SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE

Radisson Resort at the Port
Cape Canaveral, Florida

June 10-12, 2025

Snapper Grouper Committee

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Attendees and Invited Participants

Monica Smit-Brunello
Dr. Marcel Reichert
Sonny Gwin
C.J. Sweetman
Rick DeVictor
Shepherd Grimes
Dr. Clay Porch

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Radisson Resort at the Port, Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going in the Snapper Grouper Committee. We are a committee of the whole here. The first order of business is Approval of the Agenda. I know of two Other Business items. The first Other Business item is this innovation plan that we would like to add to the agenda, and then I think -- I'll look at Andy. I think, Andy, that you wanted to add an Other Business item on state management. Okay. Any other known Other Business items at this time? Go ahead, Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I don't know where would be the appropriate place, and so I'll defer to you. I think there's a couple of places it could come up, but I would like to talk about an aggregate fishing limit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Any other items that we know of at this point? All right. Is there any objection to approval of the agenda with these three other business items? All right. Seeing none, we'll move to the approval of the minutes from the March meeting. Any substantive changes to the minutes? If it's just minor changes, then please just get with staff, but any substantial changes to the minutes from March? All right. Any objection to approval of the minutes? All right. We'll consider the minutes approved. Next up, I'm going to pass it over, Andy, to either you or Rick to talk about items coming out of the Regional Office.

MR. DEVICTOR: Thank you. Yes. I'll start off, and I'll go through the exempted fishing permit applications we received. We've been talking a lot about that this week so far, and so, last week, we received three exempted fishing permit applications from FWC. These applications are in your briefing materials. If you want to look at those, there's links under SERO Updates, so you can see the three of them.

I will say that these applications are fairly detailed, in terms of the goals and objectives, the methods, and the timeline that they have in here, and I'll point out the three PIs are in the room right here, and so, if there are questions, it's best to ask FWC, and I think, Jessica, you're going to talk about, in a moment, comparing these new EFPs to the ones that we gave previously, and so I will say that they're very similar to the ones that are out there now. They'll go over -- There are some changes to these new ones.

Based on our preliminary review, NMFS finds the applications warrant further consideration, and so what we usually do, of course, is we bring these forward to the council for review and comment, and then, if NMFS decides to move forward on these, we publish a notice in the Federal Register and announce a comment period, and we receive comments on the EFP applications.

Like I said, they're very similar to last year, and you've gotten updates from FWC, and so, basically, they're requesting limited recreational harvest of red snapper outside of any federal recreational season in South Atlantic waters. They're requesting exemptions, which are listed in these applications, from the red snapper recreational bag and possession limits, the recreational ACLs and accountability measures for red snapper, and certain reporting regulations, and, in the applications, you can also see the maximum amount of red snapper that is being requested for each of the three studies.

Then, finally, just high level, FWC's project is intended to test alternative recreational management strategies that can be used to reduce the number of discards of red snapper and create additional opportunities to participate in recreational harvest and improve angler satisfaction, and so that's it. It's just sort of setting up FWC as you go through these things.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we're working on our PowerPoint right now. If you'll just give us a minute, we'll get the PowerPoint up. All right, and so, just to reiterate what Rick was saying, so this is for year-two of the three EFP projects that we had this past year. We talked earlier today about FWC providing an update on the results of year-one at our December council meeting, and so, also, the three PIs for these three different projects are in the room. It's myself and C.J. Sweetman and Kristin Foss.

All right, and so Rick mentioned a little bit of the goals there, but the duration for year-two would be September 2025 through August 2026, and the goals of our projects are there on the screen, to collaborate with anglers to obtain catch and discard data, test innovative strategies to reduce discards, allow additional red snapper harvest, and develop a reporting app and education course, and evaluate angler satisfaction.

Just a reminder of the two different study areas, and so two of the projects occur in northeast Florida, what we call the hotspot for red snapper, and then one of the projects occurs in southeast Florida, and that is -- That line there is at Cape Canaveral, at the NASA Vehicle Assembly Building.

Just a reminder that there are these three different fleets, and so what we're showing you here on the coming slides are some tables, where we're looking at year-one versus year-two, so that you can see what the differences are, and so we are making some suggested modifications, based on how things went in year-one, and also based on public input that we heard at some of the secretarial amendment public workshops and feedback to the council on some of these projects.

Just to kind of dive into this a little bit more, we had a control group in this hotspot fleet, and we are not going to have a control group in year-two, and so we did that in year-one. It worked fairly well, and we'll give you some results of that at the end of the year, in December, but we don't think we need the control group anymore. Instead, we're going to compare these to State Reef Fish Survey intercepts and other things like that.

We also -- The snapper grouper aggregate bag limit that we were testing was fifteen fish in year-one. We presented some information, I believe at the last council meeting, that people are taking significantly less than fifteen fish in that snapper grouper aggregate, plus the red snapper that they were taking in this project were not part of that fifteen-fish aggregate, and so it was fifteen fish plus their handful of red snapper that they could take. Then, in year-two, we're suggesting that the aggregate is ten fish, and their red snapper bag limit is included in the ten-fish snapper grouper aggregate.

The number of trips that you can take per quarter, per angler, and, once again, this particular project is angler-based, meaning that you apply through our Go Outdoors Florida licensing system, and then you're selected via a lottery, and then you can take your trip on a private vessel or on a headboat. We have all sorts of things that you need to take with you when you go out there, in

addition to a copy of the CFP, but a special activity license, a logbook, all sorts of other things that go with you.

Then just indicating the number of fish per trip is one more red snapper per trip, and so that's twelve more red snapper per angler per quarter, and then just a little bit about the gear there, and so any questions on this fleet, before I show you another fleet? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Did you just -- To make sure I heard it correctly, of the folks that had a fifteen-fish aggregate bag limit, plus an allotment of red snapper, they weren't filling the fifteen-fish aggregate limit?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No, and they weren't even coming close.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: But they were catching their red snapper? Okay. I think that drives the satisfaction question we've been trying to figure out.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: What fish are allowed in the aggregate?

MS. MCCAWLEY: C.J., do you want to answer that?

DR. SWEETMAN: It's all fifty-five species that you currently have in your FMP.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right, and excluding red snapper, but then we have numbers of those fish, and, if a fish is already closed, you know, due to a closed season, you can't have that in that particular quarter, and so it's not like you're -- The EFP is just basically allowing red snapper take outside the season. It's not allowing take of anything else, not black sea bass, not scamp, anything else. It's just for red snapper, and so everything else abides by the regular limits.

With some of the bag limits, and sorry, and other folks are having trouble hearing you, and so some of the bag limits are less than the bag limits that we already have. C.J., I don't know if you want to speak to that.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and that's true. I mean, we tried to -- The South Atlantic is having issues with black sea bass, and so we kind of reduced the bag limit that was within there, and so we were kind of trying to be considerate of stock status in there, and maybe reduce some of that, and not significantly, but, you know, ultimately included in there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and it's just anecdotally, but the idea here is that folks are able to keep their red snapper, and they're not continuing to fish, just trying to fill that bag limit. They're finding satisfaction in the fish that they're able to keep, and preventing, you know, discards of additional fish, like grouper and other snapper species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and this particular one is in northeast Florida, and so the hotspot area, hence Hotspot Fleet. Then the one that is very similar to the one I just showed you that's in

southeast Florida, and so you can see some of the things are very similar here, that the fifteen-fish aggregate is now dropped down to the ten-fish aggregate, with red snapper included. No control group, and just experimental group.

They're still at two trips per quarter in this area of the state, and then you can see that the number of red snapper that they're allowed to harvest is basically the same that it was in year-one, and, once again, this particular fleet, people apply to the Go Outdoors Florida licensing system and then are selected by lottery to participate.

Then the study fleet, and so this one is different than the other two. It is in the hotspot area, and so the Florida-Georgia line down to Cape Canaveral, and there are some differences in the study fleet here, and so we did drop the aggregate down to ten fish here. Red snapper are not included in the aggregate here, and so remember the study fleet is vessel-based, and not angler-based, and so, in the first year, we selected five private vessels and five charter vessels per quarter.

This was not through the Go Outdoors Florida licensing system. This was an online application that people filled out. That application period was open for the same time that the lottery applications were open, and then, basically, the captain is reporting a lot of information about everybody that's onboard their trip. They were able to take four trips in the study fleet in the first year, and we're suggesting the same number of trips per quarter in the next year.

Then you can see, in the far-right column, the maximum amount of red snapper that could possibly be harvested, and so in year-two, based on the comments that we heard from the public, we are suggesting adding an additional private vessel, an additional charter vessel, and we're also going to try adding a headboat to this study fleet, an so that was something that you guys probably heard during public comment, and so we made some modifications here, and then we're also suggesting that the overall number of red snapper taken per vessel is different, and so, instead of thirty-six, we're dropping private vessels and charter vessels down to twenty-four, and the headboat would be at thirty-six, and so you can see the numbers there.

This fleet -- We're getting really cool data from this particular fleet, and just a reminder that there are a lot of other things involved here, like everybody has to take an education course, and watch these videos, and do all sorts of other things. All of those pieces are the same. These charts are really just highlighting the differences in these projects from year-one to year-two, which is also highlighting the differences in what we're requesting differently in the exempted fishing permit, and so any questions about the study fleet or any of the changes between year-one or year-two? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Jessica. I want to say 75 or 80 percent of the fish that you're requesting for the EFPs will be off that northeast Florida area. I'm curious, in terms of kind of interest, or demand, for participation, what you've seen between northeast Florida and the southeast Florida area, given red snapper center abundance is off the northeast Florida.

MS. MCCAWLEY: C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: We're having no problems filling, in the previous one, all 200 exempted fishing permits, and then, this one, I don't anticipate we would have any issues there. I mean, on average, I would say we probably get about 4,000 applications for the southeast Florida fleet.

Comparatively, it is more in the northeast area. Typically those are around 5,000, and I think the most that we got was close to 8,000 applications in a given quarter, and so very significant interest, even in the southeast fleet.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I thought I had a table of that, of how many people applied each quarter, but it wasn't in the back pocket. Other questions, or comments? All right. I'll pass it back to you, Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: Okay. Should I move to the status of amendments, and then we'll go to the secretarial amendment?

MR. STRELCHECK: Before we move on, these are going to be considered new EFP applications, even though they're a continuation of previous studies, and so we will have to go through our normal publication in the Federal Register and public comment. As you recall, the Fisheries Service ultimately makes the final decision on whether to approve these or not, but, to the extent the council wants to weigh-in and indicate support for these EFPs, we're certainly willing to consider that as part of the process, and so I just wanted to acknowledge kind of the steps in the process to come, and the issuance of EFPs, if they're approved, would come later this year.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would ask if people are in support of the EFPs, or maybe you want to talk about that in Full Council, but just any thoughts? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: I'm absolutely in support of the EFPs because it may be the solution to our problems that we're facing, and it's a proof of concept of the idea, and we definitely need to continue on with the study. I did have a question from the previous information, and so you showed where the red snapper were not included in part of the aggregate, and I don't quite understand that, why you wouldn't include the snapper in the total aggregate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me try to explain it, and then C.J. can add to it, and so they're not included in the study fleet. In the study fleet, we're trying to really kind of get at angler behavior and figure out if you're maxing out your red snapper limit overall first or are you maxing out your snapper grouper bag limit first, and so, in the first year, the boat, the vessel, was maxing out the red snapper limit faster than they would -- The directive is, once you either reach that snapper grouper aggregate for all anglers, or you reach the red snapper vessel maximum, you have to stop bottom fishing and do something else.

You can go home, you can go fish for something else, but that indicates you need to stop bottom fishing, and so, since people weren't hitting that fifteen-fish snapper grouper aggregate in that fleet, we dropped that limit down to ten, to say is it still going to be the same results, that you're going to hit the red snapper vessel aggregate before you hit the ten-snapper-grouper aggregate per individual, and so that's -- That one, that fleet, works a little bit differently. That's why it's set up that way.

MR. HULL: Thank you. Now I understand, and that makes perfect sense in the real world, that, you know, they're probably going to what I would call choke-out on red snapper before they reach the aggregate of other species, and so thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I saw Charlie's hand, and Robert's hand, and then Kerry's hand.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm like most of the people, if not all of the people, here that thinks this is a good thing, and, if you need a motion for a letter, or you just want to do it by staff direction, from unanimous consent -- However you all want to do that, go for it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Rick, I'm not sure what you guys are looking for. Are you wanting a letter? Are you just wanting some discussion around the table? Okay. Just discussion. All right. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and I'm -- I think you answered it, but, you know, just kind of reiterating that point. If we didn't separate the red snapper and the rest of the bag limit, we wouldn't have got that. Yes, and what are folks really looking for when they get out there? Is it to catch every bit of every fish they're able to potentially catch, or do they just want something for their cooler to go home, and I think we're starting to learn that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, I'm in support, and my question is not -- I'm going to ask questions, but it has nothing to do with my support, and you may have mentioned this when I stepped out, but, for data collection, are you on the vessel collecting data on the species that are in the fifteen-fish bag limit, and then are you also collecting any information in regard to -- Are they choosing different fishing methods for red snapper, versus, if they're still out there, and they're targeting a different species, like the grouper, as far as what kind of bait they're using and things like that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me start, and then, once again, pass it to C.J., if I leave something out. So, in the study fleet -- So, for the most part, people have a logbook that they take with them, that we provide, and in the logbook is all the information that we are asking them to report in a phone app, and so, if you're in the study fleet, which is more vessel-based, and you're the captain, you're reporting everything for the whole trip, which was something that the council had talked about as something we were looking at in Amendment 56, and should that be angler-based, or should it be vessel-based, and is it even realistic for a captain to report on everybody? Whether it's a private vessel or a charter vessel, is it feasible for the captain to report out?

Everybody, even if they fill out that little logbook, when they get back to the dock, they are required to use this phone app that was developed by FWC to report their catch. Everything that's in the app is in the logbook, so they know, and they can collect that information.

If you are on a charter boat, you have an observer onboard the boat with you, and so they are looking at kind of how you're fishing. They're helping to record the catch on the charter boat, and then the -- Also in the study fleet, we have cameras onboard those boats, and so we're trying to figure out how did our instructions go, and, you know, did our instructions work? Are people fishing like what we intended? You know, are they reporting correctly on the logbook, or on the app, what we actually saw on the video, and so there's a lot of things that we're kind of looking at, but let me pass it to C.J., to see if he wants to add any more to that answer.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes, and we're trying to collect data on just about everything, and so the fishery observers that are out there on the study fleet, the charter boats, they're collecting information about discards on every single species, whether it's in the Snapper Grouper FMP or not. You know, if they're out on a study fleet trip, they're recording all the data,

because that's part of what we're trying to look at too, and so, if they stop bottom fishing, does angler behavior change, for one reason or another? Do they start targeting pelagics, or something along those lines, and so we're trying to collect all sorts of information along those lines. Jessica hit the nail on the head for -- The other fleets are a little bit different, and we're getting a lot of that information through our app, as well as through our doc site interviews that we're doing with those people.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: To that, real quick, how are you analyzing the camera data, out of curiosity, AI or real people?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're going to be using real people to look at the camera data, and we haven't been through all of those videos yet, and so we need some time, but, you know, real people is our plan to analyze. Robert, and then Jimmy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I wanted to tie that back to a conversation we were having earlier in our meeting about reporting, and I think it's incredible that, in the State of Florida, we had either 4,000 or 8,000 people apply, respectively, for programs that they knew they either had to report everything, have an observer on the boat, or have a camera watching what they were doing. I mean, this speaks volumes, from my perspective, in what fishermen are willing to do to help us collect data when we give them access that they feel is appropriate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: The camera data, I'm told, will also measure and ID all the fish as well, and so, that way, we can make sure that what's being reported on the app, you know, matches up. I think that fleet -- We're also asking those captains to tell us like are the anglers novice? Are they weekend warriors, or what, and so, that way, if there's a difference in discards, or fish caught or whatever, that we can try to tease that difference out as well. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Okay, and so this is a total retention. There's no discarding, correct?

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's different in different fleets. Let me let C.J. explain the difference.

DR. SWEETMAN: No, and there could be potentially discarding. If the species is under a size limit or something like that, they're not keeping, you know, fish all at that size, and so the simple answer is all of the regulations for every single snapper grouper species still currently apply. The only exemption that we have is for red snapper, where theoretically, yes, someone could harvest a red snapper.

MS. MCCAWLEY: But they are required to keep all the red snapper that they're getting.

MR. HULL: Okay, and so the snapper they are, and so is there any indication of a difference in predation, shark predation, that was noticed?

MS. MCCAWLEY: C.J. is shaking his head no. Go ahead.

DR. SWEETMAN: I mean, we do have that as a question, whether they experienced depredation as part of discard mortality, trying to understand the effects of that, but we haven't gotten into analyzing that data yet, Jimmy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just a question along the line of Jimmy's, and so, in the case that there is a fish that is keepable, and so it's within whatever size limit and bag limit, and part of the aggregate, all of that, are they then required to keep that fish? Are they required to retain fish that they are allowed to keep?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, we have -- In the education course, we go into high-grading, you know, and so we're trying to encourage them not to high-grade, but, no, they're not required to keep something out of the size limit, out of the season, whatever, but, yes, that's part of the education course. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, speaking of high-grading, is there some kind of methodology that you all are coming up with to make sure that your observer numbers and weights, average weights, and stuff are going to be kind of consistent with non-observer stuff?

MS. MCCAWLEY: C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: I mean, I think the data will be what the data will be there, Charlie. I mean, whether they're consistent between the respective fleets, I mean, maybe private recreational operates different than for-hire, versus headboat, and so having some sort of, you know, standalone consistency there. I don't think that's exactly what we're going to get, but, comparison within the fleets, that's certainly something that we can look at.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks. First and foremost, do you think those slides that were presented here could be added to the website at some point, please? Thank you. I know that we're still in Quarter 4 for year-one, and we're planning for year-two, and do you have a timeline of when -- It sounds like a lot of analysis still needs to happen, a lot of man and woman hours to review all those videos and what have you, and do you kind of have a timeline of when you might have some more report-style information available?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, we're definitely going to bring this back to the council in December. That's what we talked about earlier. I don't know, and I'm looking at C.J. I don't know when we'll have, you know, the full report ready, but I'll kick it over to you.

DR. SWEETMAN: So we're required, as part of this, to do biannual reports. Rick, is that correct? Biannual? Yes, and so biannual reports that will come up. We've already submitted one for the first half, and we'll submit another one, and then, ultimately, since this is kind of a continuation, you know, year-two continuing on from year-one, you know, the final, final report will be inclusive of all the years combined there.
MS. MCCAWLEY: Kristin just said that the full report is due in the spring. John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Jessica, you're asking these guys to do quite a bit of reporting, and I think that's interesting, in thinking about then the logistics of reporting, and how we often hear like, well, that's not practical, and we can never do that, and it would take too much. Are you getting some feedback from folks? Do you think that could be part of, you know, maybe some metadata, or some qualitative observations that you take out of this, just to hear from those guys what their impressions are of actually doing that on the water?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'll pass it over to C.J., to see if he wants to add some insights, but, I mean, we have an entire social science team that's part of this. People have to take pre-surveys, post-surveys, and then folks are also selected, some folks, a subset, for semi-structured interviews, but a lot of what we're trying to get is all sorts of things about angler behavior, like was the reporting too cumbersome, and what did you think about this education course, and, you know, what did you think about having to take this before you started this program, but C.J., I don't know if you want to offer any other insights here.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes. Absolutely. I mean, one of the questions that we even have on there, through the angler satisfaction survey, is can we make improvements to the program, basically, and, even beyond that, we -- You know -- Well, I should say one of our staff, whose dedicated phone number is on our website for this, is consistently getting phone calls about ways that we can improve upon that, and so we're not even waiting until we analyze all the angler satisfaction surveys in order to make improvements upon this, and so we've --

Throughout the quarters, we're constantly adjusting the reporting components of it, in order to improve upon what some of our participants have told us have been a little bit of a struggle on their end there, and so it's kind of an adaptive management, if you will, as it relates to this reporting system altogether, John.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? All right. I'll pass it back to Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: Okay. Moving into amendments that you have submitted to National Marine Fisheries Service, that we are working on the rulemaking for, and so, going through these, Amendment 55, and this has been a very high priority for us in the region, to move forward on this. This is the scamp and yellowmouth amendment, where we do have a statutory deadline, because there's a rebuilding plan for this.

We did publish a notice of availability, and the comment period ended last month. We are still waiting for the proposed rule to publish on that, but you all should have seen a letter that we sent yesterday to the council approving this amendment, and so the next steps is for a proposed rule, a comment period, and a final rule, with implementation dates for that.

Regulatory Amendment 36, this is changes to gag and black grouper vessel limits and changes to stowage of on-demand gear when you go through MPAs and spawning SMZs, and so we're working on the proposed rule for that one.

Then the next two are fairly complicated, more so than Regulatory Amendment 36, and so we have the commercial electronic logbook, and we talked about this yesterday a bit, what's going on with that, that we're working on the proposed rule and notice of availability, but there's more than just the rulemaking to that, where the Science Center is taking a lead on this, and we're helping out to

develop the database, the reports, the technical specifications for the vendors, and then, also, there's going to be outreach and education for this, and this has PRA, Paperwork Reduction Act, involved with that, where we need to complete that as part of this.

Then, finally, Amendment 48, and so you're familiar with that. All that's in there. The main thing, of course, is to modernize the wreckfish ITQ program for that, and we are also working on developing the proposed rule and notice of availability for that, and, just to point out, we are working on hiring a contractor to help us build an electronic system for this, and so there's an update on four we're working on for rulemaking.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions for Rick? I don't see any hands.

MR. STRELCHECK: All right. Moving on, as you're aware, on Friday, we filed the final rule with the Federal Register for Secretarial Amendment 59. As you're aware, we proposed -- We issued a proposed rule in January. We went out to public hearings in February and March, and we received a lot of public input, over 500 comments and I think upwards of 180 or 200 people that attended public hearings.

Originally, we had proposed increasing the catch limits and reducing discards through a discard reduction area off of northeast Florida, as well as a number of other changes, such as changes to the start dates for the commercial and recreational fishing seasons, as well as an experimental studies program.

As far as the final rule, we ultimately implemented three actions. The first action was to modify the proxy for determining overfishing, and it provides for a more flexible approach for determining overfishing, based on best scientific information available and new science and data, and so that'll be something that, as new assessments and scientific advice emerge, will be a dynamic reference point for consideration for red snapper.

We also specified the overfishing limit, the acceptable biological catch, and annual catch limits. The change in the overfishing definition and specification of the annual catch limits are sufficient to end overfishing. The catch limits were reduced slightly, because we are not taking any measures at this point to reduce dead discards, and so this year's commercial catch limit will be around 103,000 pounds. The recreational catch limit will be around 23,000 fish, which is equivalent to 264,000 pounds, and we announced that the season for recreational will be July 11 and 12, and the commercial season will open July 14 and close when the commercial catch limit is met. The rule itself publishes tomorrow, and so it will be in effect as of tomorrow. Questions?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Questions for Andy. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Andy. Andy, I've got to just -- You know, I'm trying to wrap my head around this, and I understand that you haven't done anything to reduce discards, but that means we're in the same boat that you were in last year, right? Last year was overfished, and overfishing was occurring. We had -- The commercial sector had 122,000 pounds, or 124,000 pounds, whatever that exact number is, but now we're not overfished, and we're not overfishing, and the discard situation is exactly the same.

I still -- I can't understand. I need a better explanation, or help me understand why that had -- Why the commercial sector had to take a 20 percent cut, when everything else is exactly the same, and we've acknowledged that the fishery is no longer overfished or overfishing occurring, yet the commercial industry took a 20 percent cut.

MR. STRELCHECK: We have new scientific advice. We updated the stock assessment, and so that, obviously, provided a little bit better picture for the population, so that rebuilding was continuing to occur. Overfishing, or fishing mortality, was reduced, based on the change in the overfishing definition proxy, right, and that allows us to set catch levels consistent with ending overfishing, because we're maintaining the status quo level of discards, and the remaining amount of the catch limit, or ABC, that would be available for harvest would be the difference between the ABC, subtracting out the discards, which leaves you with a lower, slightly lower, catch limit.

MR. GRINER: So, to that point then, it seems, to me, that it should have gone across the board between both sectors then, and so how is it that the commercial sector could take a 20 percent cut, but the recreational sector got a 50 percent increase in days of fishing?

MR. STRELCHECK: Both sectors took a reduction in their catch limits.

MR. GRINER: So it's a reduction in catch limit, but the season is longer. Therefore, whether or not they go over that catch limit is the same, right, and so I think I understand that.

MR. STRELCHECK: The existing catch limit, outside the interim rule, is 30,000 fish, approximately, 29,600 fish. It's been reduced now to less than 23,000 fish, and so the recreational catch limit was also reduced commensurate with the commercial catch limit. We did not change the allocations between the two sectors.

MR. GRINER: That makes sense to me now. Thank you, Andy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? All right. I don't -- Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I don't know that I want to -- I feel like I have to ask, where does -- Andy, where do you think this leaves us for the following season, the following year?

MR. STRELCHECK: So we had, obviously, a robust conversation in March. The final rule that the agency has implemented is very much in line with, obviously, the request from the council. At this point, there's no mechanism to increase the catch limits, unless the council implements something new, or changes management advice between now and next season, and so this would essentially be in place until further changed. The other business item that I, obviously, want to talk about is state management.

There's, obviously, interest in exploring exempted fishing permits to do state management, and so that's something that, obviously, we can look at, but what we've been challenged by, and, obviously, where this kind of leaves us, is, in order to figure out how to provide increased fishing opportunities, you either have to have new scientific advice that tells us the catch limits could be higher, which we're waiting to see what that scientific advice will tell us, ultimately, or you have to come up with mechanisms to reduce dead discards in this fishery and convert that then into landed or retained catch.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, when we were -- At our last meeting, we talked about the secretarial amendment. I think on the list of considered but rejected was the aggregate bag limit, and I think, when we got into it, it was brought up, and it was never fully considered. In this latest iteration, did you guys, or the Secretary, further consider that as an option, in lieu of the two-day season?

MR. STRELCHECK: We did not, and so, when we propose a rule, if we modify from the proposed rule to the final rule, it has to be within either the existing actions that were considered, or within the kind of range of alternatives, and so it's not something like, between January and February and when we issued the final rule, that we could have just added a whole new action to look at something new or different.

Then, as I mentioned in March, the aggregate bag limit is a concept that's being piloted and tested, and it shows promise. We're excited, obviously, to see the results from the FWC, but, at this point, we don't have any basis to implement management action, based on, you know, the information that's been provided or the lack of information that we have available to us right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Sure, and I was just wondering if, you know, more discussion around what an aggregate bag limit would look like or anything might be helpful, either to this council or back to the State of Florida, and so, as I sit here, it sounds like we're headed into two days of red snapper fishing, for the foreseeable future. I think that was unacceptable to begin with. I think it's going to be unacceptable next year, for most of the stakeholders, and certainly for the folks in Florida, and so what are we doing about that?

In December, we've got, hopefully, all the information from the EFPs from Florida coming back to this council, and I would like us to be in a position, at that point in time, if we are able to confirm what we think is coming, to push forward a fisheries management change for snapper grouper, and so I don't know if this is the appropriate time, but I would like this board to ask our staff to start preparing an aggregate bag limit fisheries plan amendment for snapper grouper, so that, in December, we are teed-up to actually deal with this.

Otherwise, we're going to roll into two years in a row of two years of red snapper fishing, assuming there's no other changes that causes a complete closure, leaving aside black sea bass and what kind of mess that's going to create for us for bottom fishing as well, and so I think we need to dig into that and start figuring out where the pitfalls are, what the issues are, and will this work, but, based on everything I've heard, you know, going to an aggregate snapper grouper bag limit for the South Atlantic is something I think really needs to be considered at this point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we're debating whether or not that should be a motion. We were debating that over here on the side, and so it sounds like we think it should be a motion. Okay, and so, Robert, would you like to phrase that in the form of a motion?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **Sure, and I would like some help with this from staff, to make sure it's right, but I would like the staff to initiate an amendment for the snapper grouper fishery to implement an aggregate bag limit for all fifty-five species.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: **Well, I would say just for the snapper grouper fishery, because we have another action where we're talking about removing species from the FMP, or the fishery management unit, and so maybe it's not going to end up being fifty-five.**

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **My motion amended accordingly.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Sorry, and we're having -- Just a second. We're having a debate over here, and so the thought, coming from staff, is, if we made this a little bit more general, that said something like initiate an action in an amendment, then something like this could possibly go into something like the document where we're looking at the structure of the fishery management unit. **Robert, are you okay that it says initiate an amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP or add an action to an existing amendment?**

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **I am, and Andy's waving his hand, and so I'll stop for a second.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I'm just trying to get this right, and then see if we have a second, so that we can discuss it. Okay. Go ahead, Andy.

MR STRELCHECK: We passed this motion at the last meeting. We're being redundant with what we've already passed.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I thought we did, Andy, but, when we looked at the workplan, it was part of a much larger amendment, and I'm trying to simplify this, so that it stands on its own, and perhaps I'm wrong about that, but I didn't see a standalone aggregate bag limit on the workplan. I saw us looking at MSE and everything else, and it was a much larger lift, and so I'm trying to simplify this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Staff said that it was in the MSE document, which has a longer timeframe. Andy, do you have any clarification, before we try to get a second on this?

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, the other aspect of this, and I don't disagree with what Robert is trying to do, but, even if we have something in December, are you wanting like final action in December, because that would probably be the last opportunity to even implement something for the 2026 fishing year, because of the timeframe we would take for rulemaking, and that's a very ambitious schedule, given the complexity of this, and the FWC still providing pilot study data.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Andy, I would like that to be the case, but you just -- You highlighted a few obstacles we have to getting there, but, also, as I read the executive order, I think this mandate has been given to the Secretary, and so they're going to be looking at expanding these exempted fishing permits, and I think that it would be helpful for us to start working on a plan, or thinking

about it, and whether ultimately we share that with the Secretary, or we get some authorization to do something on an emergency basis.

I'm floating here a little bit, but I'm recognizing we're way behind already, and, you know, maybe not meeting the deadline certainly is not a reason not to start now. We need to start, and get this teed-up, and, if we can find a way in December to make this some final action, because we got the information from the EFPs, great. If it bleeds into the next meeting, and teases up for final action then, but I --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, the other aspect I'll point out, because we just had the conversation about the exempted fishing permits, is that's something that it sounds like the council is supportive of continuing, and that is naturally going to roll into next year and be available for fishing opportunities beyond the two-day fishing season, presuming the Fisheries Service approves those EFPs going forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: What I thought you were going to say is we're also going to have a discussion about EFPs for state management for Atlantic red snapper, and so it's a little confusing to me. Like would the state management EFPs run simultaneous to this, or does the EFP for state management get in front of this? I just -- The timing, and my head is exploding over here. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I think we're getting passed up by all these other things, state management, EFPs, the Secretary, because we are not taking action on this. We have not done anything to address the dead discards. There's a path in front of us at least that gives us the opportunity to do that, and we need to lean into that and prepare this amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish has a point of order.

MS. MURPHEY: I just want to bring -- We don't even have a second on this, and we're discussing it, and so please let's get a second before we continue discussion, please.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It’s seconded by Jimmy. All right. Tim, then Kerry.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and, well, I have another question back for Andy, aside from this aggregate discussion. This was -- Andy, real quick, before I get off my train of thought, and so back to Amendment 59. When you did your ABC determination, what SPR value was used in that determination, and what was used to determine whether that was the appropriate value or not?

MR. STRELCHECK: We used the 30 percent SPR, spawning potential ratio, which is what the current reference point is for a red snapper. That's been adopted and used for quite some time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: So, as I like to say, and probably too much, and you all can roll your eyes, but I've been doing this a long time, and I don't understand a path in which we take final action on anything like this in December. It absolutely makes no sense to any part of this process that I understand at all, and it is -- I worry that it conflates with all of these other -- All this other forward

progress we're making with regard to, you know, whether it's state management or our overall plan. I just -- I'm lost. I don't understand it, if someone can explain it to me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have Charlie, then Trish.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, yes, to Kerry's point, I'm trying to wrap my head around possible paths forward that change the catch next year, and, from what I'm hearing, Amendment 59 is going to be in place until we get another assessment, which is not going to be for a couple of years, or we change some management, and maybe deal with some discards, that might give us some more fish, or -- I'm like Kerry.

I've never seen anybody move an amendment this fast, in this short of a time, and so I'm not saying we can't. I just -- I haven't -- I've never seen it, and so I'm trying to find out -- I would like to hear, and maybe Andy can help me with the different paths forward, on when what we need to do, and what makes sense, and how we can -- What's going to happen, so we can actually give the fishermen some more fish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I have a list going here. I have Trish, then Kerry, then Robert, and there were some questions asked of Andy.

MS. MURPHEY: So, I'm not sure I can support this at this time, because I think the original plan was to have this aggregate bag limit, to look at -- You know, be in the MSE, because we're talking more holistically. We just finished a discussion this morning on trying to prioritize our workload. You know, we're kind of in a brand new world at this point.

I think the aggregate bag limit idea is a great idea, from what I've heard from, you know, the Florida work and everything. It's something to consider, but I just -- To initiate this amendment, I think it's just adding to an already overworked staff. I mean, if you remember, when we were looking at the workplan, I mean there was a bunch of red there anyway, and, again, at the last meeting, it was determined that this would actually go into the MSE, and I think that's going to be a better place for it.

I know it takes a little longer, but, if we're trying to get more holistic, if we're trying to get more innovative, I just -- I don't think I can support this at this time. I don't know if this would be something to talk about, and I don't know if this is something for the EO to discuss, you know, an EO discussion, but I just -- I'm not comfortable with this at this point in time, and so thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I've got a list going, and so one of my thoughts is, based on what I'm hearing so far, is maybe we table the vote on this, until later in the committee, after we have some of these other discussions. It's just a thought. I'm not saying that we have to do that, but staff is trying to figure out how we would do this, and there's a lot of moving pieces here, and so it's just a thought, and so I've got -- I'm going to go back to my list. I have Kerry, then Robert, then Carolyn, then maybe Andy.

MS. MARHEFKA: Do you want to go before me or can I make a point, John Carmichael? Do you want to go before me, John?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Go ahead, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was just sort of having a procedural thought, looking at this. The motion doesn't dictate when it gets done, or how it gets done, but it does give clear guidance to get the amendment going, and it could be in an existing thing, and it could be in something new. We need to look and see what do we have to do to do this, and can it be done over a framework, and what is it going to require.

I would assume, you know, a standard amendment, we've got to do scoping, and we've got to do hearings, and we got a lot of things that we're going to do, and that will take, you know, probably at least four meetings, or five meetings. The abbreviated framework, recall, for golden tilefish was like three meetings, and so I think you need to let staff look at what is the fastest way to get this done.

I think that guidance is clear, and I think it's also clear we're saying that we don't want to wait for this in the snapper grouper MSE amendment. We want to consider an amendment that only addresses an aggregate bag limit, and then we would, maybe in September, have some guidance for you on how we can get that done, and what your alternatives are to do it quickly, and then ask you what is the aggregate bag limit? Is it ten, fifteen, twenty, forty, five? You know, you're going to have to make some of that sort of decisions on your part, and there may be some other questions that come up along with that, once the staff starts thinking about it, but I think you could pass this motion. It doesn't bind to any timeline, and let us see how it goes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm going back to my list. Thank you, John. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks, John. That's helpful, and the motion, on its surface, and let me be clear, I'm supportive of. I think laying out an unrealistic timeline of we're going to take final action in December, when we are talking about -- This isn't just red snapper. The analysis that has to go into how that's going to affect a gag, a black sea bass, a vermilion snapper, a triggerfish, and I don't want to have this these this trickle of unintended consequences because we're in this, you know, rush to get this done by December.

If it was red snapper alone, and you could just go out there and only catch red snapper, which I understand, in north Florida, and parts of Florida, that's exactly what's happening, but you all need to understand that's not what is happening in our neck of the woods, and it could have some pretty severe unintended consequences for those species, and so I would be very uncomfortable setting out a timeframe of something that happens as quickly as you hope it to happen, but the --

On its surface, I am supportive of this of this aggregate bag limit. I'm supportive of moving forward with it, and John's plan, but just please understand that what you all are seeing down your way is not exactly what's happening with us. I do not want the species that we rely on to be negatively affected through lack of analysis.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert, you're next.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Kerry, I agree with all of that, and the only way I think we get through that is starting the process. The only way. I'll go back, Charlie, to your comments. You know, I don't think -- I would hope we could get this there by December. If it's the fastest we've ever done anything in our lives, fantastic, but whether you get this done in December, or the December after

that, or the December after that, this problem is not going away. Dead discards are going to continue to be an issue for us, and so we've got to deal with it, and it's only going to start to happen in other species.

Going back, Trish, to your point, I think this is the exact type of thing we should be doing. This amendment has the potential to deal with recreational reporting, private recreational licenses, education. All of these things all in one massive deregulatory move could free up a lot of ability for us to deal with the other things on that list. I think this is the type of thing that -- The last thing I'll say there is I think this is going to move either way, based on reading the executive order.

I think the Secretary is under a mandate to move this forward, and part of what I think this council should be prepared to do is engage in that process, whether we're invited to the table or not, but feed information on how we think this should happen. Otherwise, I think Andy and his team, and the Secretary, are going to be working on expanding these EFPs nationwide. That's what it says in the executive order, and so I don't think we've got a choice, and we either can sit on the sidelines or be part of the discussion here and how it goes forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So Kerry pretty much hit a lot of where I was thinking the same thing. It's not that I don't think it's a useful tool in the toolbox, but we just talked about a second year of EFPs that will give us insight into how this works, what people like, what they don't like, and I think jumping in ahead of that information makes me uncomfortable, because what happens if we go forward and, by some off chance, it comes back as it's not supported, or people want to see it in a completely different realm? I just -- Without knowing what it looks like, I think the horse is getting out of the barn ahead of us.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and, after hearing what John had to say about there's no timeline, I'm feeling a little better about it, because I just took this as we were going to start it now, and I also agree with Carolyn. I mean, you guys have gotten one year of aggregate bag limit studied. You know, you're going to be starting a second year. I'm kind of still on the fence, because I'm -- I would like to see more on the aggregate, but I know you all have some preliminary data.

The big thing, that's helped me come around a little bit, is that there's not a timeline on it, and if we can start it later, because, again, my concern is workload, you know, just a realistic workload, and, again, I think this is something we can talk about on the EO, and so I'm good with the idea, but I'm just not sure about the timing. That's -- You know, that's where I'm at there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie, then Robert.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I still would like to hear Andy talk about state management, and when the next assessment would be coming in, and so I still would like to hear what all of the paths are. This is a path, and I would like to hear all of the paths, so we can kind of make a much better informed judgment on which way we want to drive the train and even -- You know, i.e., maybe postpone the vote on this until after we hear, you know, all of our options and what's coming and what's not coming, if possible. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Charlie, I hear that, but I think, the information you're asking for, we're not going to have until September, at best, because staff has to go dig into this and look at what the options are. Is this possible, and what's the timeline, and I'm not asking the board, the council, to say, yes, go implement this aggregate bag limit today.

You could tell there's going to be a lot of resistance, at every vote, at every discussion point we have, about doing this the right way, and I'm okay with that, but our hesitancy to start is going to put us in a worse place than we are today, in my opinion, and the only way you can eat an elephant is one bite at a time, and so I would suggest -- We've danced around this a lot, and this is just a direction to staff to go educate us in September on what this looks like, so we've got a better understanding, and I think we need to vote on this now and move this forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I've got more hands going up. Kerry, and then Amy.

MS. MARHEFKA: I apologize, and I know I'm talking a lot, but one of the things that I'm very frustrated with, and I don't know how to get an answer to, is we're spending a lot of time talking about the recreational aggregate bag limit, whether it's going to be state management, which, to my understanding, is completely recreational, and I would love to hear, sort of as we move forward, which of these things is going to make it so the commercial trip limit gets higher. Which of these things -- We're sort of innocent, and not completely innocent, but we're put in a pretty big bind because of this, and nothing we're talking about addresses how the commercial guys are going to get a better deal, and I'm going to need to hear that at some point from this body.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Do you want to ask --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, so I guess my question is, when I look at this, I'm assuming that your motion applies to just recreational, or does it apply to recreational and commercial, and so I wanted to seek some clarification.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: This is recreational, is the point here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert, did you have something on that? Otherwise, I've got a list of hands.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I did, but then I started looking at that, to figure out what Kerry had just said, and so let me --

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair and, Robert, again, I agree with a lot of the conversation that has already happened around the table. This concept of an aggregate bag limit for the recreational sector is something we're all very interested in wanting to see how it goes, and there's just a few more boxes that need to be checked off for me, one being we still need to see some results from

the EFP project that is still in year-one, and not even finished yet in Florida, and there's already been some changes to what's going to look like in year-two, based on the preliminary results.

Some of that information is going to drive this, and I also think we're going to get a lot of information in the Snapper Grouper Committee discussions at this meeting that might also weigh into this. I'm going to go back to what Jessica said, and perhaps let's just table this, and let's see what the rest of the conversation looks like. We're going to talk about state management, and potentially other ways to do exempted fishing permits there, and we're going to talk about the innovation plan, and there could be avenues, and other ideas, that pop up along the way. I'm just not ready to make a vote on this right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just some Robert's Rules. If someone makes a motion to table, you need a time certain, and a motion to table is non-debatable, and so it will stop this discussion, and so I'm just -- There's still people in the queue, and I just want to point that out. Andy is next in the queue, and so just think about that. Andy, and then back to Robert.

MR. STRELCHECK: Mine is a more I think holistic response, that would probably relate to after a decision to table, and so I'll hold off on my comments.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and so, I mean, Amy, I feel like what we're saying is no, staff, we don't want you to tell us how this might work, and we're not asking -- At this point, we don't have enough information, and, John, this is a question for you, but what would the work staff would be doing between now and September entail? I don't believe it's getting into looking at the EFP information and determining what the appropriate bag limits would be, or aggregate limits, and that sort of stuff, and I think it's more of a structural, you know, analysis and determination of how we would do this, how we would go through it.

To the last point, Amy, if more ideas come up about alternatives that solve this issue, I'm going to make a motion to start another amendment for something else, or action to look at that as well. We've -- Everybody has acknowledged this is a great idea, and we love it, and we -- You know, we have nothing bad to say, but we just don't want to look at it yet, and I think that's the wrong -- I think that's the wrong decision, to postpone this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John, did you want to go?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and Myra can correct me if I'm wrong on any of this, but, you know, I think what this would mean is we would reach out to SERO, and we would talk about setting up an IPT. They would look at the mechanisms we have, and, consistent with your discussion, where is the fastest way to make this happen, and they would maybe draft some language for a purpose and need and an action that is, you know, impose an aggregate limit, and then they would have a few alternatives of however many fish, and they could bring that back to you in September, as a real simplified framework.

To me, I think the real question would be getting the people together who do the impacts and the effects of an amendment, to think about what do they need to know to do this, particularly if the goal is reducing bycatch, and do we have any quantitative information, or qualitative information

even, that says this is how much it will reduce bycatch, and it would kind of be up to you guys to decide, and do you go forward with the information you have, and they may very well -- Staff may very well be able to reach out to FWC and say here's some questions we have, and here's some information we need, and what do you have.

You know, I think that's going to be a much more challenging component of this than say coming back to you with a draft framework in September with, you know, the typical language of what an amendment would do, and then, at that point, you know, you potentially need to approve it for scoping, and then you need to look at the findings of that, and then you need to do it for hearings, and so there is a certain process that's involved in this to go through it, but I don't think the lift for staff for September to get this rolling is excessive, and, like I said, Myra, if that's oversimplifying things, please do step in, because you do this much more every day than I do.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, John, and that was that was a good synopsis of what we would have to do. I think, if you guys wanted to have more information to continue this discussion in September, we would need to spend some time getting a range of alternatives, for example. If you just tell us you want us to look at an aggregate bag limit, that doesn't give us enough to bring anything back to you in September, and so we can. It would be preliminary. We would do what we can, like John said, to get information that would be useful to the discussion, but we would need a little bit more detail.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I've got a list of hands. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So I'm actually a little bit confused by what came out of our report in March, because the comment that I'm going to refer to comes behind a motion that came out of the Commercial Subcommittee report, but it doesn't specifically state that it's talking commercial, but there was a direction to staff that was given that says "Do not include consideration of aggregate trip limits at this time, in the interest of efficiency. The council has not had enough time to discuss this topic in-depth." That's commercial, but I tried to find where we were having the discussions relative to rec, and I can't find that, but I knew that we discussed it so I'm asking for help with that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: To that point, I remember that discussion, and, Robert, you can correct me, but I think that we were having a discussion -- Again, we were reporting back out from the Commercial Subcommittee. We were talking about the things we wanted to include there, and I believe maybe there was some confusion about the fact that we were only talking about commercial measures, and you made this motion, and we were concerned about conflating -- This being a commercial measure, with this being a recreational measure, and that's how it ended up there.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: When I was reminded I wasn't on that subcommittee, yes, and that -- But, yes, I did bring that up, and it was not intended to be related to commercial.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So then, following-up, further down, as we got into our other business, the motion was made to initiate an amendment to consider options for snapper grouper aggregate

recreational bag limits and other management actions to reduce recreational discards. This could be included in another amendment already in the workplan, so we've already made this motion. It was approved by committee, and approved by the council, and so is it not redundant? I don't know Roberts Rules well enough to know, and is it appropriate or not?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Carolyn, you're exactly right, and I think we talked about, at the beginning, the motion should probably be to move that amendment out of the MSE update, whatever we call that, and make it a standalone amendment, I think is what we're talking about.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Wow. We may be wiser to just let -- I think John said staff could work with SERO, and let's see what our options are in September. I know we would love to do something today, but I'm just so afraid that we're going to be, as Carolyn said, letting the horse get out of the barn out ahead of us. I think we might be much wiser to come back in September. I don't think we can get anything done really, realistically, for next year's season.

If I thought we could, I might have not have so much heartburn about this, but I'm -- I think we would be much wiser to come back in September and talk this -- You know, have SERO bring us some options, the IPT work on options, and then we can make a much wiser, more logical decision. That's just my gut feeling.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, Charlie, it's not -- At this point, it's not even about next season. It's about the season after that, and, you know, what John's talking about is -- I defer to John, but I think John was supportive of why not do the initial work right now, and it's not that big a lift for staff to get into some of this. The one thing that I have heard is Myra say, well, we need some more instruction, because we can't work on this, and so did the original amendment that we had, or the original motion in the MSE one, provide that guidance, or was that missing?

All right. Well, you know, that would be the basis that I'm open, to either revising this or bringing it back, but, if we need additional information in this motion, in order to get the information back from staff that we need in September, I would like to know exactly -- You know, feel free to wordsmith it, add words here, whatever you need to do, but, Charlie, this is -- It's going to take years for us to get something like this done, and just kicking -- Having this discussion again in September doesn't get the ball rolling at all. We're not committing to anything, other than staff doing a little work to outline what our options are when we come back here in September.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish, and then Charlie.

MS. MURPHEY: Maybe I'm remembering this wrong, but I remember, when we made this motion last at the last meeting, and I thought it was -- Even though that motion was made, and I guess passed, I think there was some clarification later that this would go in the MSE, and I don't know how much that discussion is captured in the transcript, but that's what I thought we had left

it. I know that --You know, I think what Carolyn read is correct, but I think, as we went, it was sort of like, no, this is this is meant for the MSE, so that that's my recollection.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that's my recollection too, because I think the workplan comes after the committees. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, if that earlier motion in March limited where we put this, then that's a different story. If we just want to go ahead and have the IPT look at all of our options, where it fits, how fast we might can move it, what SERO is going to need, what they can do, that's two different tracks, and so, if we just want to make the motion that we want to put it in the best place available, and not name anything, then that's different.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Sorry, and I was having a debate about if this motion should be changed, and so I don't know if I heard what Charlie said, but, Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So, with limited resources, and limited funding, and we've just reviewed that Florida is putting in for EFPs to continue, and so there's obviously funding going into that, to continue to learn more and understand more about the aggregate bag, but we're going to end up getting ahead of that, and so why fund those projects if we're running out of funds for things, or we're limited by funds, and I don't mean that to be a jerk. I'm just thinking about resources, and if --That that's three decently-sized projects that we feel are important, but, if we're going to keep that going, but get ahead of it, I feel like that's not the best use of financial resources.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm going to ask Myra to read -- She found our discussion in Full Council, and so I'm going to ask Myra to read the statement, which I think is going to get to timing, and then I think that possibly this is -- We would maybe withdraw this, or amend this, so that it's more about the timing component, but, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Jessica, and so, for the council, this is in the report that was put together for the Full Council II, right, and so we work on the report for Full Council II once we're back in the office, but the bullet that Jessica referred to reads: “The council clarified that aggregate bag limits for the recreational snapper grouper fishery would be explored through the management strategy evaluation for the snapper grouper fishery. This is part of the council's long-term approach to addressing issues in the fishery and allows time to obtain results of the FWC exempted fishing permit program.”

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Right, and what I'm understanding is that leaving it in the MSE would put it not just behind getting the EFP information, and it would put it way off in the future, and that's what I'm trying to get this contemporaneous, so it's close enough. I mean, we all know we've got a lot of work to pass an aggregate bag limit. We're probably going to be here two years from now doing a final vote on that, and we’ve got to get the ball rolling, sooner rather than later, to even have that option.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm going to try to help us come to a resolution here, because I think I hear what you're saying, Robert, and the fact is the train is leaving the station with or without us, and we want to -- Ideally, we would like to conduct the train ride. My concern is being completely on the wrong train, such that we plow in a bunch of other species, that it's going to hurt, but we cannot -- You are correct that the MSE plan is too long, and I don't want to do that anymore either.

I think that John came to us up here with a very good solution, and if we could come to some terms that John comes back to us in September, with, you know, an idea of the timing, I think that seems to be something we can all get on the same page, as long as you can hear that we're saying, or I'm saying, on behalf of myself, that I'm okay if it's not in the MSE anymore.

I now see the writing on the wall, and that is not palatable to anything outside of this process, and so whether we need a motion to retime it, or we handle that when we go back to the workplan, or in a different place, that's fine, and so I hear you, as long as you're understanding that -- Or you're okay with the fact that we're not going to be able to take final action on something in December. No one here is comfortable with that kind of plan, because that's too fast, and we go to John's plan.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim, and then Robert.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I like what Kerry is saying, and I just wanted to reiterate my support for uncoupling this from any MSE efforts. This is -- This needs to not be tied to any kind of MSE effort whatsoever.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Robert, maybe the motion is uncouple this from MSE.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and I think the motion is to pull the aggregate bag limit from the MSE, and start a separate amendment and action to get that ball rolling, and, you know, Carolyn, to your point, I think most anything we do here requires financial resources. At the back of my mind, I'm thinking about the ten-for-one, and, if this did work, and move, how much reduction in regulation this would cause, that would free up ability to start moving some other things, and so I get it, but, also, John said it’s not going to take too much resources in the short-term, and we can come back here in September and determine whether or not we want to continue to go down this path or not.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're modifying the motion. Give us a second here.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Would you want to put language in there that says report to the council in September on the quickest way to accomplish this? Then would you provide Myra a range of alternatives and say, for September, initial range of alternatives of ten, fifteen, twenty, and I don't know. You guys say it. What do you want? Robert, what range of alternatives would you give the IPT to start thinking about, so then they can start thinking about what do we need to know to give you information that shows that this will reduce bycatch of red snapper by X percent, to have that impact?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I would suggest starting with the same thing that Florida did, just so that, when we get there, we've got some data that kind of correlates to what -- You know, what's already happened, and so kind of mirroring that ten-fish aggregate bag limit is probably a good place to start.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm going to go to how the motion has been modified. **Robert, you need to say whether you're okay with it, and the seconder, Jimmy, you need to decide if you still want to be the seconder to this, and we'll call it a new motion, or a modified motion, to decouple the action to implement a recreational aggregate bag limit from the management strategy evaluation amendment and direct staff to report to the council in September 2025 on ways to develop this amendment.**

This is more reflective of what John is saying. First, is there -- Are you good with this?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **Motion so amended. Yes, I'm good.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Jimmy, do you still want to be the seconder to this motion? Okay. Yes from the seconder. All right. We've had a lot of discussion on this. Do we need more discussion on this, folks? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I thought you were going to table a long time ago, and so I gave up my position. Just for clarification, because the "on ways to develop this amendment" is a very gray area, in my view, right, and so John just mentioned ten, fifteen, twenty fish, and that's only one component of everything the FWC has considered, right, and so is the direction to staff to kind of look at it holistically, based on what FWC has proposed, the reporting requirements, limited access, you know, all of those factors that go along with their EFP? If that's the case, I just wanted to clarify for John what the intent is.

MR. CARMICHAEL: My understanding is exactly as the motion says. It is to look at the aggregate limit, and none of that other stuff , this amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You're back to the drawing board, I think, if we have to consider all these other things as being critical to the aggregate limit, because now it's -- There's a lot more stuff going on, and I don't think it happens as quickly.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. I'm going to go ahead and call the question.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. The question has been called. **All those in favor of this motion, please raise your hand. Hold your hands high. Five in favor. Those opposed. Abstentions. I've got --Can the no votes raise their hand one more time? Can the no votes raise their hand one more time? Five in favor; five opposed; one abstention.** The motion fails. Does it not, because it's -- Okay. **I'll vote in favor of it, and so the motion passes.** Let's take a ten-minute break.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so the next thing we're going to dive into here is the innovation plan. I believe that John emailed around a document, and I believe we're going to show you a PowerPoint. I'm going to let -- This was an idea that Kerry and myself pitched to John, and so the three of us are going to try to talk about this a little bit, and so the plan would be, today, to start

the discussion on this, kind of see if the committee wants to proceed with this, and then we could get into more of the specifics at the September meeting, if the committee is inclined to move forward with continuing to talk about it.

I'm going to pass it to John, but we're wanting to go ahead and start the discussion now, so you can start thinking about it, the committee can think about it overnight, and decide if you want to keep talking about this kind of path, or plan, forward, and then we would talk about it in more detail at a future meeting. I'm going to pass it to John first.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right. Thank you, Jessica. Yes, and they pitched the idea to me, and I thought it offered some real potential for us to start thinking about how we do business differently, and it was good timing for me. I was working on the presentation for the CCC, where we talk about things such as our successes and challenges and such, and, you know, in some ways, it's kind of hard to come up with some real recent successes, because we seem to have a lot of stocks we're struggling with, and even black sea bass, which was rebuilt, now doesn't seem to necessarily be the case any longer, and so it's certainly been a challenging time for us, I believe.

The goal of this plan is, through innovation, adapt to change that is coming in NMFS and maintain a viable snapper grouper fishery. We started talking about this before the CCC, but a lot of what was being discussed here really fit in with the themes that we heard up there and so, first of all, why now?

Well, red snapper, obviously, as we've seen just again this week, continues to pose challenges, but, bigger picture, single-species management has been challenging in a multi-species complex. We always knew that would be the case, and it continues to be the case here at the council. Reduced NMFS science and analysis is definitely on the horizon.

There's a lot of constituent dissatisfaction, and I would say there's also political dissatisfaction, as we've seen in some of the developments, with the way things are going, and then there's just a workload overload, and, by that, I'm not just referring to the council staff and the Regional Office staff and the Science Center staff, but even to the council, with the number of things we're trying to get through each meeting.

Really, what this all results in is a heck of a lot of frustration by a lot of people, and we see this repeatedly, and we hear about this repeatedly from fishermen, and so I was just going to highlight a few of the frustrations and then hand it off to Jessica and Kerry for the details of the plan.

Some science frustrations, and we all know well the Magnuson Act, and the Sustainable Fisheries Act in particular, imposed a heavy scientific demand. These are not really fully met in the Southeast. If they were, we wouldn't always be talking about data needs and requirements and have a seventy-eight-page research and monitoring needs plan. It's just really been a challenge, and it's not just -- You know you can't really point your finger at any one thing, and, you know, it's not the folks in the region, but it's just the scarce resources that exist for natural resources management in general, and we all know that a lot of our fisheries don't rise up to the top, in terms of, you know, the type of metrics that are looked at nationally for fisheries.

Nonetheless, according to the NMFS leadership at the CCC meeting, there's going to be further reductions in the science in the future, in data, analytical, and assessment capabilities, and so I

think that's a big frustration, and we also heard that we cannot simply reduce the allowable harvest due to uncertainty. That's a pretty big sea change in how we've been doing business as well, and I think that's going to -- Trying to achieve that is going to lead to a lot of science frustration in the near future.

Regulatory frustrations, and this isn't about individual regulations, and this is really about the process. The amendment development is really time consuming. It's something that we have talked with Andy about, and staffs working together on how we become more efficient. You know, we've got resiliency projects directed at that, but, you know, we looked at the workplan, and we see how long it takes to do this stuff, and we just had a great discussion, and so I think this is a frustration everyone shares, but, you know, one of the big challenges is, a lot of times, the stocks are in very different condition, by the time rules are going in, than what they were when rules were being pondered.

Sometimes the stocks are better, and people just don't understand why we're doing what we're doing, if things have really improved. Sometimes things have gotten worse, and we may have missed an opportunity.

We also have executive orders coming that are imposing deregulation, and really forcing us to take a fresh look at our overall regulatory burden, and what can we do to keep our fisheries competitive. That's tough, and the bottom line here, another big picture, is implementing the SFA has been tough in this council for over twenty years. We've got complex fisheries, and we've got a lot of information gaps, and we just haven't had enough resources to get the information we have to our scientists, to our SSCs, to everybody, to do the job that we need to do.

Some time ago, when Bonnie Ponwith was still the center director, she mentioned at one point that the SFA was the great equalizer. All stocks were treated equally under the act, and needed to be managed to the same standards, and, while that may be, and I think it was very true, that did not translate into equality of information across all of these species, and we struggle with far too many data-limited species, and it's tough to get regulations in that case.

There's a number of procedural frustrations. I think all of these have been faced by you already this week. You have to make a lot of hard decisions on the amendments and assessments that you're going to work on. We've had several discussions just today on that. You're also forced to make hard fisheries management decisions, with incomplete, and often uncertain, and sometimes out-of-date, information on your fisheries and stocks.

It's pretty easy to manage if you have all the information before you, and you have strong analysis, and you have long time series, and you feel good about it, but it's really tough when you have lots of uncertainties, and that makes everyone in the system frustrated, and it's a bit of a reality that humans in general just struggle with decision-making in the face of uncertainty, and I've seen some elegant studies on this, and it doesn't even have to be uncertainty related to the challenge, or the problem. It's just, in general, if you're dealing with a lot of uncertainties, you're hesitant to make decisions, and I think that factors into stuff that we deal with around here.

Most importantly maybe is the frustration of our constituents. Their trust is really low in the system, in the data, in the decisions that we take, and that just translates into everything that we do, and, because we rely on them for compliance, for self-reported data, it really makes the whole

system struggle even more, when they just don't really feel like they can trust us, they can trust the system, they can trust the data. They don't feel compelled, a lot of times, I think, to really be as honest as they otherwise could. You know, not everyone, but we do hear firsthand from people, a lot of times, about this and the impact that it has, and I think that's frustrating to the people who are, you know, trusting and doing the best they can and trying to put factual information out, and so there's a lot of frustrations all around.

What we're hoping to do is start a new approach. You know, the council has acknowledged the challenges of red snapper. You know, it's a multispecies fishery, and we've talked about having a snapper grouper problem, and not just a red snapper problem, to solve, but we struggle to implement these fishery-wide solutions. We've been working on the MSE for a while, and I think we just saw like, you know, it's not satisfying that some parts of that are taking a long time.

For us as a council, can we use these changes that are coming to NMFS as a bit of a springboard, and I think that, as I said, this idea came up with Kerry and Jessica before any of that stuff, but I think it really fits well with what we're being told from the agency, and I think it certainly lights a fire, maybe, under us to try and change how we do business, to be more innovative.

Can we be less assessment and data demanding? I think we have to, because we're going to have less assessment and data in the future. Can we come up with dynamic approaches, that don't take so long to get in place and allow us to respond to a fishery problem faster, rather than later, and can we do things that allow us to learn more about how regulations affect fishermen and stocks?

You know, sometimes it's good to fail early, and fail often, and learn a lot. You know, we don't want to fail in things, but the idea that you try things, and you learn from them, and then you respond and change and do other things is pretty valid to the idea of, you know, dynamic management. Do some good things, and see how stocks respond, and that's probably what we're going to need to do a lot more of in the future, and we've talked about it, but just getting it in place has been tough.

We overall need to be more innovative, as this plan hopes, timely and responsive to on-the-water observations, and we were just talking about that, and, importantly, for the workplan, can we reduce the time we spend on just the basic management actions, so we can spend more time on this comprehensive stuff? Can we do more framework amendments? Can we really get those done in three meetings?

Can we avoid adding a whole bunch of stuff onto an amendment when it's close, because we feel like, oh, we'll get that in there too, because that always slows things down, and, ultimately, we end up being slower, and not faster, and so that's where the approach is hoping to go. This is the quick look at the start, and then I think I'll hand it over to -- Which one of you guys wants to go next, Jessica or Kerry?

MS. MCCAWLEY: We can tag team it, and so I'll go, and then Kerry can state it in her own words, and so thanks for those slides, John. There was a bubble earlier about frustration, and so I would say, yes, that this concept was born out of frustration, but we see this as an opportunity to be innovative, and so I think that what we're suggesting here, and we look forward to hopefully future discussions on this, would be to establish some goalposts that would provide high-level guidance for evaluating our individual committee decisions.

We're thinking that the goalposts are really sort of a simplified restatement, maybe one for commercial one and for recreational, that we can think about our actions through, and it's you're taking those from the goals and objectives in the FMP, but you're stating it in a simplified way, and maybe it's just one or two items for commercial and recreational that become these goalposts.

Then you would establish some basic principles that we would operate under, which would be a series of facts, of shared expectations, so that we could deliberate and move forward more efficiently, and so, in other words, maybe we find a way to agree on some specific concepts, so that we're not rehashing them over and over again every time we bring up a species, every time we try to go somewhere on a particular action, and maybe there are some basic principles that we all agree to, and then we don't have to -- We put them put them aside, and we can remind ourselves of that, as we're having conversations, but we wouldn't have to rehash some of these things every time, at every meeting, under every species.

As a group, as a committee, we would develop short-term, mid-term, and long-term plans, and so we -- I think that the council has done a lot of innovative things in the past. I wanted to give an example of something that I felt like the council had done relatively recently that I saw as innovative, and we did this share-the-pain-share-the-gain approach when we were thinking about allocations and rebuilding fisheries.

Now I feel like when we talk about allocations in these rebuilding fisheries. Now I feel like, when we talk about allocations in these rebuilding fisheries, we usually go right to, well, which one of these options is the share-the-pain-share-the-gain approach, and so I see that as something that was innovative, and then we don't have to have these lengthy debates every time, and it saves time, as well as it was something that the council really hadn't done before, and I see it as an innovative concept.

I think that, thinking about all the kind of current things that John went over, I think that this is partly a way of thinking, as well as maybe we also tweak the process that we use, so you're thinking about things more holistically, and you're trying to think of innovative solutions that this council maybe had never embarked upon, or maybe we were hesitant to embark upon, but also, and we've kind of alluded to it throughout this meeting, in thinking about how we're going to put forward amendments, and maybe we have some abbreviated framework actions, to bring in items from stock assessments, and we don't bog those down with ten or twenty other actions, and then maybe we have a process that we use to figure out, if this requires a full plan amendment, do we really want to do it, and we don't just get bogged down in doing something over time.

I'm trying to look and see some of our other bullets here, but can you back up one more? Can you back up one? I'm going to pass it to Kerry and let her talk about this a little bit more, in her own words, before we move to those next slides.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and you all know me well enough to know , where John and Jessica are analytical and clear, I'm emotional and, you know, in my words, sort of how this conversation began -- Well, one, it began in 2020, in that meeting online, when I got super emotional, and I cried, because I felt like all we've been doing at this council, since I've been involved, is getting a stock assessment, and reacting to it, and getting a stock assessment, and reacting to it, and we're

not improving the fishery for anyone. Between 2020 and 2025 we've still, for the most part, been doing that.

In light of the fact that there might be a slowdown of that cycle, it seems like an opportunity for us to maybe take that breath, and back up, and really think about what we want this fishery to look like to all of us, who it means a lot to.

The other thing that I was reacting to was sort of frustration coming out of Amendment 59 and, to be honest, frustration out of not seeing eye-to-eye with people on Amendment 59, I mean our fellow council members, and, out of that frustration, I think it was either we can continue to be angry about it, and follow that definition of insanity, you know, as we all know, just hitting your head against the wall over and over again expecting a different result, and myself included.

I've got my mindset, and I've had my mindset in a track of this sort of us versus them, whether it's, you know, rec versus commercial or the council versus NMFS, and it's just been a pattern that I was firmly entrenched in, in my own mind, and I can only speak for myself, and, all of a sudden, I realized my time at this council is going to be up before too long, and nothing will have changed, and we wouldn't have gotten anywhere, because the pattern was staying the same, and so, for me, it was much more emotional than analytical, and it's helpful to have two analytical people, to be like this is driving me nuts, and they were able to put it into words.

One of the things that really struck stuck out to me, as we discussed it, was this concept of these goalposts, and how these goalposts are different for different sectors of the fishery, and how we acknowledge that, and how can we manage if the optimum way -- I'm not using the definition of optimum yield, but the optimum way for one sector to approach the fishery is very different than the optimum way for the other sector to approach the fishery, and how can we keep that in mind, as we're making decisions, and recognize that, ultimately, both of those things -- They can be achievable for everyone.

What I do know, in my heart, and this is back to the emotional thing, and the one thing I absolutely know is that we all are really trying to do the same thing, and there's no one here that doesn't want the same thing, and so how can we reset, and do that, and I think this is just -- We have this unique opportunity to take this thing that is frustrating, where there's less staff, you know, with the agency, and we're going to get less stock assessments, and how can we turn that into our opportunity to manage the way we've always wanted to manage, and so that is where my brain has gone.

We often forget to go back and look at what our original -- What are they called in the plan? What are those things called in the plan? You know what I'm saying, and you just said it. Purpose and need. Thank you. You know, we don't -- Because, you know, we often forget to go back and see where we're heading, and where do we want to head, and how are we going anywhere if we don't know where we want to be in the end?

That's where I was coming from, and I am going to make a concerted effort to be better at remembering that we all are just trying to get the same thing at the end, and that let's try to get there together, and hopefully we can all do that, but I love this idea of taking this time to look at goalposts right now, and where do we want to go, and I think we have an idea, and then, you know, come up with just some new ways to look at things, so that we're not back in this reactive cycle.

Again, I realize that that's a lot more wishy-washy, and harder to put your hands around than what Jessica and John are saying, but that's what it was born out of.

MS. MCCAWLEY: A couple more slides, and then we'll be happy to take questions and get feedback from you guys, and so, thinking about these goalposts, just to add on to what Kerry is saying, so there would, in theory, be at least one for commercial and recreational, and recreational -- I don't want to color people's mind, but, to try to give an example, it might be something like year-round access, with some small bag limits for recreational fishermen in the snapper grouper fishery.

Then, on commercial, it might be something relative to trip limits that can -- People can make a living as portfolio fishermen in the snapper grouper fishery, something like that, and you would set up these goalposts, and we would kind of check ourselves against these goalposts. When we're establishing them, you can think about, yes, some of us were around when we did visioning, but we're not suggesting going back to that lengthy visioning process at all. We're instead saying I think we all know where people are, what input we've received from constituents, our APs, our port meetings, public comment, you know, over the past year or so, and we can use all of that to guide kind of where we're going, how we would define these successes, and then there's an example there at the bottom.

Then we would have these basic principles, that we talked about a minute ago, that would be kind of simple, factual statements that we would agree to, and then we could kind of check ourselves, as we have debate, where maybe we don't have to keep saying these statements over and over again with each amendment, or each action, and this would limit the need for people to feel defensive, and, instead, maybe we can come to consensus on some of these positions, some of these innovative ideas, but these principles would kind of help establish some of these sideboards for our discussion.

There's an example there on the screen of a basic principle. Based on the discussion that we've had around the table over the past couple of years, it seems like the council doesn't desire to make significant changes to sector allocation, and that doesn't mean that we wouldn't talk about sector allocations after we get a stock assessment, because that's required, but we would say, hey, a reminder, and is there something that makes us think differently, that would be different from our principle, and that is that we're not really desiring to make significant changes to sector allocations.

Then we would also develop an action plan, and this would be directed at multiple needs, by implementing this approach, but it's also thinking about how we're responding to things like the seafood competitiveness executive orders and directives that NMFS is receiving and bringing to us, and then it would incorporate these innovative ideas into things that we're already working on and things that we would be seeking to work on so, and this would be incorporated in the workplan, like we talked about this morning.

Let me give you another couple of examples that the three of us have already talked about, and so I think that what we're doing with the Snapper Grouper Commercial Subcommittee is an example of being innovative. We're looking at trip efficiencies, and we're looking at the two-for-one, and that also goes in line with the seafood competitiveness EO and other directives that are out there.

I think another example, and we talked about this yesterday in the presentation from the CCC, and another innovative thing is thinking about what species are in the fishery management unit, and you received a survey from Mike, and we're going to talk about it, probably tomorrow, and over the next couple of days, about what can we actually manage in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and how can we reduce that down to the species that we know we need to manage, that we have the data for, and so those are just some examples of some things that I see as already underway, that I would classify them as innovative ideas as part of this plan. I'm going to pass it to Kerry or John, to see if you want to add anything to those three slides.

We would love to take some questions from folks about this. We don't really feel like the way that we've been going, as we all described, is really sustainable, and we're really just looking at single-species management in this multispecies fishery, and we're really kind of getting back to what we say we always want to work on, but we can't seem to find the time, and now maybe we can find the time to do it, and so we look forward to hearing your feedback, and starting this discussion, and, as we mentioned, you know, we don't -- We don't need to try to hash out all the pieces today. If the committee is interested, we can bring back some examples and start a more robust discussion at the September meeting. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: First, I would like to thank you, John, and Kerry for working on this. This is some good stuff. Going to the goalposts, I think just an observation. I think, at least from my perspective, we struggle a lot with commercial versus recreational. Dead discards has really been a wedge that's driven, you know, a lot of between us, and so I just --

From a high level, when we think about goalposts, I think we should think about that from fishery as a whole, and maybe it should be, you know, fisheries abundance, or, you know, fish available to be caught, and that's kind of, you know, starting up high, rather than immediately jumping into our commercial and recreational, which I think hopefully, if we resolve some of these management issues, that divide, or that separation, you know, the way we look at things, might come together a little bit, and so, from a high-level goalpost, I think thinking about fisheries abundance, or something else like that, that collectively recreational and commercial sectors agree is a good thing, would be helpful

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'm just -- Obviously, like everybody else, I'm just kind of getting my head wrapped around it, and I can see where we could change gears on some stuff. I think we just took vermilion snapper off of the assessment list, and I think you can -- There are probably some species, and, again, this is still single-species management, but you can look at CPUE, SPR, what the trends are with the MARMAP traps, you know, input from fishermen, average sizes, and we know where we need to go just from that.

We don't need a full assessment, and we can do an update just from, you know, some information like that, and so we can take a lot of work off of various staffs, and so, yes, that -- Again it's single species, but there may be -- You can multiply that out into complex groups, or something, and so that's just one of the things that came to me, and then how do we work this with the service? You know, is that going to work with them, you know, that simplified approach. You know, we have to get feedback from Andy and his team of can we do that, things like that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Gary.

MR. BORLAND: I want to thank you three for putting this together. It's some of the most encouraging news I've heard in the last, I don't know, eight meetings probably, and we seem to get caught in the process, and Kerry talked about it, and it seems like every conversation is around a new assessment, and how do we reduce catch, and it gets frustrating, no doubt.

I do believe in, you know, some of what Robert said, that, you know, we have two distinct groups, user groups, and, you know, I think, a lot of times, from the recreational side, we don't look at, you know, the recreational fisherman as spending his off time, and discretionary income, and, obviously, he wants access, or that person wants access, more than they need to go catch 5,000 pounds of fish on a trip.

Then we've got another group, the commercial people, who would rather go catch their full aggregate in one trip, because expenses are less, and they make more money, and so two, really, when you when you break it apart, two very distinct user groups, different user groups, right, and I think the way we manage it, and the way we look at it sometimes, is like it's still one, and it's frustrating at times to see that, and so I really would love to step outside the box that we keep ourselves in all the time, and I encourage this type of activity.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Other thoughts, or questions? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I was able to provide some comments prior to us coming to this meeting, and I'm just going to sort of reiterate them, and, dude, I'm going to give you a high-five across the table, Charlie, because, man, we have a lot of data out there, and we need to learn how to better utilize the data we already have at our fingertips. Fishery-independent indexes, they really don't lie.

The one thing that I really like about this is the simplistic approach, looking at things from a different lens, reframing what we already have and trying to figure out what is available. We always sit around this table, and we talk about a more simplistic approach to stock assessments. Well, this very well could be an avenue to going down that path a little bit, and we have those resources at our fingertips, and I did want to commend the three of you for putting this together, for taking the feedback that you got back from all the council members, and I really look forward to being able to plan this out a little bit more, really kind of put some guidelines in there, and I want to think about sort of like a -- I don't know.

My kids and I have what's called a magic word that just kind of gets us to reset, and so maybe innovation or something like that, and it's just something that is a quick trigger for us to go, we're not going down that path, and we're going to stop, and we're going to think about this, and we're going to make sure that our next conversation, and our next comment, is going to be applicable to making positive change. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Amy. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Sol first, thank you for putting this together. We've had some good conversations this week, both outside this meeting and in the meeting, and, you know, I view Amendment 59 -- For all the frustration and discontent and anger that was born from it, also some

good that's coming out of it, and this is one example, right, and so I really commend, you know, you, Jessica, and John and Kerry for putting this together.

I like the balance between the analytical and emotional, and, Kerry, never apologize for being emotional, because that, to me, has had a lasting impact on me as a Regional Administrator from day-one, essentially, of, you know, me sitting in this position, because it reminds me of, obviously, we're not just managing fish, but we're managing people, right, and the impacts that this job can have on that.

I have a few notes that I put down, and I just wanted to kind of mention a few things, and so, one, I think this proposal aligns very well with what John talked about earlier this week, and which was discussed during the CCC meeting, that matrix that we talked about, that Clay and I are involved with, with aligning the science and management, and the capacity to actually accomplish that, as well as the simplification of that management process, based on the science that we're going to have available to us, and so that's positive.

You know, some things I think we'll need to think about, and I appreciate the goalpost idea, and I think state versus federal management, and we have different statutory requirements and goals, and so the goalpost can be very different depending on, you know, you as a state agency, versus the federal government's requirements, and so bringing that to the table is also going to be important going forward.

Internally, we are, obviously, not standing still. We see a lot of opportunities just for efficiencies, and we've set up a process that involves Myra, that involves the Gulf Council, that's looking at how we develop documents, and where are the inefficiencies in the document development process, and what are the bottlenecks for obtaining data, and so we are working hard to actually come up with some things that are outside the purview of the council, but that hopefully will reap some benefits, in addition to some things we can do to streamline our procedures for implementing actions.

The other things that I can think about, that I think relate to this, is I really love, conceptually, you know, this idea. I think we need to think about how we really use our time when we come together at these meetings, and, oftentimes, we sit around and get a lot of presentations and updates, and we're not having that discussion, or debate, or conversation, and so are there more avenues to spend our time more efficiently while we're here?

Then the last thing I'll just add, or two things I'll add, is we still need to, I think, not lose sight of some of the root causes of our challenges, and so it's not just the science it's not just the deficiencies in science. We are going to be challenged based on population growth, based on demand for fishing activity, based on a lot of factors, as well as things that are outside our control, right, and so how do we set those goalposts, in light of all those challenges, and be realistic with that?

Then the last thing I'll just say is that I think the goalposts are good. They need to be adaptable, and there may be times that we're going to have to move the goalpost, and that spirited debate can be healthy at times, and so I don't want to squash the opportunity to have that spirited debate, when we need it, but, overall, I love the concept, and I would love to, obviously, come back to this in September and further detail.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Andy. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just one thing I was thinking of, and, John, I don't know if you said it when I had been out of the room earlier this week, but what the new Assistant Administrator had said, I think at the CCC meeting, about, you know, this concept of where science meets reality, and, in my mind, that's what this is for this body. It's going to mean something to the SSC, and it's going to mean something to that agency, but, in my mind, this innovation plan is where science meets reality for this body.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Kerry. Other thoughts? John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: So, reflecting on a number of things said here, and Charlie kind of described a stoplight, it sounded like to me, Amy and Bob, you guys are familiar with that, but what you described is very similar to what ASMFC uses for a number of unassessed stocks called a stoplight, and you look at all your various sources of information, and they get a red yellow or green, and then you have some parameters in there about as you get, you know, a percentage of reds and yellows, and, in some cases, you're forced to take some action.

It really is trying to make the most of the information you have, in a more rapid and maybe, to some extent, less qualitative approach, but you're using the information, and then we were thinking about the FMU, and I just kind of had a bit of an idea that, you know, maybe we start to apply this concept when we talk about the FMU, and we consider not -- You know, we have the things we have to consider, but maybe we should consider do we have a plan for how we would monitor and evaluate that stock.

You know, I mean we have -- We know what we have that's been assessed, and we know we're not really going to get more things added on the assessed list, and so we should consider, you know, those other stocks and say, well, is there information that's out there, and, like Amy said, there's a lot of data that, in some cases, we're not always making use of, because we don't really have the frameworks, but maybe, as we work through that, that should be part of it, and like we want to manage this stock, and we have a plan for how we would do that, so we don't have so many stocks in the only reliable catch, and even some stocks in the don't even have reliable catch kind of categories.

You know, I think, to me, that would be a bit innovative, that we factored that into it, because, as we said, we've got to have a reasonable list that can actually be evaluated to manage, and that became clear from the agency.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, John. Other thoughts or questions? Clay.

DR. PORCH: I too wanted to commend you on this presentation, and, obviously, from the science perspective, we've been thinking along the same lines. My predecessor, Bonnie Ponwith, was right that annual catch limits leveled the playing field, in the sense that we were required to provide a catch limit for species, even if they weren't supporting a major fishery, but, unfortunately, no one paid the bill for that, and so it didn't level the playing field in that sense, and so we've been struggling ever since.

We've never been able to give the informed ACLs that we would like to have, and so now I agree this is a good chance to kind of reboot and look into things like using species complexes more, with indicator species, and look into implicit rebuilding plans, where we adjust the ABC control rules in a way that, if the stock goes below a certain threshold, then you automatically reduce the fishing mortality rate, instead of trying to calculate and predict into the future how the stocks are going to recover, because we know we have changing conditions, and it's not only the fishery that's affecting the fish.

I think there's a lot of things we can do. I really like the dynamic approaches, including on the science side of the house, but, as Andy said also, we manage people, and not fish, and you do have an awful lot of people here.

I mean, it is essentially unlimited fishing all year long, and you can't always harvest and take home the fish, but the people are fishing, and, you know, we're going to have to really look at some innovative solutions on the management side of the house as well, and so I totally support where you're going on this, and we would be very happy to work with the council on the science side to figure out what's the most effective way we can provide science advice, that covers the most species, given right now what our unknown future resources would be. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Clay. Any other thoughts, or questions? I mean, it seems like -- I don't want to speak for everybody, but it seems like maybe we're kind of coalescing around this seems like a good concept, and let's at least kick it to the next meeting, and maybe spend some time -- Allow some time to start talking about the specifics, and the devil is often in the details, and so is that where we are? Let me just kind of look around the table. That we want to talk about more specifics of this plan at the September meeting? Okay. I see heads nodding yes. Okay. I see thumbs-up. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Just as way of suggestion, I'm wondering if, when we bring this back in September, it would be good just to bring back a few examples, or ideas, that could be talked about, and it's not a comprehensive list. I think it's just what we can manage, in terms of a conversation, but some ideas with regard to how science could be simplified to provide the management advice, right, and what that might look like, as an example.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Are you volunteering to bring that piece?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I'm going to volunteer Clay to work with me on that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I love it. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and then I guess I'm probably putting the cart a little further down than it needs to be, but, at some point, when this body feels like we've got a little bit better of a component out there, I take it the intent is to share this with some of the APs, and also get them sort of thinking in this particular path? Okay. Just thank you for that confirmation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and the SSC, I would say. Any other thoughts, or feedback, today? All right. I appreciate the discussion. We're debating up here what to do next with our last say fifteen, or fourteen, minutes. We're thinking maybe we go ahead and adjourn for the day. When we come

back in the morning, we will go into the MSY proxies, and first up in that discussion will be a presentation from Luiz Barbieri, and so that will be the plan for the morning.

MR. CARMICHAEL Chip says he can probably take care of golden tilefish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip says -- I'm sorry. Don't get up yet, Tim. Chip says that he thinks he can take care of golden tilefish in what is now thirteen minutes. Okay. I'm going to pass it over.

DR. COLLIER: Wow. Thank you for the greeting. For golden tilefish, I know there was discussion to try to get an amendment started quickly, and completed quickly. However, when I was diving into the details of golden tilefish, I looked at the commercial landings, and went into the ACL monitoring file, and then compared that to the landings that were in SEDAR 89, and they were very different.

We were not tracking relative to the ACL, similar to how the assessment was assessing the population, and so what we need to do is dive into the details of the landings, to figure out where the discrepancy is occurring, and figure out which dataset should be used to either track the population properly or assess the population properly, figure out which direction we need to go, and set up a -- Basically, a workgroup to figure that out, potentially including our partners from ACCSP, our state partners, and National Marine Fisheries Service, in order to work out the details of that.

Then we'll come back to you all in September with a plan on where to go from there. Sorry we weren't able to get you something for golden tilefish right now, but I want to make sure that we're going through this in a stepwise process, in order to get the best information possible for developing an ACL, or revising the stock assessment, and I'm not certain which one needs to be fixed, but there is a discrepancy, and we'll get it fixed and come back to you with a plan in September. Please let me know if there are any questions, or if I said anything that you guys are concerned with.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any questions for Chip? I don't see any hands. Thank you for that update, Chip. All right. Now we're adjourned. All right. Be back at 8:30 in the morning

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on June 10, 2025.)

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JUNE 11, 2025

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Radisson Resort at the Port, Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Wednesday, June 11, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to go ahead and get going here in our second day of the Snapper Grouper Committee. The first thing that we're going to do this morning is we're going to dive into maximum sustainable yield proxies, and first up in that conversation is a presentation by Luiz Barbieri with Florida Fish and Wildlife, the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

DR. BARBIERI: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, everyone. Just to give everyone a little bit of background on this, and it's just a refresher, and I know you already know all of this, but this discussion of SPR-based MSY proxies has been a major topic, right, for the last half-year to a year.

Both this council and the Gulf Council have had presentations on SPR-based proxies for MS, and fairly intense discussions, right, and so, if you remember back in March, you asked the institute, the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, to put together a presentation and come present our perspective.

You know, in science, you're going to have, sometimes, and this is a positive, disagreements about things, right, or differences of opinion, different perspectives, and this is what allows us to discuss and move things forward, and so this alternative perspective here is really an attempt to sort of present our view of this issue.

So, specifically, the request from you was a non-technical presentation from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's stock assessment group discussing their perspectives on developing spawning potential ratio, SPR, based MSY proxies for state and federally-managed species. I'm going to have to start by apologizing that I did not manage to follow that direction of the non-technical. I tried to keep this as non-technical as possible, but, in reality, you cannot really have a meaningful conversation about MSY and proxies of MSY without having a more in-depth discussion of some technical issues.

The other two requests, and I sprinkle a little bit here into my presentation, compilation and comparison of SPR proxies for southeastern stocks that have MSY estimates based on stock-recruitment relationships and a discussion of management situations that will require a higher or lower SPR. I sprinkled a little bit, but the follow-up presentation, that Judd will give, will have a lot more detail, and is much better structured to discuss those two points, and so consider my points here as kind of an introduction to Judd's presentation, and so here we go.

Discussing MSY, and proxies for MSY, is inherently discussing stock productivity and resilience, and that is one of the things, within stock assessments, that have a lot to do with the stock-recruitment relationship, and so going into the stock-recruitment relationship really helps us understand the main points of discussion, especially because, in modern stock assessments, the productivity and resilience of the stocks are often quantified by the parameter steepness, right, of the stock-recruitment relationship.

The graph here, and let me walk you through, is a stylized conceptual model of a stock-recruitment relationship, in this case following approximately the Beverton-Holt stock-recruitment model, and so let me walk you through the main components. Here, on the X-axis, you have the spawning stock biomass going from zero all the way to B0, which in this case is indicating the estimated unfished biomass of the stock, when it was unfished. On the Y-axis, you have recruits. You have

recruitment, also going from zero all the way to R0, which in this case is the estimated recruitment that you would have at the unfished stock stage.

Now, you can think of this as a simple analogy, right, and it's an oversimplification, but, conceptually, you can think about SSB, in an investment account, as being the principal, and the recruits really being the interest that is produced to replenish your principal, right, and so you have to have some idea of recruitment, and you try to have as much SSB as you need to produce the recruits to maintain sustainability, and so that's the whole concept.

This curve here, right, indicates how recruitments increase as biomass increases, and you can notice that, in the beginning, the curve is fairly steep, and so you have a fairly large increase in recruitment, and a small increase in stock size, and then, eventually, that slope starts abating some, and becomes pretty much asymptotic, right, and this is because we're dealing here with biological beings, right, actual fish, and, in reality, what happens is, over here, when you get to very large stock sizes, they are approaching their carrying capacity, and so this --

Just the population is at a large size, and it doesn't really have enough resources for everyone, space, food, all the other things, to maintain that population growth, and so they're going to control, right, their recruitment, because there's no need to put more individuals into the population.

Now steepness, this parameter H here, measures the expected reduction in recruitment when SSB declines to 20 percent of its unfished level, and so here's what it is, right, and here's the fish level. As you get down to 20 percent, right, you look at what recruitment you would have at that point. In this case, you can see that this stock has a fairly high steepness, and so, even at 20 percent of its spawning stock biomass, it's still producing about 80 percent of the virgin, its estimated virgin, recruitment, right, and so it's fairly productive.

Now, this different stock, represented by the red line, is not -- It has a stock-recruitment relationship that's not as steep, right, and so you can see that, at 20 percent, you will achieve the same level of virgin recruitment, at virgin biomass, but, at 20 percent of that unfished biomass, it's producing only 60 percent, right, and so this one has a higher steepness than this, and so, in this case, you can see that steepness is also a metric of the stock's compensatory capacity.

Compensatory capacity means the resilience of the stock, right, and so, as you push the stock down, it actually pumps up its productivity by achieving change in biological -- Adjusting biological parameters so that it matures earlier, and it produces more eggs, and it grows faster, and so it compensates to have higher growth as you push, you know, population growth -- As you push it down, and so this is really the ability to produce more recruits per spawner as the stock declines.

Okay, and so this is really, really convenient, right, and this is a very elegant, really, concept, steepness. It's actually unitless, and so you can compare among different species, and you can see, oh my gosh, you know, this one is more productive than this other one, and it's a convenient way for you to estimate the productivity of the stock and know why your future recruitment is going to be, because you have a metric of the productivity of the stock.

Well, unfortunately, steepness is very difficult to estimate reliably, and what happens -- Mainly due to data limitations, right, and we're going to discuss that in more detail in a minute, but, when you don't have an estimated steepness, and you cannot really have an estimated stock-recruitment

relationship, MSY is not estimable, and you need to use an SPR proxy, and so it's the whole reason why we have sometimes -- I thought it was important to review this with you, and why we have to go into an SPR-based reference point.

Now, understand that, if steepness is not estimable, right, future recruitment for this stock is essentially unpredictable, and so you're trying to evaluate what future recruitment is going to be, but you don't have a metric that tells you how productive really this stock is.

Now, going back to the difficulties of estimating steepness, I put together here several papers, and I tried to look for the more recent ones, just four of them, that, if you have trouble sometimes in the middle of the night, sleepless nights, pick one of those up and read, because it's going to put you right back to sleep, but these are excellent papers, that really go into details that basically point out that, even though the concept of steepness is really useful, helpful, a smart, clever way to handle stock productivity, it might be more aspirational in nature, in terms of the data that you have to have for reliable estimates than you might want to see.

Here's an example, right, with yellowtail snapper, and so there's two graphs here. On the left is the same type of stock-recruitment relationship that we had before. The X-axis has spawning biomass, and the Y-axis has recruitment, just like before. This is part of the stock-recruitment relationship. This is estimated by the stock assessment model, right, but you realize that it's incomplete, right, on both ends, and this is because this is the only range of data that we have to estimate this.

So a few observations, right, and one is the data that we have, the range of data that we have, is already doing that fairly flat, and you can see how there's quite a bit of variability in stock size, for not a concomitant variability in recruitment, and so that already expresses uncertainty in that measure of productivity.

Now the curve, the graph on the right, uses exactly the same data, right, but I asked Chris to plot the entire curve, so you get to see that the model parameters that are estimated are coming out with this picture of the complete curve, right, following the Beverton-Holt stock-recruitment model, and so it has an estimate of SSB0, right, which is right here, which, of course, was never seen, right, and we don't have good information for that, and we don't have enough information over here when the stock was at small size.

Now, it has an estimate of steepness that came out, and, actually, this estimate is not too bad, considering the biology of yellowtail snapper, right, but, if you look at the observed range of SSB, right, you realize there are problems with this estimate. You know, the model spit out a number. Now, what that number means -- Now, remember these models are trying to represent biological systems, right, and so you're trying to approximate what's actually happening, and you have to keep that in mind, and so it's very difficult to estimate this.

In this case, even though the steepness estimate here was about 0.77, right, looking at the diagnostics for steepness for this estimate, there were values between 0.64 and 0.99 that were all almost as likely to be the right estimate and so a huge range of possible -- I mean, there were less than two likelihood units between this estimate and the other ones, and so it's really a level of uncertainty that is, I consider, inadequate to accept this steepness estimate, and so, in this case, we decided to go with an SPR proxy.

How do we relate -- Now that we discussed the fact that we are not having -- Being able sometimes, or perhaps most often, to estimate steepness, how do you relate stock productivity to the choice of SPR proxies for MSY, and so we're going to have to go with something that substitutes, right, for your initial lack of ability to estimate steepness, and so this is SPR, which represents the spawning biomass in fished condition, and so, as the stock is undergoing fishing, you have a spawning biomass, and you measure that relative to what that spawning biomass would be when the stock was unfished, as an estimate of what that biomass would be.

Basically, what you're doing here is trying to see what level do we need to have -- If you think back about the savings account, right, principal and interest, you're trying to see, to guess, how much spawning biomass in fished condition you need to have to produce the level of recruits that will maintain the stock at a sustainable level.

Now, SPR -- By the way, here, you have to express this in a per-recruit basis, because remember that future recruitment is really technically unpredictable, and so you don't know -- You don't have absolute metrics of what the recruitment is going to be, and you have to produce it, you know, those biomass, relative biomass estimates, based on a per recruit basis, right, and so that explicitly acknowledges that you don't have a good idea of the stock productivity from a direct metric.

SPR is based on life history, right, parameters like growth, reproduction, et cetera, for a given selectivity pattern of the fishery, because here, remember, you're measuring this in a fished condition, and so different selectivity patterns for that fishery will influence your final estimate of SPR, and then the choice of SPR proxy that you're comparing the calculated one to can be sometimes considered arbitrary, because, basically, what you're doing --

Since you don't have a quantitative way to estimate that steepness, you're using your best judgment, expert judgment, knowing the biology of the species, knowing the selectivity of the stock, to then decide how much spawning biomass -- What fraction of spawning biomass do I need to leave out there to produce enough recruits, right, and so it can be considered arbitrary, but the goal is to maintain SSB within safe biological limits, but, importantly, while also limiting foregone yield.

This, in a way, right, and some people are going to shoot me down for saying this, but I have to say it, and picking your SPR proxy is somewhat of an art, as much as a science. I mean, you're using your best expert judgment to make that choice, right, and, when I mean maintain safe, it's not that this needs to be precautionary, but, because you're actually trying to guess, right, what that value is, you want to make sure that you have enough recruits coming for the future, but remember that limiting foregone yield -- So you're trying to balance here those two issues of stock protection, on one hand, as well as yield, because we are doing this for fisheries management, right?

The one and only Clay Porch, actually, had this graph that he showed, this figure, at a previous presentation, and I don't remember which one that was, Clay, but that I thought was spot on, right, because it really helps you see that this estimate of SPR is trying to make choices about where MSY would be, but you don't really know exactly what it is, where it is, right, and so you have, and I thought that this was very smart of Clay to put this here, this region where MSY would be, and that would be different for different stocks, and that would be different for different selectivity patterns.

In this case here, he put, you know, 30 percent at the lower end of that range where the MSY region is, but that would be debatable as you look at other stocks, and so when we look at the use of SPR-based proxies for U.S. councils, what you find is a lot of variability, right, and so here, for this graph, and this -- Actually, I thank my friend John Walter for letting me use this figure. Here on the right, you have, in different colors, the different councils, right, in different regions, and here, on the X-axis, you have different values of SPR, or steepness.

Here you have SPR going from 20 percent all the way to 50 percent, and then you have a number of estimated steepness stocks and fixed steepness stocks, right, stocks that, instead of using an SPR proxy, you just fixed the steepness value, right, which is equivalent to choosing an SPR proxy, because, in reality, you're making that choice about the productivity of the stock kind of a priori, right, and so a few things jump out at you.

One is less than 10 percent of the stocks, right, have actually estimated steepness, just seventeen out of 188. I am unsure, to tell the truth, about the time that this data covers, right, the timeline, the time period that this data covers, but I think it's all the way to perhaps a couple years ago. Judd's presentation is going to have a little more on this, but only seventeen out of 188 have estimated steepness, and then one only stock for the South Atlantic Council, right, and so it's really clear that use of steepness -- It's really not very likely, given the data limitations.

Now, some examples of SPR values that FWC uses for Florida-managed species, right, and so it's really working with industry and stakeholders and trying to decide what values are recommended to achieve that biological safety for the stock, and long-term sustainability, while providing them with management goals that they are after.

In the case of snook, it's 40 percent SPR, because you want to provide anglers, and they asked for this, high abundance, larger sizes, and resilience from some environmental factors that can negatively impact the stock. For red drum, the escapement is equivalent to SPR 40 percent as well, but, for seatrout, and this is a more productive species, they go with 35 percent SPR.

This graph down here for snook is an interesting way, I think, a visualization of what happens with the biomass of a stock when you go from the unfished condition, the B0 that I mentioned before, all the way down to what the biomass of the stock in the age composition is at the F 40 percent SPR, and so, by fishing the stock, of course, the first response of an exploited stock is juvenescence, right, and so this is going to happen, and you're going to lose some of the older ages.

Now, all this conversation about SPR, right, and stock productivity -- In reality, how do we fit this into the ACL framework, and so your charge is to develop catch limits, annual catch limits, that are based on the ACL framework, right, as council members, and so we need to see how those fit.

Now, the first thing that jumps at you is the MSY, or its proxy, actually corresponds to the overfishing limit, and so this is a limit reference point, and, by definition, that is not to be precautionary, right, because it's a limit. Now, the system itself is set up, deliberately and intentionally, with these buffers, right, to account for the application of precaution, due to both uncertainty and risk, and so I think that some of the previous older papers, before the Magnuson-Stevens Act came out, before the ACL framework was put together, they are recommending precautionary values of SPR proxies, because this system was not yet existing, and so they were

not actually able to apply these buffers at that point, right, and so the situation has changed now with this.

Actually, all of this was discussed at this National Science Workshop on Implementation of Annual Catch Limits that the agency, the Office of Science and Technology, held back in 2011 to discuss exactly -- To provide a forum for a national discussion on the status of the science needed for ACL implementation, right, and so this is to see how we develop the science to implement this.

Several of us here in the room were actually there in the flesh, right, and Carolyn Belcher, John Carmichael, and I were there. I think Clay was up in Spain, doing some ICCAT stuff, and he couldn't attend, but, you know, this really was conducted jointly with the regional fishery management councils, and involved nationally-recognized experts, explicitly to develop these sort of rules of the road for how to apply this.

Rick Methot was the convener of that workshop, and he gave a presentation that was setting the stage for all the subsequent presentations and discussions, and this is a slide I got from his presentation, because I thought it was absolutely genius, right, that he sets all the issues here that have to do with the science-management flow, and I think the main message here is that we don't have really a way to apply this fisheries management correctly unless we have science and management working together, and so this is, by definition, an integrative process that needs to happen.

Here, he talks about the tradeoff analysis of buffer size versus foregone catch and stock protection, and so, again, that balance between trying to guarantee long-term sustainability of the stock, but also being aware that maximizing yield is necessary, and then, down here, and this is not something that I put here, and he actually had this on his original slide, that to me is absolutely genius. Science does not decide the policy, but policymakers cannot make informed policy without the science, and, again, highlighting the integrative approach, where this is not a confrontation, right, but all working towards the same goal of the science and management integrative to develop these catch level recommendations.

Here's another presentation that Erik Williams gave, from our Science Center, that he gave on this, and he reinforces all those same topics. OFL should not account for precaution, but it does have uncertainty, and so it should correspond to the long-term MSY. Higher uncertainty leads to higher precaution, which leads to a higher buffer, right, and lower ACL and ACT, but he mentions here that tolerance for risk is an important part of this. Again, integrative science and management to kind of develop recommendations that integrate scientific uncertainty and the council's management, you know, tolerance risk.

Now, what management situations will require a higher or lower SPR? As we discussed before, SPR proxies should be determined for each stock, depending on its biology, ecology, productivity, resilience, right, as well as their selectivity pattern, and so, trying to avoid being prescriptive, you know, I put here, to illustrate this concept, two extremes of what I believe are in our region, stock productivity and resilience.

On the left, you have tomtate, right, high productivity, and very resilient to fishing, because it can replenish itself fairly rapidly, versus warsaw grouper on the right, that is lower productivity, and much higher vulnerability to fishing, and so, if we're talking about plants, right, another group of

biological beings, on this side, you have weeds, that you try to get rid of, and you can't, right, and then, on the right, you have orchids, right, and how many of us have got orchids? Then, if you look at them the wrong way, they die, right, and so it's really higher vulnerability.

Ideally, this choice, when you look at this, should account for what's called the species density-dependent compensatory capacity, and so, again, the issue that we mentioned before. As fishing reduces population density, the population responds with altered life history traits, earlier maturation, faster growth, increased fecundity, and so this is compensating for that lower population size and the availability, greater availability, of resources. This should be a metric that we keep in the back of our minds as we're choosing SPR proxies.

Now, that brings us back, right, to the presentation the SSC received back in 2023 regarding NS 1 recommendations for SPR proxies, and so these were developed, basically, because the agency, you know, the Office of Science and Technology, put together this document that is the technical guidance document for National Standard 1 Guidelines.

Rick Methot presented this to the SSC, and, in that presentation, for age-structured assessment method applications, he provided two main directions. One, if the data is available, and sufficient, and you actually have the ability to do a direct estimation of steepness, because then you have an actual metric of stock productivity that you can apply towards projections in the future, then everything will be fine, but, and this, I believe, is most of our situation, most of the stocks that we deal with here in the southeast U.S., for data-moderate, right, species, for which steepness is not estimable, you're going to have to go the MSY-based proxy.

They recommended in that document, right, SPR proxies in the range of 30 to 60 percent, which I think is a fairly wide and realistic range, and, to me, indicates that this document was never meant to be prescriptive about this, but it also recommends a default of 40 to 45 percent for most stocks. I think I see a little problem there. I have some concerns about that recommendation, and so some of my concerns are expressed here.

You know, a lot of the science that went behind that determination came out of this paper, Zhou et al. and colleagues, right, published in 2020. They used records from the RAM Legacy Database. Ransom Myers was a biologist. He passed away several years back, but he was famous in developing a lot of the science that has to do stock-recruitment relationships, way back when, and he left together this legacy database of over 300 stocks globally, right, that has all the information about stock assessments that have been conducted.

This paper, the Zhou et al. paper, was trying to predict, from life history parameters and gear selectivity, what would be the SPR values that would be associated, more likely to be associated, with MSY, but look at their results. The results that they had ranged from 13 to 95 percent, right, because they looked over a wide range of species, for a wide range of ecosystems, and so it's not specific about anything, which to me prevents you from developing an SPR proxy that's biologically realistic for the stock in question.

This mean of 47 percent -- When you're doing a mean of something that's so wide, it's not really meaningful for anything, in my view, and so the reason for this is that it was based on 185 global stocks, here from the U.S., from Antarctica, from the Indian Ocean, from South America, from Mediterranean, and so it's such a hodgepodge. It's trying to develop some guidance that's global

in nature, and that's understandable, but it's really not directly applicable to any particular stock, as far as I'm concerned.

It includes species ranging in productivity widely, and so that mean is really a mean that encompasses too much biological variability to be representative of any particular stock. In their paper, they point out there is not enough information -- They couldn't find on the quality of the MSY, FMSY, estimates that they obtained from the legacy database, and so they opted to use as many estimates as possible, to increase sample size, because it was difficult to determine which estimates were accurate.

This happens a lot with this meta-analysis, where you collect -- You know, you're trying to pull together information results from a variety of papers that have been done over time, or over space, or both, and you end up not understanding the limitations of the data that you're actually integrating into your analysis, and here's why.

The RAM Legacy Database has a lot of species that are actually cold-water species. It's biased that way, because northern latitude countries have had more stock assessments, and have more of those estimates available in the database. Now, these species have very different productivity, reproduction, and biology, right, and so their productivity and resilience is very different than what we have in the southeast U.S. Cold water systems are often food limited, and exhibit high seasonality, with a short window in which offspring can survive.

These species have what's called determinate fecundity, meaning their productivity of eggs for that year of spawning is predetermined from the pool of germ oocytes, right, the primary growth oocytes in the ovaries, and so, as soon as those start developing, no new ones come after that, and so it's a limitation, in terms of how many times those species spawn and the productivity, in terms of fecundity they can produce.

Here, just as an illustration, I put one of the figures from the Zhou and colleagues paper that relates SPR and MSY to steepness, and you can see here, in this case, and this is based on, I guess, twelve or thirteen species of rockfishes, right, a 40 percent SPR would be equivalent to a 0.61 steepness, which, as you can see from this other paper that Kyle Shertzer and Paul Conn published back in 2012, it's really not in line with that initial value, right, and it's called a prior within a Bayesian estimation process. They use an initial value to kind of get started, before you converge towards the values that you want to estimate, and then that value starts at 0.84, right, because, of course, here the stocks are more productive.

Fish reproduction in warm water systems, and, of course, the southeastern U.S. falls under this, are very different. Productivity is very different. Actually, my better half, working with a lot of colleagues within the southeast U.S., the Science Center, South Carolina DNR, University of Southern Mississippi, and University of Florida, all working together, came up with this unified framework, right, that's trying to address a terminology for fish population productivity.

Here, 100 percent of the species, all of them, have indeterminate fecundity, meaning they are producing eggs as they eat and they grow during the season. They are producing more and more eggs, and their productivity is already inherently higher, because they have multiple batches that recruit new oocytes during the spawning season.

96 percent of them produce one-millimeter pelagic eggs, meaning they are just broadcasters, right, broadcast spawners, and they don't have to worry about issues like parental care, nest building, or internal development, like the rockfishes do. Most of them have extended spawning seasons, and so multiple opportunities for them to be productive, right, and a third is sequential hermaphrodites, which is an issue that we need to be aware of, cognizant of, but, in this case, it shows how different this system is as a whole from the systems that we saw before.

This brings us into what I think is one of the issues that we have to deal with here, which that document -- I think I see value in it, right, the tech memo guidance document. I think I see value in it, but we have to look at it from all the different perspectives that we get from different ecosystems, right, that exist in this country. We have a very large country. You know that we have eight councils, deliberately set up to capture the diversity of ecosystems that you have. You know, you have Alaska, and the Caribbean, and you have Massachusetts and New England, and you have southern California.

You have such a wide range that you actually have to look at the nationally cohesive, right, science and management guidelines, but apply that with a regionally-specific approach, because, if you don't, you're not going to be able to apply your science and management to the species that you're trying to manage.

Main takeaways are to ideally estimate MSY directly. Personally, I don't think that this is going to be possible for the vast majority of species. However, this is rare, given data limitations. Thorough evaluation of the quality of steepness estimates is critical, because, when you just get a number that comes out of the model, without you looking at the diagnosis and finding what is acceptable and not acceptable, you don't know the quality of that estimate. You can't accept it, you know, blankly.

SPR proxies should be stock-specific and account for the stock's biology and fishery characteristics. MSY is a limit reference point. The SPR proxy for MSY should not be precautionary, and so, if you want to address uncertainty and precaution, address this through the appropriate buffers. I mean, the system is deliberately set up to allow for that.

The default SPR values recommended in the draft NS 1 technical guidance memo, those values do not properly account for the biology of South Atlantic Council-managed stocks, in my view. For South Atlantic stocks, SPR proxies in the range of 30 to 40 percent seem more appropriate.

I actually feel that setting up some default value -- Me personally, I find it problematic, because you're going to have a range, right, of species, in this case, for example, 30 to 40 percent, and I don't mean that they have to be just within that range, right? There will be some situations, some species, that may require less, and some that may require more, and that's going to have to be evaluated. That, Madam Chair, completes my presentation. I'm sorry that this was an extended presentation, but I thought that this issue had to be discussed thoroughly.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I really appreciate it. Hands are already going up. Thank you so much for this presentation. Do you mind going back to that slide on snook? I wanted to talk about that for just a second, if we could pull that slide back up.

Just to add more, and so, when this discussion came up, when we were talking about it here at the council, I was trying to explain more of how we do this at the state level, and so, just to focus on this a little bit more, and so, to add to what Luiz was saying here, we -- When we are talking about a particular fishery, and we're discussing a stock assessment, and we're also discussing where to go next for management on something like snook, or redfish, and we're about to do it on seatrout, we go through the stock assessment with the public, but we also have a debate about what that SPR percentage is, and the public gets to comment on that.

The graphic on the left is what we use at the state level, and we call that the thermometer, and we talk to the public about target and limit reference points, target being kind of where you want to be, based on what you want to get out of that stock, and then the limit is that which you don't want to drop below. Otherwise, you're going to do some type of reproductive harm to the population, and so this is our state thermometer, which is flipped opposite of the federal thermometer there, but the public actually comments on what SPR should be, and our commission actually debates it as well, and then they actually adopt these percentages.

We used to have 30 percent for snook, and then you can see, with that top bullet, that anglers went to the commission and talked about how, for snook, they really wanted higher abundance, and they wanted larger sizes, and they wanted this resilience from cold kills and red tide, and so the institute talked about, well, what is the SPR that would get us what stakeholders are wanting out of this fishery, and so the commission ultimately changed the SPR from 30 to 40 percent, and then this is what we're evaluating it against when we run the stock assessment.

Something similar happened with red drum, in that they used to have -- I believe it was at 35 percent, or 30 percent, escapement, and escapement is a proxy for SPR, and then stakeholders talked to us, and then our commission, about what they wanted to see out of the population, and then ultimately changed it to 40 percent escapement.

So, I mean, we -- It's a discussion between the managers and between the scientists, and then we let the public get involved, and we go into these types of details, but we are ultimately asking them what they want to see out of their fishery, and then we're helping them figure out what is that SPR that would kind of get them where they want to be, and then, ultimately, our commission debates that, and adopts it, and so I just wanted to add a little bit more, because this came up in the discussion when we were talking about it at the last council meeting, and so I just appreciate you showing this, and, you know, thinking about how we do it at the state level, but so I saw hands going up. Tim, I think I saw your hand up.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you so much, Luiz. It really helps me to have you help simplify some of these very difficult concepts, for me to get my arms around, but before I jump into Luiz, Jessica, you -- I had a question for you, based on the comments you just made of letting the angling public have some input into your process, and so my question for you is, by changing these SPRs around, as you've done for red drum and snook, are you achieving the desired results that the anglers have asked for?

Great. Thank you, and, back to Luiz's presentation, and I had a couple questions for Luiz. We're trying to adopt a proxy for MSY, and MSY is, I guess, as I understand it, is a long-term average, right, and so an average over a long-term is changing, and so, in my mind, this SPR has to be changing, and so I'm not sure I can wrap my arms around how you can have a -- How you can

continue to do an assessment, or use an SPR, that is fixed, because we're talking about a proxy for something that is an average, that is changing, and, in fact, I'm not sure, but I'm pretty sure that Magnuson requires you to re-look at that long-term average, and to recalculate it based on prevailing conditions, or changes in life history, but the conditions are always going to be changing.

You know, the climate, and the ecological conditions, today are very different than when that paper was done in 2020, even in 2020, and so maybe I would like to hear some discussion on why is it appropriate to have a fixed SPR.

The second thing that jumps out at me, as we're looking at a long-term average, and a proxy for that long-term average, is how could you ever end up with a round number? You know, that, to me, scientifically, just jumps out at me, and, like, well, it can't be exactly 30, and it can't be 35, and it can't be 40, because what we're really talking about, at the end of the day, is this MSY, that we're trying to get a proxy for, is really OFL, is what we're really getting at, and so we're really getting at the overfishing limit, without any precautionary input.

The difference being -- In 1 or 2 percent, it's the difference between this council having to initiate a rebuilding plan and not initiating a rebuilding plan. The difference between 30 percent and 32 percent, or 27.65 percent, is the difference between being overfished and not overfished. These are serious ramifications of a few arbitrarily-picked percentage points, and so I think these things need to be discussed, and everybody has to have their eyes wide open when they're just arbitrarily picking a proxy for MSY. Thank you.

DR. BARBIERI: Thank you for those questions, Tim. Very good questions. So, number one, let's talk about the changes in the ecosystem, right, and, like you're saying, environmental conditions, whatever it may be, that are impacting the stock, and impacting productivity of the stock, and so you're absolutely right.

This needs to be looked at periodically, right, to see if the choice that you made before is still applicable, given current conditions and the status of the stock. We can think about this exactly the same way that you look at the other reference points that you work with, and so this is why you don't do a stock assessment, right, once and never would do it again, right, and this is why you keep assessing the stock, because you want to keep your finger on the pulse of what's going on there.

If you have an estimate of MSY that will have changed, given the changing productivity of the stock, that will be reflected in your estimated reference points, right, from the stock assessment. If you can't estimate MSY directly, and you have to rely on a proxy, that discussion, I agree with you, should still be had, right, in evaluating, and, actually, this tech memo that Rick presented to the SSC -- When you read the whole document, it talks about that explicitly, that that should be evaluated periodically, because conditions will change, stock productivity will change, and you have to adjust it. This is number one.

Number two is the values being not 40, or 30, right, and being more exact, I guess, in terms of decimal points there, well, this is difficult to do, right, and I had it, and I want to go back to that SPR. Mike, can you help me here? I want to go up to the -- Okay.

It's that you're trying, right, here, to choose an SPR that falls into this range here, where MSY would be, but you don't know exactly, right, and this is why I started the talk going through that steepness in stock-recruitment relationship, and so that is the ideal situation, when you have the information and the data, and you actually can come up with a quantitative metric that should have the precision and accuracy that you're looking for.

If you don't do this, you have to kind of go to, you know, a less optimal situation, which this is why I put this thing here, about they can be considered arbitrary, because you're making choices that are basically evaluating the biology, the resilience, the productivity of the stock, based on a number of criteria, and using scientific expert knowledge, but not necessarily being able to calculate what the value is.

Now, there's one stock -- As far as I'm concerned, as far as I know, there's one stock assessment scientist, this brilliant guy, who did this for red snapper in the Gulf, and came up with a 26 percent SPR, and that was based on a global -- That was Clay Porch, by the way, but that was based on a global, right, MSY estimate, that integrated different selectivities from different fleets, right, into one estimate of SPR, and that's why you came up with 26.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: That was a factor under consideration, for certain. There's a lot that went into that, and the perception, at the time, was that that was a very resilient stock. The perception changed somewhat when we realized there were actually more fish out there, and what we had was a big cryptic biomass. Where the fishery operates is primarily in the high-relief areas, but most of the fish live in the scattered -- What they call the uncharacterized bottom, which is a lot of low-relief habitat, and so it ended up that, really, it was just a much bigger population, and we were only exploiting a fraction of it, and so it's probably less resilient, in the sense of the reproductive capacity of individual fish, than we thought, but, while you have this graph up, I wanted to comment on a couple things, and this relates to the comment Tim made.

I would say, right at the outset, SPR proxies are going to be less sensitive to things like environmental change than an MSY calculation, because MSY depends on your perception of what the long-term recruitment level is. SPR does not, and so SPR -- When you're picking an SPR proxy, what you're trying to do is get a fishing mortality rate that tends to get you in the vicinity of the maximum sustainable yield, even though, because you don't know what the long-term recruitment potential is, you can't actually calculate it.

I can't give you a number for what the MSY is if I don't know what the long-term recruitment potential is, or if I think it's changing, but, looking at this graph, the whole point of that is, looking at stocks where we have estimated spawner-recruit relationships, we find that the MSY tends to be in the region of that spawner-recruit curve, where it's just starting to bend over. There's some subtleties there that make it variable exactly where it is on that point of the curve, and, in general, we find that SPR values ranging between 30 percent and 50 percent fall within that MSY region.

I would say, also, Luiz, I don't think "arbitrary" is the right word there. It's not that just people are making stuff up, and there's no criteria to it. There's actually been a number of studies that bear this out, that, depending on the life history of the animal, they tend to be, in some cases, SPR 30

percent, and you allude to this later, but some of the more productive stocks could even be a little bit lower than that, like anchovies and sardines.

Then some stocks, like deepwater groupers, Goliath grouper, or -- Not that they're deepwater, but Goliath grouper is big, large animal, a long-lived animal, and yellowedge grouper is a long-lived animal, and probably it should be more like 50 percent, and so that's what the work that we've done shows, and so it's not really that it's arbitrary. In general, MSY varies between 20 percent and, you know, 50 to 60 percent for stocks in our region, depending on their life history, and there's a number of studies that bear that out, and so, again, not really arbitrary.

We could come up with -- To get to your point, it doesn't have to be a round number. It's not known that precisely, because there's so many subtleties, which is why people tend to fall within increments of five, but we could probably come up with some sort of distribution, and so, in some cases, you might pick 36 percent, or 42 percent, but it's not really known that precisely.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm going to see if Luiz wanted to finish answering Tim's question, and then Tim had his hand up again, and I have Jimmy, and then, also, I think the Gulf Council had a motion relative to a discussion like this, and so I wanted C.J. to speak to that motion as well, and so back to Luiz.

DR. BARBIERI: Thank you. Yes, and I think that was the right answer, Tim. I tend to disagree a little bit with my friend there, just because I feel that a lot of those studies, a lot of those estimates of steepness, right, that we use to inform where the zone would be, came from a time when we really didn't have the ability to look at the diagnostics of those, to assess their quality, and so, in reality, it becomes a little circular that we say, okay, we cannot estimate the steepness by using this steepness to help guide development of SPR proxies. This is why I wanted to emphasize that looking at those diagnostics, to me, is very important, because, otherwise, you don't have a reliable estimate, but that's just differences of opinion, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, guys, for those explanations. One thing that would also help me here, as I look at these graphs and try to wrap my arms around this, is I want to make sure that I understand the actual definition of a recruit. You know, what exactly are we calling a recruit? Is it a fish that has reached maturity, or is it just the fish is alive at one year old, or is there some metric that tells me what exactly we're talking about and defining as a recruit?

DR. BARBIERI: Another excellent question, Tim. You must be doing your homework. And Yes, so this is a very important point, right, and it has been fairly widely discussed in the literature recently, because it is very important, and so, when I mention here recruits, you're talking about fish that are about to be, or have just become, let's say one-year-old fish, right, and so this is biological recruitment. It's not recruitment into the fish population, right, and it's the productivity of the stock biologically.

You don't want them to be sexually mature, ideally, because, otherwise, you're going to have them here, both in the Y and the X, right, because the X is the spawning stock biomass, and so you want to capture them after that very high mortality that happens in the early phases of life, the predation, starvation, and all sorts of things happen, that a lot of those eggs and larvae decrease in number,

right, their abundance, and that density-dependent natural mortality phase -- You want to be beyond that, into the point that they're recruiting into the population, and they can be a metric for year class strength, but they are not yet sexually mature. Ideally, not recruit to the fishery either.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Luiz. I have several questions, and so, just going back to the definition of a recruit, so you would determine that to be a young-of-the-year? It hasn't recruited into the fishery yet, but it's a year class that's coming, that has survived at least a year, and its next steps are to recruit into the population, and then see how many of them survive then.

DR. BARBIERI: That's correct.

MR. HULL: So young-of-the-year. Okay. Thank you for that, and so, if you have a spawner-recruit relationship, if you have an idea of what that is, so you must know the productivity, the fecundity, the egg production of an individual spawner, and so then that gives you that relationship. Then you can apply that information into your biomass, and then the productivity of each individual in that biomass, and then your model can compute, and you develop this curve, and so that helps me there.

Then can you go back to the very first slide in your presentation, or, no, it was a graph. It was -- Right there. The first stock, you have a curve in black, and then you put in a different stock, you said, in red, and so how did -- First of all, how did you determine where it intersects, both of them, on the Y-axis, and so you have a line drawn over, and where does it -- How did you get that line over to the Y-axis? Then, secondly, when you put the red stock there, I mean, how is this curve being determined? It's a different curve than the black one. I just -- I don't understand how the curve is developed. Does that make sense?

DR. BARBIERI: It does. Very good questions. Thank you for those, Jimmy, and so, first of all, between the red and the black curves, those are two estimated curves, right, according to the Beverton-Holt model for a stock-recruitment relationship, similar, for example, to this one here on the right.

Now, this one is stylized, right, and I explained that this is just a conceptual thing, to help you understand conceptually what's integrated into this, right, but the actual curve itself, and those values, are estimated through a set of equations, right, that represent the Beverton-Holt model and all the parameters that are associated with it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, do you have more questions?

MR. HULL: Yes, I do. Of course, you would have to be a mathematician then to understand the set of equations and figure out, for me, to what's going on, and, of course, I'm not and so -- But my next question is, can -- If you're running a stock assessment model, and you go ahead and run it, and you've already put all the inputs that go into a stock, the base run, at the end, does it -- Can that model calculate what the SPR of the stock is? Does the model, and not the Beverton-Holt model, but as an input into that model, but, whatever you put in, at the end of the stock assessment model, the one we choose, can it give you a value of what the model says that the productivity of stock is?

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, it can. It depends on the model, right, and it depends on the kind of assessment that you're running, but most of the software that I'm familiar with now that runs age-structured stock assessment models produce an SPR estimate, or you can obtain, from outputs of that model, easily an estimate of the SPR that's popping out of it, yes.

That's the one to use, in this case, right, to compare with your reference point, and so, usually, for projections for example, you're trying to find that fishing mortality at that SPR that are going to be applied, ideally, to the average recruitment going into the future, right, because the average is the best estimate that you can for sure say that it's more likely to be there into the future, because you don't know the productivity of the stock explicitly.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MR. HULL: Yes, and thank you. That's helpful, and there's one more. Going to the snook information, and the stock assessment that you guys run, and the SPR determination for that, and the way that you're able to choose an SPR to, you know, develop a fishery that you want, you know, the size and the age structure and reproductivity, and so you must really know a lot about snook and the productivity of an individual, a full-grown female snook, to be able to go further and say, well, we know all this, and we know how much we can get out of each animal, and so, I mean, it's really -- You have a lot of good information there to go that far. Okay. Thanks.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, and snook is our most best-informed assessment, right? The Florida saltwater fishing license, many, many decades ago, established something called a snook stamp, right, and it's a dedicated fee, ten-dollars per person, if you want to harvest the snook, and most snook anglers are so passionate about snook that, even if they don't want to harvest, and they fish just for catch-and-release, they buy a snook stamp anyway.

By statute, by Florida statute, that money can only be applied and used for the benefit of snook research, monitoring, enforcement, and management, right, and so we have dedicated programs in snook that are funded exclusively from those revenues.

MR. HULL: Sorry for taking up so much time, but this stuff is so interesting, and so, if the stock assessment model calculates an SPR for that specific stock, and that assessment has been determined to be BSIA, why wouldn't we use what the model produced as SPR well into the future and not even look -- I mean, this is what our best scientific information available, or all the equations, everything we have, and this is what it's telling us, with the information we have, and we trust it, and we think it's the best information available, and it seems like that's going to be -- That's it, at that time, and so, for the next assessment, that's what you're going to choose, is what it gave you.

DR. BARBIERI: Well, if that assessment was able to be considered best scientific information available, the SPR that's produced by that assessment -- I mean, what you're doing is using that as a reference point, similar to what you use for MSY, right, and so, whatever comes out of the assessment, you're comparing with a value that you set, right, a priori, that you feel represents the best representation of MSY.

It's what Clay explained over here, and they should be in this region here, right, and so, after you pick a value, and it can be 30, or it can be 40, or it can be 50, depending on the biology, productivity, and resilience of the stock, you're comparing the value of the assessment to say, okay, am I meeting that bar, or am I below, or above.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just to add to that, so I thought this is what you were saying, Jimmy. I thought you were also saying, once you select the model, and you have such good data, why would you ever choose a different model, and why would you ever tweak things, but I would say, every time we run the snook assessment, we figure out -- Don't we use Stock Synthesis 3?

We figure out like what model program are we going to use, but, also, we try to figure out what environmental conditions and other things have happened since the last stock assessment, like red tide, and so we might -- You know, we run some models where we're trying to figure out what's the best base model, taking into account what has happened in the fishery over time, and what has happened, including environmentally, before we run the next stock assessment, and so it's kind of like the process, the SEDAR process, when you go through a full benchmark, where you ask a lot of questions, and bring in all this different information, before you just kind of turn the crank and rerun the exact same model. Go ahead, Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Okay, and so, with the graph that's up there now, what are safe proxies for MSY, and so this was -- The blue shaded area is on the right-hand side of the SPR 30 percent, which is just -- It just starts to nudge into the blue shaded area, and so that's indicating that these recruits -- The blue shaded area is when they enter the fishery, on the right-hand side, and they become spawning stock biomass or, you know, available fish, maximum for yield, and is that why that's chosen to be on the right-hand side of that SPR line?

DR. BARBIERI: Well, Clay was explaining that this area, right, based on a variety of other sources of information, turns out to be the area where it's most likely for you to find the MSY, and so you're trying to choose SPR values that fall within -- Because you're using this as a proxy for MSY, right, in that range, and he shows here, for this particular example -- I think this, all of this, is really just conceptual, right, and so he shows here, one, that usually we know that 30 percent is towards the lower side of what you would expect, in terms of where MSY would be.

MR. HULL: Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I've got a list of hands, but, Clay, it seemed like you wanted to speak to that particular issue, but then my list of hands are Andy, Robert -- Or C.J., Andy, Robert, Charlie.

DR. PORCH: Sure. I mean, in this case, Luiz is exactly right. This is just conceptual. Where that SPR 30 percent would fall within the supposed MSY region would depend very much on the actual shape of the spawner-recruit, which often is not known, and the life history of the animal, and so this is just illustrative, that generally it's between SPR 30 percent and 50 percent, but it could be lower or higher, depending on the life history of the animal.

It's just to illustrate the point, and the straight lines are just the replacement lines, and so, if you maintained the spawning biomass, you know, where's the recruitment going to be, and so I think the key point here is, unlike snook, which is a relatively easy species to study, you know, and it's

inshore, you know, widely accessible, and, for a lot of our stocks, they're a lot harder to study, and we're not going to have the resources to understand the biology as well as snook.

In many cases, most cases, we're not going to be able to do things like estimate a spawner-recruit, and so we need to pick a proxy that gets us a fishing mortality rate that we think will get us in the vicinity of MSY, even if we can't actually calculate it, and that's the whole point of this exercise, and there's been a number of studies that suggest, with different life histories, what that fishing mortality rate might be, that SPR level might be. Is it perfect? No, of course not. There's a lot of uncertainty there.

I was just taking issue with saying it's completely arbitrary, because it's not. There may be some subjectivity and expert opinion required, but, in any case, I think that's what we need to focus on here. We are not going to have the resources to have, you know, these beautiful stock assessments that can estimate a spawner-recruit relationship and how it's going to change for every species. Therefore, we need to adopt something that has a high likelihood of getting us in the vicinity of MSY, even if we can never actually calculate what that is, and that's what we're trying to do here with selecting an SPR proxy. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Clay. C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thanks, Madam Chair, and so we -- At the Gulf Council, we've discussed this probably for about a year now, pretty intensively, with all the stock assessments that we've had going, and, obviously, I think you guys, based on the discussion I'm hearing around the table, recognize the importance of how these numbers are set, how that impacts the sustainability of these fisheries, as well as potential foregone yield, if those numbers are too conservative in there.

At the Gulf Council, I think at our April meeting, we actually passed unanimously a motion that stated to form a -- It involves you guys, but to form a working group comprised of members of the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs to collectively address the best practices for estimating steepness, and, thus, estimate MSY for management advice, as well as a discussion of SPR proxy values, given a range of life history values amongst fish species, and so I just wanted to highlight that for you all.

This is certainly something that's important to us at the Gulf Council, but I do think, given the issues that we are collectively dealing with here in the southeastern U.S., that potentially agreeing to that working group could be quite beneficial, to have some of our SSC members try and deliberate some of these issues, and how to best navigate through them, because it is incredibly important.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, C.J. I have Andy next.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Luiz, for the presentation. If you could go to the takeaway slide, and I, really, I think, want to get to the crux of why we've been having this debate, and discussion, and hear your input, and so the last bullet is a takeaway, right, which is SPR proxies in the range of 30 percent to 40 percent are appropriate for South Atlantic species, which we are, I think, operating with that range pretty much for all of our species at this point, and so that's not necessarily the contention.

It's the question of whether we should be shifting proxies from a lower SPR proxy to a higher SPR proxy, right, and if that's appropriate for our managed species that we're doing it for, and then, you know, I guess the takeaway that I have from your presentation is we don't have that definitive certainty as to exactly knowing what that proxy should be.

There's a range around it, obviously, you know, and we can accept that there's going to be scientific uncertainty, but I'm curious, from your professional opinion and perspective, with SPR proxies in the South Atlantic, and even in the Gulf, and, most snappers, we have a 30 percent proxy, or in that range, if we're using a proxy. We've been shifting to 40 percent for a lot of the grouper species, and so, given your presentation on life history characteristics and productivity, what are your thoughts on that, and kind of perspective, because I think that's really the crux of why we've been having this debate.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, and very good question. Thank you, Andy, because those are important points, right, for us to discuss, and so I debated, right, with myself, about putting that last bullet there, because one of the things that I was trying to do here is not sound prescriptive in any way, right, because I think that this should be a determination that's based on the biology of the species, right, discussed amongst experts, integrated with inputs from the council.

There's so many dimensions that come into play here, right, that you have to integrate into this, and I didn't want to put a value down, because people, at times, tie themselves to those values, right, and so, like Clay said, for species that are actually less productive, and let's say Goliath grouper, or some other grouper, like Warsaw for example, it could be 50 percent, right, because they don't really have the ability to withstand the same level of fishing the others would, right, and it's just the way that their biology is set up.

I feel that, in the vast majority of cases, and I think this is what I was trying to capture here with that bullet, you're going to be in the range of 30 to 40 percent, right, and I would agree, right, and this is why this is the snapper grouper management plan, right, that this -- I would put snappers more towards the 30 percent, and groupers more towards the 40 percent, and I think the hermaphroditic -- A third of the sequential hermaphrodites compose, you know, the stocks in the South Atlantic.

I mean, we have the most hermaphroditic stocks of any other region in the country, right, and so those are vulnerabilities, because sex ratios, right, matter. Sometimes it has happened in the Gulf, right, with gag, sperm limitation, because males -- The percentage of males, and the proportion of males in the population, has decreased to a point that it's compromising reproduction, and so all of those things need to be taken into account, those vulnerabilities, right, for you to be able to produce the MSY, and so that's -- That would be my general thoughts on this, Andy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm going to go back to my list. I have Robert, Charlie, then Carolyn.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Luiz, thank you for the presentation. One of the, I guess, one of the risks that I see here, and really important, and, you know, C.J. mentioned, you know, being too conservative and leaving some yield on the table. Do we understand at all what, across species, the impact is of allowing stocks to get so big that they're losing reproductivity, but also impacts on other stock, and I'm thinking red snapper, for example, but what happens when

red snapper kind of gets to its carrying capacity? Reproduction, by this graph, would slow down. Any analysis, or thinking, on what that means for other fish stocks, other snapper grouper species?

DR. BARBIERI: Thank you, Robert. Very complex, but good question. I don't think -- I mean, based on my experience, my professional judgment here, I don't think we have the information for South Atlantic, or Gulf, red snapper, for that matter, to be able to assess where we are in that sense, right?

There's some research going on now that seems to indicate a fairly high compensatory capacity, right, and some things that are associated with their reproductive strategy, with their ability to adjust their growth rates, you know, size-at-age that are observed now in a very truncated population, in terms of age composition, but you still have fairly large fish, right, and so, obviously, size-at-age have increased, changed, over time, it looks like. Whether that population is approaching carrying capacity or not -- I'm not aware of any research that's looking into that, or was able to obtain those results.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I understand, and I know that snook is strictly recreational, but what I heard was, by moving the SPR to 40 percent, it allowed for larger fish, and higher abundance, and it did not necessarily allow for higher harvest limits, and so it seems you've used SPR to get specific characteristics of the recreational fishery, instead of what a commercial fishery, which would want higher harvest, and so I'm just trying to make sure I understood that characterization.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, also, and I think that either Clay or Andy were speaking to this, snook is kind of the gold standard. I mean, we have so much information, so much data on snook, but you're right that, not only is it a recreational fishery, it's primarily a catch-and-release fishery, and so that's another piece of this that's going to be different than kind of what we're looking at here at the table, but, yes, to me it's another factor, and like seatrout also has a commercial component in Florida, and you saw that that one is at 35 percent SPR, and so I think that you can still ask some of those questions, when setting that number, but you're right that it's a different animal for snook, and it's definitely the gold standard of data collection, is what I would say.

DR. BARBIERI: Madam Chair, may I interrupt quickly?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes.

DR. BARBIERI: I'm sorry, but Chip reminded me, Robert, that, actually, there's some research that's being conducted at the ecosystem model, right, that's being done, actually from folks from our research institute, the FWRI, and Lauren Gentry, I think, has taking the lead, working with the South Atlantic Council, right, and that they do have some carrying capacity estimates for red snapper. I just have not been involved in that effort, and so I wasn't aware of it, and so thank you, Chip.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and I guess the core of my question there was kind of getting at fishing, you know, mortality, and how are we looking at, you know, the increase in sharks, increase in other predator-type, you know, fish, red snapper, grouper, goliath grouper, and others, and so I'm just curious about how we're accounting for that, and thinking about, you know, not just negative impacts to that stock, but also others, and I know this is a very, you know, dynamic and complex thing we're trying to deal with, but I'm just curious.

DR. BARBIERI: Exactly, and I'm so glad that Chip reminded me of that, because, in reality, this is ongoing research, and we don't know a whole lot of those issues and how they impact, right, the stock, and it's not being integrated, I think, into the assessment explicitly now, but it's giving us some hope that some of these issues are going to be evaluated as we get into the future.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: More of a comment than a question, but, Luiz, I really appreciate the presentation, and, C.J., I appreciate the input too on the Gulf, because I was looking through some of the Gulf discussions, about how they were looking at SPR, and the SSC's conversations, and I do think that the one take-home I have is kind of where we've had the fundamental struggles right now, is seeing the proxy written in the FMP, and so it's kind of in the management realm, but yet when -- Black sea bass as the example comes to mind.

It's being changed in a scientific realm, and then there's this back-and-to, back-and-to, but Florida, obviously, has said this is something that is discussed across the table between the managers, and so it's not just we hard-set it, and it's not an input in the model. Managers stay out of it, and then, meanwhile, well, we wrote it in the code, and so you have to hold it as to what it is.

I think that's, to me, the take-home of the conversation that I see us having with black sea bass, is, given the status of black sea bass right now, maybe there is a reason to think about a 40 percent for black sea bass, but I would like -- Again, the negotiation between the science and the management, I think, is the key point that we've not really had right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm going to go back to my list. I have Tim, then Amy, then Shep.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for that, Carolyn. I mean, I think we're getting to the crux of it exactly. I mean, you know, that's really why I'm struggling so bad with this whole thing. I mean, in my mind, if you're going to look at that chart, and you're going to look at that steepness curve, and you're going to see that range for MSY, and 30 percent falls out down here at the bottom of it, and 40 percent falls out up here at the top of it, okay, and the idea here is not to be -- Not for the science to be precautionary, right?

We have this range, and so, in my mind, the science should always pick the lowest value possible, because that's the bottom of the MSY, right? The precautionary portion, the buffers, come in from this council, right? That's the management end of this. That is what this council is responsible for. The science should be not taking that into account. That's not their purview, right?

The realm of this council's position is to decide that buffer, and if that buffer is necessary, right, but you cannot -- This council can't pick an appropriate buffer if there's already buffers in place that they can't really account for, right, and so, in my mind, the science should come to this council

at the bottom of that range, right, because, if it comes to you at the top of that range, you don't have any way to buffer anything, other than being too precautionary, and, as C.J. said, you're leaving biomass out there, and so that's my take on it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn, to that point?

DR. BELCHER: Yes, and I get where you're going with that, but I think what my thought was is, just because of how we're handling it right now in the fishery management plan, it's more of like what we do with the allocations. You know, we have a particular situation, with black sea bass, that's unique because we're pretty much showing, with projections, that fish -- If we remove fishing, it's not fixing the problem. It's not going to rebound, and so should we be move -- Should we thinking about that?

Is there a shift in -- As Luiz was saying, there's compensatory things that happen. Has something happened with black sea bass that apparently it's not compensating, and it's actually going the other direction, and so should we be thinking about being more precautionary with that assignment of the proxy?

It's not necessarily -- I get your point, because a lot of, you know, the thought is relative to the yield, but I'm thinking from that standpoint of, as managers, our risk is in that proxy right now, and so should we be a little more precautionary and move it towards a 40, 35 or 40, thirty-seven-and-a-half, whatever you think, because we don't really functionally know why the stock is not rebounding and why -- You know, again, fishing pressure doesn't seem to be the majority of the cause, and so what do we do? Should we be a little more precautionary, to put a buffer in for that reason? That's kind of the way I look at that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think -- Clay, did you have your hand up to respond to that?

DR. PORCH: Yes, and, to be clear, I agree that the science advice should not build in levels of precaution, especially if it's not explained. What you described though, Tim, is the opposite of that. If they just gave you the lowest value possible that could be within the realm of MSY possibilities, what you would be doing then is intentionally picking one that has less than a 50 percent chance of achieving MSY.

What the science should be doing, and what I think they are doing, what the SSCs have been doing when they discuss this, is try and figure out what proxy is most likely to produce the MSY for an animal with that life history strategy. If the council adopts a proxy that has a higher fishing mortality rate, a lower SPR, they would be intentionally adopting a risk-prone strategy, where you have a greater than 50 percent chance of overfishing, whereas the National Standard Guidelines clearly prescribe that it should be 50 percent chance or less of overfishing.

If the science intentionally said, okay, let's look at the range of possible SPR proxies that would be associated for an MSY with the species with this life history, and we give you the lowest SPR, the highest possible fishing mortality rate in that range, you will have more than a 50 percent chance of overfishing, on average, and so that would not be responsible of the SSC to do something like that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim, to that point?

MR. GRINER: Yes, and, to that point. I understand that, Clay, but the flip side of that is all that is based on data that, for the most part, for a lot of that data, by definition, it shouldn't even be used for management purposes in the first place. There's too much uncertainty in the data, right, and so, you know -- Black sea bass is a perfect example.

You know, we're sitting here talking about changing an SPR on black sea bass, because we think that there's a recruitment problem, but nobody can explain to me where these millions and millions and millions of fish that are being discarded in the estuary are going, and we just had a definition that says that these are small one-year-old fish. They don't have to be sexually mature. Well, then where are all those recruits going, okay, and so there's so much uncertainty in the data right now that I don't think -- I don't think that you're running that risk, necessarily, and that's what's putting you over that 50 percent threshold. You know, what the real problem is, it's the uncertainty in the data, and if it's -- If you have that much uncertainty in the data, it really shouldn't be in these models in the first place.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: So, Clay, I just want to ask a follow-up on that, because overfishing, under Magnuson, is relative to whatever the fishing mortality threshold is chosen, and so, if the council chose any SPR for its threshold, then overfishing would be based on whatever their ABC and ACL is relative to, whatever catch level they choose relative to that SPR level, but I think what you're referring to, when you're talking about probability of overfishing, is relative to the true but unknown MSY, because, you know, within Magnuson, our overfishing is tied to the threshold, and you can pick any threshold, any SPR, as your MFMT, and there's going to be some probability that any fishing level overfishes or exceeds that, or not, and that's kind of different than a given reference point and its relation to the true underlying, but most often unknown, MSY.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and this is a great discussion. I'm going to go back to my list. Amy, you were on the list.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thank you, Luiz. I always learn, every time we have these lovely conversations, but I think your snook slide kind of made me think about something, and I'm wanting to sort of get your perspective here, and so I struggle with this idea of the unfished condition, or this concept of the virgin stock, in this idea that our environment, our oceans, are in constant change, water temperature, currents, habitat.

Can you help me understand why the MSYs -- That we're wanting to go back to this idea of a virgin, or unfished, stock, when we actually don't know if we're shooting for a real target, or a target that we think might be happening, or a target that likely has changed drastically over the number of years?

DR. BARBIERI: Great point, Amy. I agree completely, and so all of these things that you're doing, right, is developing estimates the best way possible. It's not going to be perfect. There will be imperfections, right, and so, in this case, we start by saying, if we have enough data that we can actually estimate the stock-recruitment relationship, that stock-recruitment relationship actually has an assumption of stationarity, right, that it's not changing over time, right?

We rarely have enough data to actually look at that assumption and, you know, accept it or reject it, right? We just don't have enough information, and so the probability of the stock, that we are looking at one picture in a movie, right, and so the movie is going on, and we pick one static point, you know, from the data that we do have, and we develop that picture, but that picture may be changing in the future, or from what it used to be in the past.

There's only so much that we can do about that, right, and, unfortunately, that's the way it is, and so, in this case of SPR, and I think this goes back to a point that Tim made earlier, right, and having to look at this over time, because we know for a fact, especially us here in the South Atlantic region, that stationarity, you know, may not be applicable to all the stocks, given all sorts of variable environmental conditions that have been taking place, right, and so it's something that keeping the finger on the pulse of what's going on there is necessary, and so very good point, Amy. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You're good, Amy? Okay. I'm going to go back to Clay, and then Shep had his hand up, and then I'll go back to our list.

DR. PORCH: Thank you. I did want to respond to John's comment. Magnuson actually requires us to fish at a level that produces the maximum sustainable yield, or optimum yield, which is MSY as reduced by relevant social and ecological factors. Now, in many cases, we just established that we can't actually calculate the MSY, but that doesn't mean now there's this sudden bifurcation and the council can pick any proxy it wants. If that's the case, you could say, okay, let's make it 5 percent SPR, or let's make it some tiny value, and we'll fish the heck out of it and then drive it down to extinction, and so you don't have that liberty.

That's why the proxy you choose should be designed to get you in the vicinity of MSY, and that's why we've been going through this discussion that, depending on the life history of the animal, it usually will be somewhere, for this region, between 30 and 50 percent. Most of the time, probably, yes, in that 40 percent range, and some of them, the snappers, may be closer to 30 percent, but I just want to be real careful, because I think there's been this perception that it's like, you know, a sudden hinge point that we can't calculate MSY, and pick any proxy you want.

That's not the intent of Magnuson. I don't know that you were saying that, John, but I just want to make it clear what we're trying to do here, and what the SSCs have been trying to do, is say, okay, we can't estimate MSY, because we don't have a clear spawner-recruit, and so, in this case, let's look at proxies that we expect, given the life history of the animal, will be most likely to get to MSY.

Now, the council could look at other factors, and say it was a recreational fishery that was catch-and-release, like snook. Maybe they want to go a little higher and have a lower fishing mortality rate, higher SPR, which would allow more fish out there, and bigger fish out there. The council certainly could do that. The problem with going to a lower SPR is then you have a greater than 50 percent chance of missing your target of MSY.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. One point, and then just one question. I wanted to -- I think it's an important point, or it is an important point, to realize, relative to Florida and snook, as

Florida said, they manage for -- It's user-group driven, right, and their target is what the users are seeking to achieve out of the fishery. We have legally-mandated biomass-based targets, that are based on what the stock can produce, right, and so their public input, and their management input, as to what the appropriate target is, is very different than ours.

Ours will be much more scientific in nature, because it's not based on user group preferences, and one other thing in my question is I gathered, or a main point from me, and I'm kind of reading between the takeaways in your slides there, but I think you clearly made the point that at least there's criticism, or concern, that the Zhou estimates are based on species, and that they're not region-specific, right, and they're global, and they're cold water, and there are questions about the productivity.

It's my understanding that the Science Center is redoing that analysis with just the species in the Southeast, to address that very concern. I just wanted to confirm some discussion, and is that occurring, and do we have any idea of the timeline for getting the results of that work? Thank you.

DR. PORCH: It is occurring. I don't have a clear picture of the timeline, and, obviously, we're considering not only stocks in this region, but the Gulf as well, consistent with the motion that was passed.

MS. MCCAWLEY: C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think you all are experiencing some of the challenges that we navigated at the Gulf Council relative to this very topic, and so, I mean, I guess, just based on the presentation and some of the comments that I've heard today, I mean, SPR proxy is certainly under the purview of the council, right, and so you can certainly select SPR proxies, but I kind of agree with Clay, to some degree there, about setting an SPR that's super low, artificially, and, you know, that's -- It's going to be problematic.

You're going to have to justify that, in some capacity, to the SSC, to justify BSIA there, but, at the same point, to Carolyn's discussion about being conservative with the SPR for -- I think, black sea bass was your example, and I would urge caution there, too. I mean, you want to set it not based on a precautionary status because of unknown, from my perspective, at least. You want to set it based on the biology, life history, and ecology of the species, and then you have your appropriate management buffer between the ABC and the ACL, to navigate that, rather than inputting it directly into an assessment there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I've got one more question for C.J. I know that this was a big thing for the Gulf, was kind of what Amy was getting to, like the start date, and, you know, should you be comparing to this unfished condition, and can you talk a little bit about maybe that discussion that the Gulf Council had, and kind of where that ended up?

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes. Absolutely. I mean, basically, the thought process there is that, if you're looking back at some historical time series, are we ever going to get back to the productivity back in the 1950s and 1960s, relative to where we are today, and so getting back to that level seemingly does not make a lot of practical sense, and so setting out a more recent timeline, and I think the 1980s has been what typically has been discussed so far, and that's a more reasonable level of

realistic productivity that we could potentially manage to get back to, and so I think that's been the discussion at the Gulf Council, relative to the start date in those assessments there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you. I see lots of hands going up. Carolyn, is it responding to that?

DR. BELCHER: Yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

DR. BELCHER: I appreciate the fact that what you heard was not what I meant. I was trying to figure out a way to where my head was, how to explain it best. My point was is that, when we were -- When we kind of hit this speed bump, I'll call it, and I don't know what else to call it, but we have it specifically in the FMP that we're currently at a proxy of 30 percent. The assessment came to us, and the change was made to 40, without a conversation, and so what I was saying is that the idea is that now, for me, what you did is you've got this setup, where now we're butting heads, because the science says you must change this number.

We're not having a dialogue about it, but, after getting Luiz's information, I can tell you my comfort level to go to 40, based on the fact that here are some things you need to be considering biologically, you know, compensatory because, in this case, obviously, black sea bass is not compensating for anything, by what we're seeing on a piece of paper, and so, in that situation, that conversation, and changing to a 40 percent, is more of that nuance and dialogue that we're not currently having, because, in one situation, you shouldn't be setting it, and, well, we're saying you shouldn't be setting it, and nobody is at the table negotiating for what really should or shouldn't happen.

To Tim's point, well what does a 35 get us? Maybe there's something in the middle, and we're not having that conversation. That was what I was trying to get across, but thank you for that, and I definitely don't agree that we should be looking to backslide. I think we should be able to have those negotiations, with some stops around it, I mean, reasonable stops around it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you for clarifying, because I did not get that from your comments, and so that helped me. That discussion definitely helped me. I've got two more people in the queue. I've got Robert, and then Andy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I don't want to take us back out, and I was going to ask about scientific versus management uncertainty, and how we were accounting for that, but I think I've heard enough from that discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So let me repeat the question, and just a reminder to speak -- To get closer to the microphone. The federal thermometer, that we call it at FWC here, and Luiz can point out the buffers that you would be setting for scientific uncertainty, which is between ABC and ACL, or, no, between OFL and ABC, and then the management uncertainty between ABC and ACL, but, Luiz, I don't know if you want to add more there.

DR. BARBIERI: Well, I mean, you can apply the buffers, right, from management uncertainty either between ABC and ACL or between ACL and ACT. You can address this in different ways.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Ultimately, I was trying to -- We don't have the information yet to be able to account, in our recruitment models, what other stocks are doing to impact that recruitment, and someone else asked, well, would that be scientific or management uncertainty, and how would we deal with that, and there seems to be --

Just from a high level, right, we've seen abundance of red snapper go like this, and we're seeing big problems with black sea bass, and recruitment, and I'm -- I can't help, but just, in the simple nature of how I look at things, seeing the correlation and wondering how is that impacting it, and how do we deal with it. You know, we've got a couple more years of two days of red snapper fishing, and we're really, you know, being conservative on red snapper catch, and so I'm curious what kind of impact that has on our efforts to try and rebuild black sea bass.

DR. BARBIERI: I'm going to just -- Yes, and that's a very good point, Robert. I would say work in progress, right? I mean, this is something that is sort of like a very complicated issue to address, because it has so many data needs, right, that you have to integrate beyond just analytical capacity to run those models.

I mean, the effort here in the South Atlantic, I believe, has been going on for, what, twenty years perhaps, or fifteen, right, and we have some models for the Gulf to try to integrate some of that, especially between groupers and snappers, but it hasn't been able to move forward, you know, as much as we would expect, and so it's a work in progress, but this is a goal to be achieved.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So this has been a good conversation. I'm going to maybe try to bring us in for a landing, and so what I've heard, and I think people are agreeable with, right, is, one, the Gulf's motion, and I think we all support, you know, coordination with the SSCs on this topic and looking at steepness and looking at how these proxies are set.

I think the other aspect, and it's been mentioned by several people, and so I appreciate Luiz, which you talked about, in terms of how the Florida looks at kind of the reference point holistically with stakeholders, right, and Shep talked about it not working quite the same at the federal level, but Carolyn kind of flagging really what is the friction point, which is we're getting a reference point that's recommended from the science without a conversation around it, right, and so I think, to the extent that we have assessments that are coming forward, that reference points would be looked at and evaluated, that that conversation, at a minimum, needs to be happening at the SSC, and the SSC then advising the council on those conversations, so that we don't get to the end of a stock assessment and we're surprised that there's a recommended reference point that's changed on us.

I feel like that will be at least a little bit of an iterative process initially, but something where we can at least start plugging in the conversation with the scientists, scientists talking to the managers, and having a conversation around why reference points may or may not be recommended for change, and so I just wanted to offer that as a possible path forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, and so I see lots of hands going up to try to respond to that, and so let me also kind of talk about where we're going, and so, when we're finished with this discussion, which hopefully we're going to wrap up in a couple minutes here, we'll take a break,

and then, when we come back, I think we're going to get a couple updates, either from John Walter or from Clay from the Science Center.

Then we're going to have Judd come up here and give a summary from the council perspective, but, also, I've asked him to bring up the motion that was made by the Gulf Council, to make sure that we want to do something similar, and then to try to bring in kind of what Andy's thought processes were there about are there any other steps that we want to take following this discussion. It's been a good discussion, but need to figure out how it's going to translate into what we're working on, and so I saw Luiz's hand to respond to that, and then John's.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes, I just want to thank Andy for bringing that up, right? This is -- I think this is very important. I put this slide in here deliberately, right, because it actually talks about the science and management flow and I had the previous slide here about this national science workshop, right, because this is an effort that the agency put together, way back when, right, to make sure that those rules of the road, so to speak, were being developed and followed.

I think that this statement at the bottom, of the integrative nature, is super important. I put this here as well because, as you know, I serve on the Gulf SSC, and we have been having those same discussions there, and, in that setting, I've been telling people, like, by all means, if we send something to you, and you have a question about it, send it back, and we will explain to you our reasoning, right, and so those kind of back-and-forth conversations need to exist, because sometimes, if things are not properly understood, of course, they are not going to be productive, and so thank you, Andy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I have John, and then Charlie.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thanks, and, Andy, I think that was a good job of bringing us to a landing. I agree with you completely, and I would just add that I think we should let the SSC know that they need to make the recommendation relative to the stock that we're talking about in the South Atlantic species, that rules of thumb are not adequate.

They might be useful for saying, here's the range that we're looking at, but, when they're going to recommend where in that range you fall, it really needs to be relative to the conditions of that stock, the life history of that stock, and what we know about it, because I'm with Carolyn. When you look at sea bass, and both the life history of hermaphrodism and what it's done recently, yes, 40 percent seems to make a lot of sense.

We just needed that conversation, and it can't just be, well, you know, the rules of thumb are evolving, and we think higher levels are needed in general. I think that's where the council bristled and said, no, no, we need this relative to our stock, and I've heard Tim say that for a year's worth of meetings, perhaps, and, you know, I think we need to make sure that's stressed to the SSC.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie, last word.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and there are other ways to change the productivity of the stock other than just doing it through SPRs. I remember, and I don't know, fifteen or twenty years ago, when we went up on vermilion snapper two inches, and, for about six months, our catches were lower. After about six months, the fish had grown, and the stocks were there, and

the catches went right back to the same number of pounds that we were always doing, but, by going up two inches, we, by default, went up on SPRs, and so there are other ways we can do that in conjunction with this, and I don't want us to forget that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for this really great discussion this morning. Yes, we are a little behind schedule, but I think we're going to make up some time here as we move throughout the day. Let's go ahead and take a ten-minute break, and, when we come back, we'll hear from the Science Center, and then Judd. Thank you for that discussion. Thank you for the presentation, Luiz.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, Let's go ahead and get going here. All right. Next up in our discussion, we are going to get some sort of an update from -- I'll look to Clay, and is John Walter doing this online, or, Clay, are you doing it? Okay. All right. Then we'll look for him online.

DR. CURTIS: John, I've got you unmuted on this end, if you would like to go ahead.

DR. WALTER: Good morning, everyone. I'm not really sure what the council is expecting here. I had mentioned that we are working on species or stock-specific estimates. They're a work in progress. We don't have them ready, and our preference is that they would go before the SSC first, probably in a fall SSC meeting, and we have staff working on those. We don't have a further presentation than what we provided in April on this, that is similar to the presentation from Luiz, in many ways, and so we can answer questions, but we don't have a further presentation on this. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, John. Let me see if there's any questions. Any questions for John Walter? I don't see any hands. I think we're good. Thank you, John. I'm now going to pass it over to Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Thanks, Jessica, and so I put together this presentation, that's supposed to provide more of a snapshot on the South Atlantic-specific stocks, which estimates of MSY have been used for various stocks throughout the kind of management history, which have used proxies most recently, and some other parameters from the different stock assessments, to help kind of with this discussion that we all been having. A lot of the topics and bullets have already been discussed, including non-stationarity concerns, and we've pointed to that NS 1 tech memo guidance, which I'll get into a little bit as well, as well as some other discussions around the SSC and some pathways forward that we've been looking at.

Certainly one thing to mention too, and I updated this presentation as of late yesterday afternoon, and I found a couple errors, and so those have been corrected, and so download the most recent version that you'll be seeing today.

Certainly it’s not an exhaustive history, management history of MSY proxies in the South Atlantic, but I thought it was nice to just mention where this all got started, and it comes from the Comprehensive Sustainable Fisheries Act Amendment, all the way back in 1998, which set a 40 percent static SPR for Goliath and Nassau groupers and an F 30 percent static SPR for -- As the MSY proxy for the remaining snapper grouper species, as well as the coastal migratory pelagics,

and some of the other FMPs as well, but we're not mentioning those in this presentation, and so I didn't put them there.

There is certainly a lot of other bullets between now and this last one, but this is kind of where we're at now, and so the latest kind of guidance we've had from NOAA Fisheries, and that NS1 tech memo draft guidelines, which was presented to the SSC in July of 2023, and you all have talked a little bit about that around the table already this morning, and it's basically to reevaluate the choice of those SPR proxies, or the use of an MSY estimate, with new assessment results, and so that's been ongoing, as we've been getting new assessments and going through the SSC. They've evaluated the use of the MSY and the appropriate proxies for associated benchmarks.

The data that I've pulled together, that will be reflected in this table and some of the other figures that you'll see, come from the starting point of NOAA's Stock SMART, which stands for Stock Status, Management, Assessment, and Resource Trends, and this is a database, a nationwide database, of all the NOAA Fisheries stocks that have been produced and resulted in management decisions, and they come with a list of different parameters, including fishing mortality, natural mortality, spawning stock biomass estimates, et cetera.

I supplemented some of the data from that table with any of the SEDAR information, from our stock assessment reports, and then, also, anything coming from the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and, specifically in July of 2023, where you'll see the kind of comments from the SSC based on the NS1 tech memo presentation that was given by Rick Methot.

This is kind of the overall summary table. It's a lot to swallow, and so this represents the most recent MSY benchmarks for all the South Atlantic stock assessments, coming from the sources of Stock SMART, SEDAR, and the SSC. You have your common names of the species on the left. The most recent assessment year, the assessment model, and "SS" standing for Stock Synthesis, which is done in the Gulf and with the Florida assessments, and then "BAM", which stands for the Beaufort Assessment Model, which is what most of the South Atlantic stocks are used, and then you see a few other ones there. "SCA" is the Statistical Catch-at-Age Model, and that was not run through SEDAR. This was an independent-contracted stock assessment that was done, and "ASPIC", which is a production-type model that was done for blueline tilefish in SEDAR 50.

You see the sources of those assessment reports in that fourth column there. The MSY basis, that's where we'll focus on kind of the differences and what we have as a snapshot for our South Atlantic stocks now, and so you see stocks that either have used the F 30 percent SPR as an MSY proxy, an F 40 percent SPR as a proxy, and then FMSY itself, as the MSY basis is broken into two categories. We have whether it is estimated, and Luiz talked a little bit about the difficulties with estimating FMSYs directly, and fixed steepness -- Sorry, and those are steepness parameters broken up to estimate.

The fixed steepness values are assessments, and values, that are derived from fixing the steepness based on prior information, and this was typically done in some of the older assessments, and is not a recommended approach anymore, because of certain concerns.

You see the H values, and that's the value of steepness, in that third-to-last column, a natural mortality estimate, and then the F reference, which is the fishing mortality rate at whatever that

MSY basis represents, and so, in the first line of hogfish, you have an FMS, essentially, of 0.138 at that F 30 percent proxy.

Similarly, all the way at the bottom, for tilefish, with a fixed FMSY, your F, or fishing rate at maximum sustainable yield, would be 0.216, and so those are there just to provide some additional information and for comparative purposes. There's a lot to swallow there, and we can always go back, but I thought it was nice to pull together just an overall summary of the most recent assessments to use as a reference for you all moving forward.

This next figure -- These figures here are meant to represent the entire historical time series of the assessments that have been completed, and whether they used an estimate of steepness, and their direct estimates of FMSY, a fixed steepness, or either of those two proxies, and so the bar graph is color-coded by species, and then organized into each of the different columns, and so keep in mind that one species may appear in each of those different columns on the bar graph, because sometimes -- For instance, for black sea bass, steepness was estimated at some point, and it was fixed in another assessment, at some point, and an F 40 precent proxy was used in another assessment, at some point, and so that provides kind of an overall snapshot, but it's not the current FMSY, or proxy, that has been used for the latest assessment that is on the books.

A couple notes there that I've mentioned related to steepness, and Luiz covered some of the concerns there, but, in the estimated steepness categories, you have what we call direct estimated steepness, which is quite rare, and I think red porgy was the only stock that was actually a direct estimate. I could be wrong in there, and somebody can correct me.

Then more common though, in the cases of an estimated steepness, are you have these prior values, that basically bracket what you think, where you think the appropriate steepness value might fall, and that provides some information to guide where that steepness does fall.

Fixed steepness is a case where that steepness value is not estimable by the model, and what this actually does is implies a proxy into a fixed steepness value, and, as mentioned before, a lot of the literature does not currently recommend fixing steepness anymore, and moving towards directly assigning an SPR proxy, which brings us to that last category of SPR proxies, and this typically, as opposed to steepness, where you generate what that recruitment time series might look like from the stock-recruit model, you have a mean recruitment, that's based on an average recruitment time series, over either the length of the entire time series, or you might choose a different recruitment time series, or different stanzas they would say, that might reflect different conditions in the fishery.

This figure comes from the Zhou et al. 2020 paper, and so I thought it was a nice backdrop to superimpose some of our values. Now, keep in mind this is a meta-analysis from X amount of different stocks, and these sixteen data points they use here in this particular figure actually come from west coast groundfish.

I think there's sixteen stocks there, and so it's not an exact approximation of what our stock curve might look like, but I think it does well enough to illustrate where the relationship of our stocks might fall on a steepness to SPR-MSY curve, and so, on the Y-axis, you have what that spawning potential ratio and MSY might look like, and, on the X-axis, the corresponding steepness value, and then the curve assigned based on that meta-analysis.

You see the dotted lines represent what the steepness value would look like at an SPR of 40 percent, right there in the middle, and a couple things to consider too with regard to the steepness, right, and so looking at high steepness, and so further along on the X-axis, and that results in a lower SPR, and this means that there's less spawning stock biomass influence on what that recruitment might be.

Counter to that, having a low steepness results in a higher SPR and a high -- That should say "spawning stock biomass", and not "SSC", influence on recruitment. I don't know what that is, and so, species with an MSY proxy of F 30 percent SPR, these are the stocks in the South Atlantic that have been using an F 30 percent SPR. We have hogfish, yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, king mackerel, and red snapper, and you see where the corresponding steepness might fall out on that figure when the proxy is 30 percent. That's right around the steepness value, and probably about 0.73, it looks like.

Species that are, or at least the last assessment indicated, F 40 percent SPR were scamp and gray triggerfish. Note that gray triggerfish -- This is based on the research track information, and it never made it to an operational assessment yet, and so it hasn't been integrated into management, but, based on the modeling parameters, the F 40 percent was recommended, and this is where that would fall, and this corresponds then with a steepness of about 0.61.

The few species that we do have an estimated MSY include black sea bass, the most recent iteration of the black sea bass assessment, which we'll be looking at next, red porgy, from SEDAR 60, and then gag, from SEDAR 71, and so you see quite a pretty large range, based on an estimate of MSY. In gag, you would have a corresponding SPR at MSY of around 0.2, and, for black sea bass and red porgy, that SPR MSY would be equivalent, with about 61 percent, and a steepness of around 0.4.

For species that had been assigned a fixed steepness during the assessment process, and you see the stocks there, blueline tilefish, tilefish, vermilion, snowy grouper, wreckfish, Spanish mackerel, red grouper, and greater amberjack, and they kind of span a pretty broad range along that curve, with blueline tilefish around a 0.5 steepness, and probably around a 0.53 SPR, all the way down to greater amberjack, at the higher side of the steepness spectrum and the lower side of SPR MSY.

To take a couple points from Luiz's presentation, you know, the steepness is difficult to estimate reliably. He's gone through a lot of the reasons why, including the stock-recruitment functions are often non-informative, due to data limitations. One thing I added here also, that we've talked a little bit about, is this assumes that the stock productivity is stationary through time, and this is where some of that discussion over non-stationarity and changing reference points becomes important, and then the guidance, as of now, right, is, if steepness cannot be estimated, that means your MSY is not estimable, and you should be using an MSY proxy.

To illustrate how this productivity may change through time, and directly violate that stock productivity, he looked at black sea bass specifically, and all the assessments in which black sea bass have been evaluated, and you see, on the table there, throughout its assessment history, starting in 2005 with SEDAR 2, we had an FMSY estimate that was estimated steepness for black sea bass at 0.5. In SEDAR -- Let me move that here, and I plotted those on the Zhou curve as

well, so you can kind of see how this has been changing through time in relation to the relationship of steepness and the SPR, or what would be the SPR proxy at MSY.

Of course, in 2005, it was estimated on there. Moving to 2013, which is the update of the 2011 estimate, FMSY was also estimated in this assessment, but the steepness value was now reduced down to 0.48, and so you see that would correspond to a higher SPR proxy value. In 2018, the steepness was fixed, as FMSY was used for the MSY basis, resulting in a fixed steepness of 0.64, and you see where that would fall on the SPR proxy curve.

Then F 40 percent, which is the intersection of those two dashed lines that are on the Zhou curve itself, was recommended, or one of the iterative recommendations coming out of SEDAR 76, of which there were many, and then, most recently, in the SEDAR 76 update, they were able to estimate MSY again, and a steepness value of 0.39, and so further reduced from the other values that were estimated prior.

You see where then it becomes a concern that having that stock productivity being stationary through time is, obviously, not the case with black sea bass, and maybe some of our other stocks, and so having that static point becomes difficult, and this is why the guidance was to reevaluate where that productivity may have changed through time, with new assessments moving forward, but, of course, this then makes it difficult, when you have these long-term benchmark targets, right, and so, if you're supposed to be rebuilding to a certain benchmark throughout the entire time series of this assessment, when we know productivity has been changing, then you're in kind of a catch-22, where you need to use that long-term benchmark in order to rebuild, but we know that stock productivity has been changing through time.

So how do we resolve some of those concerns, right, and so this is what a lot of the NS 1 tech memo draft guidelines have been addressing. This was presented to the SSC in July of 2023, and I'll touch upon some of the highlights that Rick Methot provided in his presentation.

You see both the presentation he gave, and then the actual draft document linked on the right side of the screen here, and, in talking with Dr. Porch, he said that the final version of this is going through review now, and should be expected pretty soon, and so we're looking forward to seeing that, and that also probably would be something that would be great for the SSC to review again, but a couple of the concerns, or some of the guiding guidelines coming out of that tech memo, were to update those reference points for prevailing conditions, right, and so, based on what I just mentioned, where you have changing productivity through time, this may not -- You know, twenty years ago, the stock productivity may not be reflective of what the prevailing conditions indicate, and it makes it difficult to project into the future.

Investigate changing conditions that could lead to maintaining high F on a declining stock, and so you have changes in natural mortality, due to potential environmental changes, impacting natural mortality, and that may be a concern in changing stock conditions.

Another consideration was to set these benchmarks of FMSY, BMSY, and MSY and rebuilding targets in a more recently prevailing condition basis, and, as stated at the beginning, if using these percent SPR for proxy reference points, reevaluate these choices, to ensure it's still consistent with the new perception of the stock's productivity.

This is a very good document. I encourage you all to go in there and read it in full. It talks a lot about the issues of, you know, these long-term benchmarks, how to implement some non-stationarity and dynamic reference points into the stock assessment framework moving forward, and so the SSC did have a chance to review this tech memo, and some of the comments that they made was that they were hoping for more developmental guidance on density-dependent forces, and so this is some of the things that were mentioned during you all's discussion, you know, some of the recruitment dynamics, or species-to-species density-dependent forces that are happening, and it's still very uncertain, and not a lot of information has gone into how these density-dependent forces really affect stock-recruit relationships and biological stock compositions.

More exploration, and testing of the dynamic biomass approaches and the associated reference points, and more exploration into the stock reference points, stock-recruit relationships, and status determination criteria.

The National SSC meeting, in August of 2024, looked into a lot of these issues too, in response to the tech memo and other concerns, and one of the prevailing conclusions that came out of that meeting was this concept of non-stationarity really calls into question these long-term reference points and rebuilding targets, and, to that extent, and one of the charges coming out of that National SSC meeting on a regional level was that each region was to look at, -- To specify specific action items to address some of the concerns coming out of that National SSC meeting.

One of the action items that the South Atlantic representation developed was to investigate that use of dynamic harvest control rules and reference points, as mentioned in that previous slide, and to address those NS 1 tech memo guidelines, and, to that extent, they've started to consider that. We had a guest seminar speaker, Dr. Jeremy Collie from the New England SSC, who has done a lot of work, and was the keynote speaker in the National SSC meeting on this particular topic of non-stationarity and long-term reference points, and so I encourage you to go to the recording to see that, if you didn't already or weren't able to tune in.

The joint South Atlantic and Gulf SSC meeting, which met in February of 2025 to review mutton and yellowtail snapper, had a lot of discussion on, you know, estimates of MSY, appropriate SPR proxies, and the precision necessary to estimate steepness, and so, you know, they made a statement in the report that is there, but, basically, requiring a look at requirements to estimate steepness, and the precision surrounding it, in order to estimate MSY, and a further discussion of SPR proxy values, given the range of life history values among fish species, and this was then echoed, as C.J. mentioned, at the Gulf Council, that passed a motion to see that workgroup be developed, and that's all I have for you. That was kind of a lot to swallow there. I'll take any questions here, and then, Jessica, we'll see where we need to go from here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Sounds good. That was a great presentation. There was -- After that table that you put in there for reference, that slide after that, if you wouldn't mind backing up to that, and I had a question on that. Right there, and so the fixed steepness bar is the highest there, and then I read, over there on the right, and you talked about this a little bit, that it's not currently recommended, and so how do you get one of the stocks that's in the fixed steepness category over to another one of the categories other than a stock assessment, or is it only being discussed when a new stock assessment is done, or does the SSC often discuss it at other times? Just I wanted to learn a little bit more about how you could move between the categories.

DR. CURTIS: Well, I'll speak to my experience since I've been involved with the SSC and the South Atlantic, and for -- Well, let me back up. The fixed steepness no longer being recommended comes from some of the literature that we pulled as well, and there's probably others that can talk more elaborately about that than I, but my experience with the South Atlantic SSC, right, is these benchmarks do not change until we have a new assessment coming forward.

There hasn't been any discussion of changing an assessment value from a fixed steepness to a commensurate proxy, or, if you could estimate it, which is probably unlikely, because they would have done that in the original assessment if it was possible, and so -- But, currently, there has been no discussion at the SSC on what those commensurate values would be for the fixed steepness, or if that's still the most appropriate proxy to use for that particular stock.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Judd. Other questions? Tim.

MR. GRINER: Well, looking at this, is that not exactly what's happened with black sea bass? I mean, have they not gone from an estimated to a fixed to now just a picked 40 percent? I mean, that seems to be exactly what you described doesn't happen happened.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and so the -- For black sea bass, right, this was a case where they had initial estimates of FMSY earlier on in the assessment series, SEDAR 2, 25, and the update, where steepness was estimated. Then, in SEDAR 56, steepness was fixed. In 2023, it went to an F 40 percent proxy, SPR, as a proxy for MSY, and, most recently, there was enough data to estimate FMSY, again, and an associated steepness.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions, or thoughts? Tim, did you have more?

MR. GRINER: No, and I'm just trying to wrap my arms around why.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: First of all, thank you, Judd, for this presentation. It's really great to see it laid out this way. I will mention that there have always been, you know, kind of two schools of thoughts on this, and it also depends on where you are in the world, in terms of which approach we're taking, which I'll bring up again later, but some feel that, if you can't estimate the actual steepness value, or the spawner-recruit relationship, then you fix it to something that's plausible, and it's really, in that case, kind of a management procedure, where you're striving for consistency. You know you don't know -- You can't actually estimate it, and so you don't know that you're actually getting the abundance right, or the long-term productivity, but it's still a management procedure that generally gets you in the right place.

The other school of thought is, well, if you can't get blood from a stone, don't try, and you adopt a proxy, and it does seem like now we've moved away from the idea of fixing steepness. However, when we get in the SEDAR meetings, and we get the CIE reviewers that come from all over the world, they often give us conflicting advice from one assessment to the next, and so we're bending over backwards sometimes to meet the recommendation of CIE reviewers, and some of them have actually recommended fixing steepness, and, in some parts of the world they still do that, and so that's part of the reason you see these differences.

I think we need to, and we've talked about this at the SEDAR Steering Committee, and we need to take a look at how we frame our terms of reference, and how much latitude we give to the assessment panel to adopt recommendations from the CIE, because they come from different management frameworks, and they're not always fully aware of how we do things here, and so that is an important issue that needs to be addressed, and I fully support having that -- Revisiting that working group that we've been talking about. I think that's an important step to take. How should we respond when we don't have a clear, stationary spawner-recruit relationship, and be consistent.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that's a great point, a great point about the CIE reviewers, and thinking about that in the terms of reference. Thank you for bringing that up. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I've always wondered, or maybe I just don't know, and what triggers that review? Do we do that review with every single assessment, or is there some level that that peer review gets triggered?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: Every benchmark assessment in SEDAR, or the equivalent, when it was a research track, gets the CIE review, usually in person, and sometimes it might be a desk review. When it's an update assessment, or the equivalent, usually it's just the SSC reviewing, and so there tends to be more consistency, of course, when the SSC is reviewing, but you add that wildcard with CIE, and they may have very legitimate recommendations, but many of them are influenced by the system that they happen to operate in.

MR. GRINER: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Any more questions? Once again, great presentation. Judd, do you mind bringing up that motion that the Gulf Council made, and then I think that you captured some points, from our earlier discussion, about next steps that maybe we could talk about a little bit. All right, and so, that motion that's at the top, is that the motion, the exact motion, that the Gulf made? Can you speak to this a little bit?

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and I'll look to C.J. to read that language, to see if it's exactly right, but I copied and pasted it, and so --

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so that's the Gulf's motion at the top there. **Once again, to form a working group comprised of members of the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs to collectively address the best practices for estimating steepness, and thus estimate MSY for management advice, as well as a discussion of SPR proxy values, given a range of life history values among fish species.** I'm just assuming, based on the discussion earlier, that we want to make a similar motion. Tim.

MR. GRINER: **Yes, and I would say similar, but I would like to add a little bit to that, and, you know, in my mind, to convene this group, it needs to be comprised of not just members of both the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs, but it needs to have some council members in there, and so I would like some language added in there to include council members in this workgroup.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so I agree. We were trying to figure out -- I'm assuming that you want it added to the motion itself, like another sentence that says we recommend having council members as part of this workgroup, from both the Gulf and South Atlantic councils? Okay, and I see a head nodding yes, and Judd is capturing that. All right. We have a motion. Before we second it, let me go to Chip.

DR. COLLIER: I also want to point out that you have other stocks that go up the coast, and the Mid-Atlantic might have reason for representation on this group. Blueline tilefish I think is a prime example of what we were having to deal with between the different SSCs, and I think it would be good to get them engaged as well, to have some conversations. It's not just snapper grouper species, but management for CMP goes all the way up to New Jersey, or, sorry. Rhode Island, and so I think it would be good to have them engaged for the management side.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so a couple of things, and so that's a different science center, and so the first thing I would like to do is focus on the Gulf's motion, and try to focus on that, and then maybe a separate group, that doesn't necessarily need the Gulf, that's focusing on the Mid-Atlantic, because it's not like the Gulf is dealing with blueline tilefish.

You've also got two different science centers here, whereas, the Gulf, we're talking about the same science center, and so let's come back to that thought after we dispense with this, and so keep that in mind. Other thoughts on this specific motion? Tim, can you make sure that the language that was added captures what you were thinking there? All right.

MR. GRINER: Yes. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Do we have a second, first? It's seconded by Trish. All right, and so I saw Kerry's hand, then Andy's hand.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'll come back to it, because my point is the same as Chip's.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: The addition of the council members is giving me a little bit of pause, mostly because of what we saw around this table this morning, and so all of us bring a different perspective to this, a different level of knowledge and expertise, understanding of steepness and SPR proxies, and so having a council member -- The kind of representation could widely vary, depending on who that person is that's appointed, and so I'm wondering if it would be better for a council staff member to participate, rather than a council member.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would say, and then I saw other hands going up, I would prefer that a council member was there. I just assumed that council staff would already be there, like Ryan Rindone from the Gulf, and I was imagining someone like Carolyn being our council member, and just saying, but I saw hands going up. So, Kerry, I think your hand was up, and then Trish.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes. Exactly. I mean, we have a council member who I believe is assigned as the SSC and council -- I don't know the term, but liaison, and so, as much as that person does -- That's what the person agreed to when they took on the role, and I'm just saying, and I think that

would be the appropriate person. Andy is right that you don't want me sitting there. That's not going to be helpful, but Carolyn sitting there would be helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Two votes for Carolyn. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I was going to suggest, in this motion, do we want to add the council liaison member? I don't know, and does the Gulf have a council liaison member?

DR. SWEETMAN: C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: He just termed out, and so we'll have to figure that out later on.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Well, never mind, but I second Carolyn.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Did I see some other hands up as part of this discussion? More discussion on this motion? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, I assume that, like anything we do, this would be a process which, even if they meet in-person, it will be a webinar, and those of us who want to further educate ourselves can still listen, and still try to educate ourselves, without necessarily being, you know, active members of the process, and so I think that's really comfortable.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more discussion on this motion? **Any objection to this motion? All right. Seeing none, that motion carries.**

Then there were some other considerations that we talked about, that Andy brought up, that John brought up, that we were trying to also talk about this more iterative process between science, and Carolyn talked about this too, between the SSC and the council for development of these appropriate proxies. How do we want to handle that? Do we want to write something down about how we would like this to work, et cetera, and then I want to come back to the how are we going to handle stocks that are also joint with the Mid, and so let's talk about the first bullet there for other considerations.

We don't want to lose that good discussion that we had, but we had this discussion about there being this more back-and-forth, and black sea bass was given as an example. Do we just want to keep it as that bullet that says develop this more iterative process? I see some heads nodding yes, but I was looking for some thoughts on that, because I don't want to lose that thought that we had. Anybody? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I guess I would probably suggest that the appropriate staff person, Judd, with the support of others, and, again, don't be mad, but working with a council member who really understands the SSC process, whoever that may be, could develop a draft process for us, and bring it back to us, because we don't need to wordsmith it. We don't need to get into it here. I have faith in those people, and when I don't know, and that would -- I would also say the timing of that, for me, would be at the discretion of staff, and their workload, and we don't need to prescribe that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm good with all that. Any other thoughts on that, or concerns? Okay. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: This is just me thinking out loud, as you all know I do. I guess we want to just make sure it's not so crazy here if we don't get anything done, and so I don't know if there's -- I'm not sure if there's -- So I guess I was picturing with “iterative”, it would be back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, and how much is it going to be too much back and forth, and so that's where I was at, bu, if I'm misunderstanding the iterative process, then --

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's right. Back and forth, but I guess I would say let's let council staff come back with some sort of process, and then we could give them some feedback on that. Does that sound good? Okay. Jimmy, do you have a question, or something to add?

MR. HULL: Yes, and both, and so it seems like, if we're going to have a conversation with the SSC, when they're developing these proxies for a specific species for a stock assessment, and, you know, you've got the data workshop, and you've got when they're developing the terms of reference, and is that when we're talking about this communication back and forth and having the liaison, or Carolyn, being there and involved in that discussion, because I know, generally, we have -- Chip is usually at these SSC meetings, when it involves a stock assessment for our region, or other staff members, and so is that what you're talking about the conversation occurring at?

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and I think, you know, we need to think about it a little bit, but I envision it similar to maybe how we frame like the terms of reference with you all. It's like that kind of goes through the SSC first, for a version and some edits, and then we bring it to you, and it goes back. That would, as an example -- You know, we need to flesh this out, obviously, but, you know, I think having the iterative process back and forth would be a critical component. I don't know exactly how that will happen as of yet, but that's something we'll think about and bring to you for -- Once you have a little more clarity and focus.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: Thank you. I have, actually, a similar concern to Trish, that back and forth and back and forth for every single species, every time we do an assessment, worries me a lot. I mean, there's going to be some science guidance, in terms of the best proxy. Obviously, the council could go for something that is actually a more precautionary proxy, if they wanted to, but then that's outside the science process.

To me, it seems like, if we're going to go down this route, and kind of educate each other, have a conversation, then what we should really do is set up, you know, the process that proxies are selected, and maybe agree on that, like we do with an ABC control rule, and so, you know, what criteria are we going to use to determine SPR proxies, make sure we all understand that, and then that kind of gets set, and so that gets to one of the previous working groups we were talking about.

You could come up with, for example, based on certain life history characteristics, sort of a curve and then, you know, given whatever the life history characteristic is, you would pick, as a proxy, the SPR that's most likely to achieve the MSY, and you just set up the guidance for that. Again, sort of like you do with an ABC control rule, but, if we were just going to keep having back and forth for every species, I see this really delaying actions, and that's been sort of a perennial problem.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's a good point, and so maybe we take the word "iterative" out of this, and we have staff develop a process, but I'm going to look to Carolyn to -- Because you were speaking to this as well, and what do you think about the way this statement is phrased, and how did you envision this might work?

DR. BELCHER: I mean, in my mind, I kind of see it similar to where we go with projections at times. We get the assessment, and we talk about what projections we want to see. If the science is suggesting a potential change in a proxy, then maybe that's where the conversation comes forward, and we -- Because that's back kind of where we were, and we got an assessment that had a 40, and we asked to see it with a 30.

I think, you know, from that standpoint, again, going in, and you've got a consistence -- What do we call them, where, basically, we're doing the -- Carrying forward what the consistency has been, right, and the last assessment was done this way with the proxy. If there's a suggestion for a change, that at least you give what the current status is, plus -- Then have the discussion about it, and so, at that point, if there is strong support scientifically to say we might need to check this, it comes through when we're starting to suggest projections. That's one way I could see us doing it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That was helpful. So then we deleted the word "iterative" here, which might help. I still think a process could be developed, like what you're saying. Judd, thoughts?

DR. CURTIS: Well, I think this is clear now. A couple questions for clarification, and so would this then be kind of on the heels of the joint workgroup with the Gulf, and the recommendations coming out of that workgroup, or should we do this in concert, or at least development of this process that we look at, so that the results coming out of that workgroup then can be integrated straight away based on this process? That's the first question I had. I'll stop there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I mean, I saw it as somewhat simultaneous. I don't know that I would just wait for the workgroup, because I'm not sure exactly what's going to come out of that, and I would like for us to think about what it is we want to do, and figure out how that meshes with what the workgroup is doing, but maybe we -- Maybe this bullet is enough for right now, and you guys think about what's the best way, and then we can -- You can bring something back to us that's a process, or suggested path forward. Does that sound good to everybody. Tim.

MR. GRINER: I just want to make sure I understand that this process, whatever it ends up having -- Being comprised of, will be a dynamic process. I mean, you've got to be able to re-evaluate this proxy, and not annually maybe, but it's a changing number. I mean, as things change, as you get more life history information, as climate changes, whatever, and, I mean, it's a long-term average, is what we're trying to make a proxy for, and so it can't be a static thing, that we have a process that says, okay, we have this descriptive process, and, boom, there's your proxy. It's got to be something that's dynamic and has built in the ability to change.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and so I'm envisioning something like you have threshold points or something maybe -- That get triggered, that would activate, you know, the SSC to look at maybe a re-evaluation of the proxy, if we can't get a brand-new assessment or something. The other question I had too, and that's something we can flesh out a little bit further within this, but the other question I had too was towards one of the questions that was asked during the presentation.

It was with the fixed steepness stocks that we have currently, that are no longer recommended. Would you task the SSC, and the development of this process, with kind of re-evaluating what those fixed steepness stocks would look like and what a commensurate SPR proxy might look like?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're getting both of those bullets up there. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. Well, I guess I had a question. I was envisioning this more of developing a process that you're going to use going forward, and looking at SPR values when we have a new assessment, or new catch advice, whatever, and we're changing it, and not that you're necessarily going to go in and use this group to evaluate your existing SPR proxies, and that's what this is -- What that kind of started to sound like to me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I guess I would say let's let staff go figure out what they want this group to do. It's challenging on the fly here, without seeing exactly what this would look like, because maybe Judd and Carolyn and whoever else talk about this and say, hey, we don't recommend this, or we do recommend that, and so I think that this is enough for tasking them, or maybe more than enough, with tasking them to look into this, and so just are we good with that task? Okay. Then now how do we want to deal with these stocks? I'm sorry. Go ahead, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Just before we move on to the Mid-Atlantic representation, Marcel reminded me that we actually have an active workgroup at the SSC level that was tasked with looking at SPR proxies and development and things. It's kind of been stagnant, as all these things have been going on behind the scenes, but we could kind of breathe some new life into that and develop it a little bit further. I think I've got enough guidance here to try to hash out a working plan that we can bring back to you in September, or December, whenever we next meet about this, and for you guys to review.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That sounds great, and so then back to the Mid-Atlantic, and how are we going to deal with that? Do we want something as formal as another one of these groups, like the motion that we just made? I'm sorry. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I mean, I agree we need to take it northward too, but I almost feel like, if we -- Let's work the group within the Science Center, because at least we've got a little bit of cohesion there, and figure out what we think our best management practice, or our approach, is going to be, and then work with that, so that we're not kind of, you know, hodgepodging the whole thing together.

We get more cohesion, and everybody in the Science Center is working with us, and we're all supported, and then, that way, when we go to do it up the shoreline, you're not bringing in more diverse groups to the equation. We're kind of all in lockstep, and then it's Science Center to Science

Center, as well as council to council, and having those conversations, and maybe that would be a better way to go.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me make sure I understand what you're saying. You're saying figure out between the Gulf and the South Atlantic first and wait till that is complete, or almost complete, before going -- Okay, and so maybe that's just some clarification here, on a bullet, that we will do this after we finish the first topic within our Science Center, but go ahead, Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: It probably wouldn't hurt to talk to the Mid-Atlantic, to kind of let them know what we're doing, and then, that way, maybe they'll be thinking about it too, and so, I mean -- Because maybe that's something that carries from them to the New England council. I mean, that's just kind of -- At least just let them know that that's what we're trying to work toward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so we've got a couple bullets there, and just making sure everybody's okay about how -- The order of the process that we would do here. I think we're good, and we're capturing some of the thoughts and discussion that we had this morning. I just want to check with everybody first, to make sure that there isn't something else that we want to capture from that discussion, or something that we said that we wanted to think about. I'm just looking around the table to make sure we're good. I think we're good here.

Now I think we want -- We said, yesterday, that, after this presentation and discussion, that we wanted to go back to the Gulf gag, or I'm sorry, the Atlantic gag terms of reference. Is that right? Okay. A short break while we go get the gag terms of reference document, and so stand by.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. If everybody can come on back to the table, we're going to look at these gag terms of reference, and then, as soon as we're done with this, the plan would be to take a lunchbreak, and then, when we come back, we'll be talking about black sea bass. All right, and so I'm going to turn it back to Judd to remind us what we need to do here, what we said we wanted to come back to here in the terms of reference.

DR. CURTIS: Thank you, and so, if you recall, you put a pin in the South Atlantic gag grouper terms of reference yesterday, or Monday, after you had that MSY and proxies discussion, because there was a term of reference addressing just those. Before we get there, I just highlighted, in yellow, the quick changes to the language, based on your recommendations from Monday, and so incorporating, or stating that the data is using a terminal year of 2024. To Tim's request, I think add language to provide commercial, recreational, and combined landings and discards in pounds and numbers.

Then the last point that you all were discussing was the inclusion of this language highlighted here in yellow, related to the MSY proxy, if it is recommended provide justification for its use over a direct estimate of MSY, and rationale supporting the value chosen. I think, based on what Clay stated earlier, and the concern with the fixed steepness estimates too, there -- You could add language in there as well, to the terms of reference, to avoid any fixed steepness direct estimates, if you felt that was necessary, or that can be something that does not need to be explicitly stated here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: A point of clarification. I was kind of under the understanding that we aim for a direct estimate, and, if we can't get a direct estimate, the proxy comes into play, and, the way that's written, it's like, if an MSY proxy is recommended, provide justification for why you want to use a direct estimate. It's like I would think -- Because, I mean, we would never say use the proxy over a direct estimate. I think that's just --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we're flipping it there. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Then I would think, to kind of my -- Sorry, and my brain is a sequential thinking thing, but to kind of invert that with a, because it's more of like, if a direct estimate is not recommended, and then go through if -- Then evaluate a range of MSY proxies.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Judd, can you remind me, and is -- Do we have something in here that we want people to consider State Reef Fish Survey estimates here? I thought that was in there, but I'm not seeing it. Chip.

DR. COLLIER: So, not to contradict Carolyn, but, at the most recent mutton snapper, I think, or maybe it was yellowtail, and I can't remember which one, but there is a direct estimate of MSY, but they ended up going forward with a proxy. Judd can probably talk about it a little bit more, and just, because there was so much uncertainty associated with the estimate of MSY, that they felt more comfortable with the proxy.

DR. BELCHER: To that point, I'm just -- It's that idea of you have an estimate, right, you're given it, and you have the discussion, and, if you feel it's too high in uncertainty to use it, then you punt, but that was where I just wanted to make sure, that, generally, the idea is, if you've got a direct estimate, that's really what you want to work with, and you just don't want to say we like what the proxy says better, and so we're going to use that. That was -- That was my only thought.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and I think that language captures it there, right? If a direct estimate of MSY is available, and the SSC is comfortable with using it, then that would be the recommended approach. If the uncertainties are too large, where it is not recommended, then you would revert to using an MSY proxy. I think that language covers it there, but, Carolyn, is there anything else to add to that sentence there, for clarity, or you're comfortable with that?

DR. BELCHER: No, and I think that pretty much captures what I was thinking.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So we're looking about where we could put something about State Reef Fish Survey data, and so we're thinking Number 3 there, about consider new and updated information, and maybe there's something we could add there about State Reef Fish Survey data. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: While you're working on that, I guess, going back to 4b, and I'll let them type first. For 4b, I guess I'm looking for clarification for the scientists, and so, when we say evaluate a range of benchmark proxies, what are we meaning by that, in terms of what range are they evaluating, or is that more intended to like discuss the range of MSY proxies considered in determining the best proxy?

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and more to the latter. I think maybe the "benchmark" word is redundant there, and "evaluate just a range of MSY proxies, because, yes, the objective is to get at what you stated in the latter part of your statement, is to look at what proxies would be most appropriate in approximating MSY.

MR. STRELCHECK: I guess I'm just thinking of the term "evaluate", and are we asking them to do different model runs, with the whole suite of different MSY proxies? I don't think that's our intent, and so just looking for clarification.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Maybe if you started the sentence with the "if an MSY proxy is going to" -- However you want to say it, but is recommended for use or whatever, and, if there's discussions about a change, and I'm throwing words out there, and I guess we can wordsmith it, but the idea being so are you going to use the proxy, and, right now, whether it's written into an FMP or not is one of the conversations, right, because, if it's not there, you're going to have to start a discussion about it, and so, if there's a discussion about the proxy, and it's a value that's kind of coming out of literature or whatever, at least discussing why you're choosing that proxy.

If it's set -- Like, for us, if we're saying it's F 30 percent, right, but there's the discussion that the group thinks it should shift to 40, or 45, whatever, if you're proposing an alternative proxy to what's in the FMP, make sure the discussion is had as to why you're selecting it, or, if you're selecting a range to evaluate, discuss why the range is evaluated, and so there's more information, when it comes to the SSC, and to us, to have a better understanding of why those values have been selected. I don't know how -- Again, how to wordsmith that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Clay, while Judd is typing here.

DR. PORCH: I'm just wondering if that's already captured in the highlighted sentence, and it says to provide justification for the use of the MSY proxy and rationale supporting the value chosen.

DR. BELCHER: Yes, and I think it's just language. I mean, the use of "an MSY proxy" is kind of one of the ones that's an open-ended, where "the MSY proxy" suggests that there's already a set value, and I know, like I said, that sounds like persnickety, but I think there's part of that discussion, and it's either a value, or you're using a proxy, and the proxy isn't necessarily set.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Look at it now see what you all think. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think the prior wording for b had the range of, you know, possible options, right, and so that's, I think, what's the missing component, for me, is like, when they're having a discussion about proxies, it would be good to understand I'll say the uncertainty, the kind of range around that proxy that is being evaluated, and how they ultimately arrive at a single determinant for a proxy.

DR. CURTIS: So you do want to retain that second bullet, just with discussion of the range of uncertainties around that MSY proxy?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I was waiting, Clay, until he could type something up here that you could react to.

DR. PORCH: No, and, I mean, I guess that -- This would tie into the discussion we had earlier, if we have an SSC, you know, and council staff or whatever working group to set up sort of a decision rule, where, if we have various life history characteristics, what's the best proxy, and there could be a distribution around that. I think that's where we're trying to head, and it gets us to a situation where we don't necessarily have to work in 5 percent increments. You know, it's not always going to be 35, or always 40, or 30, or whatever, and then we just agree on that selection process.

I don't know if that would be done in time for this, but I think it could be, but I don't have a clear timeline, but ideally, yes, we would just have a process in place where we say, based on these criteria, this is what the SPR would be, and that's the rationale.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree, and I thought the same thing, that maybe it would be done in time, but we're just not sure, and so do we think b captures it and allows consideration by that workgroup, and so look at b there. Are you all -- Is everybody over there good? Okay. I see Carolyn is a yes. Clay is thumbs-up. Okay. Good.

DR. CURTIS: I think moving forward to that point with the workgroup recommendations, once it's completed, that could be something that's then added into future terms of reference. You know, we're still uncertain what the timeline for that might be, but, similar to, you know, the South Atlantic Catch Level Projections Workgroup, we outlined that those recommendations should be integrated into the TORs, and we can do something similar with the SPR workgroup for future terms of reference.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I'm sorry. I thought we were done. Amy.

MS. DUKES: I wanted that SPR conversation to happen first. I wanted to go back to 3, and so we are including that Florida source. Do we want to specifically talk about other data sources that we want to ensure that are looked at? I know we say "new and updated information", but, on the heels of SEDAR 90, I want to make sure that that SEFHIER data is really taken into consideration here for gag, because there's going to be lots of zeroes, where that may change if we look at SEFHIER data for the charter mode, versus MRIP.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so help us fill out the list, and so SEFHIER. Amy, I'm asking you to help us fill out the list, if there's other ones that you would like to call out here. If there's specific ones that you're concerned that they might not look at, then it sounds like you want them here, but Chip is coming to the table.

DR. COLLIER: I definitely think Release might be another good one for this, or other sources of self-reported length frequencies of released fish.

MS. DUKES: FISHstory. Do we not have enough? We might not have enough lengths.

DR. COLLIER: Jessica, would there be anything in the EFP that could potentially be used?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't think so. I mean, we could look at the data as we're writing it up, but my guess is probably no. All right. Are you good, Amy? All right. C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: Even just relative to the EFP, and I'm just looking at this. If the terminal year is 2024, Chip, we wouldn't have even started our EFP at that point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are we good now? Just checking. All right. I appreciate this additional discussion here. I think we're good to break for lunch. Trish, can you tell us what time we're coming back from lunch, and, when we come back, we're going to be talking about black sea bass.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. I guess everybody just come back at 1:30.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. While people are coming on back to the table, I wanted to introduce Kai Lorenzen, who is there in the back of the room. I was going to invite him to the table to speak on the topic, but he's here, and he is recruiting snapper grouper anglers to participate in a survey. Actually, Susana is going to do it, instead of Kai, but they're recruiting snapper grouper anglers to participate in a survey on fishing preferences, and the intent to incorporate the results of the survey into the snapper grouper MSE, but I'm going to pass it over to Susana, or Kai. Here comes Kai to talk about this a little bit.

DR. LORENZEN: Yes, and I don't want to say too much. We just have set up a little table outside, and so we're looking to talk with people about -- Essentially, it's input to our design of the survey that we'll be making, and so we're having some preliminary discussions about preferences, and about management scenarios that people want to see explored as part of the MSE, because we need that input to design a good survey, and so, if you're interested in the MSE generally, and the recreational angler preferences and attitudes part of that, do come and talk to us, and we'll be out there at the table. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Kai. All right. We're going to get back to our agenda today, and let me just go over what we're going to try to accomplish this afternoon. We have public comment this afternoon, and so we have a hard stop at 3:45. We've already covered a couple of things that are on the agenda, but we're going to go into black sea bass, and see how far we get, and, if we still have time left before 3:45, we might look at the Commercial Subcommittee report, the update on MSE, and some other things, and then, tomorrow, we'll probably dive into the fishery management unit revisions.

We're going to skip everything that was for Amendment 46, based on our pushing that back. We were going to get the presentation, but, based on timing, we're going to push that back to our discussions on recreational data collection, and so at a future meeting, and so, with that, I am going to turn it over to Judd to talk about stock risk rating relative to black sea bass.

DR. CURTIS: Thank you. Welcome back. I hope you all had a good lunch, and so, as part of the ABC control role, if you recall, we have a stock risk rating that is made up of a bunch of biological attributes, human dimension attributes, and environmental attributes, that then get a qualitative

score of one, two, or three, and that represents either the high, medium, or low risk of overexploitation.

You see before you the spreadsheet that we used to work that out, and then the combination of all those scores and results in a risk rating of high, medium, or low is also used in concert with the biomass output from the assessment model to determine what that default P* is and what your decrement from ABC, or from OFL to ABC, will be.

The process has been to -- Staff will compile information, that you see in the notes column for each of these different species that we've gone through, and apply a default score, based on the criteria that are were developed in the ABC control rule comprehensive amendment. We'll take the default scores to the advisory panels for the respective species. In this case, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel weighed-in, at their April advisory panel meeting, and the SSC did the same, and we'll make notes of any comments that they made during each of those meetings, and put those in the notes as well.

Then, once those preliminary scores are completed by the AP and the SSC, the council will look at it, and weigh those scores, and any additional input that you would like to make, and come up with a final council score, that will then determine what that risk rating will be at the end. We went through this at the last meeting for a couple other species, and so hopefully we've got the drill down by now, and so any questions before we start?

Great. All right, and so, starting off with the biological attributes, there's two there, estimated natural mortality and the age at maturity, and these are typically generated from previous stock assessment values, and so you see, in SEDAR 56 and 76, we had natural mortality estimates of 0.38 and 0.375, respectively, which would make it fall between that 0.2 and 0.4, into a medium risk of overexploitation. Both the AP and the SSC agreed on a two, and so any dissent in each of those, in that score of two?

Okay, and the age at maturity then, and you see the notes there, fell into a low risk of overexploitation. That age at maturity was less than two years, and we also has some probability of sex change information in the notes section as well, but those make it a low risk of overexploitation, and so that would be a three. Any concerns with the three? Not seeing any around the table.

Moving on to the human dimension attribute scores, and so the first is the ability to the regulate fishery, and the definitions here are whether fishery is consistently exceeding the total ACL. Three out of five years are high. If it's mostly below the total ACL, except maybe exceeding it in a couple of years, and then it's consistently kept below the total ACL, and sea bass fell into that latter category of a low risk of overexploitation. It hasn't exceeded the ACL in any years from 2020 to 2024, and so that would make it a low risk of overexploitation, a three.

All right. The potential for discard losses, and so this fell under a high risk of overexploitation, as the dead discards represented a significant portion of the total catch, and the total removals as well, and I think this is how it is written in the ABC control rule definitions, but the idea was to get actually at the percentage of total removals, and so that should really be a proportion of total removals, and so your landings and your dead discards, which amounted to around 74 percent total, making it a high risk of overexploitation. Any concerns with that score?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: The dead discards are representative of 15 percent of the entire discards, and is that how we're -- If the discard mortality rate is 15 percent, and so this represents 15 percent of all discards, is that correct?

DR. CURTIS: No, and this would be the proportion of dead discards, and so that discard mortality rate multiplied by the reported number of released fish, and that would be your dead discards, and then as a proportion of the total removals, including landings, and so you have landings plus dead discards over total removals, and that's how you get to that percentage.

MR. GRINER: Correct, and so which all is based on -- Basically, it's all based on the discard portion, or the numbers coming out of MRIP for those years, right? Correct?

DR. CURTIS: Correct. Yes, and either from a direct query of MRIP releases, or, if there's information in the most recent stock assessment for during the current years, then we would use those two.

MR. GRINER: Great, and so that's my concern with that rating. Those years of MRIP data have a PSE greater than 50 percent, and they really -- You know, MRIP itself says don't use them, and so here we are making a risk rating based off of data that is data that we probably shouldn't even be looking at, and that's my concern with the rating, and I don't know -- You know, I don't know exactly what to do, other than to note that, I mean, but, you know, it's just strange that we can we can assign a risk rating based on data that we shouldn't be using, that we know is probably wrong.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. I've made a note of that in the comments. Do you feel that that would be justification in order to change those default scores?

MR. GRINER: It could be. I guess, as you move down through the category itself, I don't know how big of an effect that has, I guess, and I'm just saying that, for that particular risk rating, you know, we're assigning it the worst risk rating it could possibly be, based on total discards and a mortality rate that I don't believe is accurate, and the data itself says it's not accurate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, then Clay.

MR. STRELCHECK: Tim, maybe I'm not fully following you. You referenced a PSE greater than 50 percent, which I know for sea bass can be in certain waves the case, but, if you look at the annual discard estimates, they're -- Most of them are 20 or less, in terms of PSEs for discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Maybe I'm looking at the query wrong then. I mean, I'm looking at the cumulative, and not -- I'm looking at the cumulative of all waves, and not by wave, and maybe I should be looking at waves, but, you know, in 2022, they were 67.2. In 2019, they were 73.8. In 2024, it was 48.1. In 2023, it was 46.3, and that's total catch, you know, including the discards. I didn't break out just discards, but, if you break out just discards, and I'll do that real quick, I would imagine it would be even worse.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm looking at the query now, and released alive, B2s, right, and so it's not -- It's just discards. Annual estimates range from 9 percent PSE to 15.1 PSE for the last five years. Now, that's not broken down by wave, and I recognize that PSEs is going to be higher by wave, but --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: Just a point of clarification. What time period are we using for this? Is this really kind of an average over multiple years, in which case that PSE isn't going to be much of an issue?

DR. CURTIS: Typically, we're looking at the last five years' time series, and so, yes, you're right. If you did add them all together, that would reduce your overall level of CV. Are we okay retaining that as then just still a high risk of over exploitation? We can dig up --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim is reviewing. Do you want to come back to it?

MR. GRINER: Yes, and we can -- Let's come back to it. I mean, I'm just one person here, and so I -- You know, I'm just telling you my thoughts. I don't know what the remainder of the council feels about this issue.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. We'll put a pin in that one and come back, if necessary. The next category is the annual commercial values, and this is split into two, one representing the total annual -- The percentage of the total annual revenue, and the other representing a percent of the total trip revenue, on average, and you see the different break points on each of those, over ten, between one and ten, and less than one for total annual revenue.

The average annual revenue calculation, for 2019 to 2023, was 2.8 percent, and so falling in that mid category. One of the comments from the AP was that deflating price, leading to -- It leads to less fishing activity, and there's an influence of Mid-Atlantic boats that may be altering some of the annual revenue calculations, and, for the second bit on total trip revenue, that was equivalent to 11.3 percent for that same year time series, making it also a two, a medium risk of overexploitation. Any comments?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't see any hands.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving to recreational desirability, this fell into also the medium risk of overexploitation, where between 1 percent and 5 percent of trips report targeting this species. The average percent of all trips was 2.2 percent. If your average percent of all trips, not including gray snapper, which there are a lot, that came out to 13.2 percent. The AP comment was that they're not targeted anymore in Florida, Fort Pierce south, and we do have some regional differentiation that has been observed in desirability across the coast.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm assuming we're good with two.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. A two, and social concerns of the communities with the highest black sea bass landings for highly reliant on commercial and recreational fishing, and so this fell under seven, which is the benchmark for the low to medium, and so this would result in a low risk of overexploitation. Okay.

Moving on to the environmental attribute scores, and so this is a little bit unique compared to the other two categories of attributes, in that, if you assign a value in any of those three different environmental attributes of ecosystem importance, climate change, or other environmental variables, it automatically defaults the entire category to a one, and so, in some way -- For the AP, you know, they agreed that there was an occurrence of a potential range shift, and they saw that recent recruitment is lowest in the time series with the South Atlantic, and they agreed with that statement, and observed that range shifts are occurring, and so they wanted to apply a one under the other environmental variables score.

The SSC concurred with this statement, and these notes as well, and, in addition, thought that there was important component -- That black sea bass was an important component of the snapper grouper complex before the declines in biomass, and they added another one up near ecosystem importance. I'll leave it up to the council to discuss if they would like to include also a high or a zero in this case, and there's no intermediate.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any thoughts here? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I would say probably, yes, it is going to be affected by water temperature changes and stuff.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I was looking for -- I guess, in ecosystem importance, we talk about predation, and that's certainly one that I think is important as we look at black sea bass stocks. I was looking for predation in here, and I found it under ecosystem importance, and I just wanted to highlight that I thought that was an important factor to look at.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. I made a note of that as well, and so it sounds like you're landing on that you want to apply a score of one for an environmental attribute, and so you would consider that as a substantial impact in the risk. Okay. All right, and let's move back up to the potential discard losses then. Is there any other heartburn with assigning a level of one, a high risk of overexploitation?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thoughts? Gary.

MR. BORLAND: (Mr. Borland’s comment is not audible on the recording.)

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so, to clarify how this value is calculated, you have the three, the low, medium, and high categories, right, and so either over 40 percent, between 20 and 40 percent, and less than 20 percent, in this case, and so the total removals is calculated by taking your discard mortality rate, which is based on the assessment, right, from either tag mark-recapture studies, tagging studies, et cetera, and that goes into the stock assessment as a fixed parameter, essentially, a fixed percentage.

13.7 percent was the latest discard mortality rate applied for the recreational sector in the last stock assessment. Then, taking the MRIP average from the years 2020 to 2024, you look at the total releases, the B2s, and you multiply that by that discard mortality rate of 13.7 percent, and take the proportion of that value over the total catch or, excuse me, the total removals.

MR. GRINER: Well, I guess part of my issue keeps coming back to -- Maybe I'm misunderstanding, but so high risk is dead discards as a portion of the total catch, and not removals, but the total catch greater than 40 percent, but as we go over to the notes, the proportion of dead discards to total catch is only 13.1 percent, and so are we talking about the risk rating is a proportion of total catch, or are we really saying that this risk rating should be based upon a proportion of total removals, because, in my mind, we're using one term under the risk of overexploitation, but then, under the notes, we're using a totally different way of formulating the risk, and so is it total catch or total removals?

DR. CURTIS: So that's a source of confusion. In the language of the control rule amendment, I think it was stated that it was a proportion of total catch. However, I think the intent was that it was supposed to be of total removals. We have to go back to the language, and we can change that. I believe that would take another going back into that amendment as well, but I think the intent was for that to be the denominator, to be the total removals, but I've included both those calculations there, because it does make a large swing, and you're absolutely right, whether you're looking at that as a proportion of total catch or as a proportion of total removals.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and maybe that's a discussion we need to have, because it's a huge difference in which -- You know, what was the intent? What is our intent? Regardless of what it was, what is it now?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, and so, looking at the numbers here, the recreational discards, and the bottom line says proportion of dead discards to total removals, and it equals 74.3 percent, and so that's telling me that 74.3 percent of the total removals are dead discards in the recreational fishery. Is that correct?

What does the 74.3% represent, and then, under the commercial discards, you have a percentage, for the pots, of 14 percent, and 19 percent for handlines, and so, on the pots, is that telling me that 14 percent of the landed fish in pots are going to be dead discards, and, in the handline, 19 percent? Is that what that is -- That's the way I see it. It looks like, to me, that’s what it is, but I’m not sure.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and the 14 percent in the pots, and the 19 percent in handline, that is the discard mortality rate that was applied in the last stock assessment.

MR. HULL: So that is the rate. Okay.

DR. CURTIS: Total, and so that rate is then applied to the total released fish, and it results in a commercial discards, total dead discards, of 3.89 percent.

MR. HULL: Which means that -- So 3.89 percent of the fish that are harvested are dead discarded? I think -- Didn't this go to our AP, and they rated this, and I know --

DR. CURTIS: They did. Yes, they both rated it, but based on that denominator assuming total removals, and so not -- With guidance from us saying that was the intent, as we believed it was written in the ABC control rule amendment, even though it does explicitly state total catch, because the potential for discard losses would indicate that it's over total removals, and so that, obviously, is a big swing , depending on if you are using the total catch as a denominator or the total removals as a denominator, but both the AP and SSC preliminary scores, and feedback, were based upon them, assuming that was over total removals.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: So, I mean, when we look at how we manage the black sea bass on the recreational side, we have a very high size on it, which leads to lots of discarding, and so it's obvious that you're going to have high amount of dead discards on the recreational side, and then so -- I mean, you could just, common sense, say, yes, it's risky, because we are dead discarding a lot of animals, because we're discarding so many animals, and the percentage that are going to die. On the commercial side, you know, it's not as high.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: I guess it's -- So the only difference in the total catch and the total removals -- The only difference is the total catch is only accounting for releases that are alive. It's not counting for your dead discards, and so that total catch number -- It does have your releases, but it's released alive, and not dead, and so, therefore, the only difference there in that is going to be the dead discards, right, and so I don't know that it's not appropriate to look at the risk as total catch, and I'm not sure how you would have that big of a swing if the discard mortality rate is 15 percent or under.

How could you have a swing from 13 percent to 73 percent, just based on the difference between released alive and released dead, because the mortality rate is only 15 percent, and so it seems, to me, there's a very large disconnect in the math of the difference between released alive and released dead, based on total discards altogether, when, in fact, all of the discards themselves, based on the mortality rate, are -- 85 percent of them are extremely healthy fish, mainly because they're one and two-year-old fish, or one-year-old fish.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and that's -- I mean, that makes sense with those numbers, because you imagine the amount of released fish that are being accounted for in that total catch that do survive the catch and release process. That's a huge amount of numbers that would be added to your denominator, that would then decrease that percentage, right? If you're looking at just the dead discards, and plus your landed fish, your total removals, you're not accounting for all those released alive fish in your denominator, and so that's going to increase your percentage.

MR. GRINER: That's my point, and so my point is you're releasing alive 85 percent of the fish, right, and only -- You're only -- The dead discards are only 15 percent of the fish that you released, and so your risk should be less. Your risk ratings should be less, because you're releasing 85

percent of them alive, and so your risk to the stock is less, because you're releasing -- 85 percent of the fish you release go on to live another day.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I look at this very different than you, Tim, and so I would look at the proportion of dead discards, the total removals, is 74 percent, and so what's that telling us? That's telling us that three out of every four fish killed are due to discard mortality, right, and what have we wrestled with around this table, that we struggle with trying to figure out how to reduce? It's reducing dead discards, right, and so, to me, that points to this as a high risk, and that we need to look at mechanisms to bring down that risk, and, in order to do that, and improve that proportion, we have to figure out ways to shift those dead discards to landed catch and bring down mortality.

The reason that the percentages is so different is what Judd was saying, is that there's a huge number of fish that are being estimated to be discarded, but then most of those are surviving, right, and so -- But yet the ones that aren't surviving still represent a majority of our fishing mortality.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: To build on what Andy said, a lot of these categories are loosely based on the National Standards, and so this one is looking at trying to reduce dead discards, or bycatch, as much as possible, and so envisioning that as a negative thing, and that's what -- That's why the high risk for high number of -- Or high proportion of dead discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just to kind of add on to that discussion, one of the reasons why it is a higher risk, when you have a large proportion of your removals coming as dead discards, is because there is no annual limit on the number of fish that can die from being caught and discarded. There is an annual limit on the number of fish that can die from being caught and harvested, but there isn't --

We can put in -- The council can put in measures to, you know, change seasons, and whatever, but, ultimately, if there is no annual limit on it, then it shifts with whatever effort is put into the fishery, and so having a larger proportion of the removals coming from the part of the catch that is under control via Magnuson, which is an annual catch limit, that's going to have a lower risk than having it in the portion of the catch that doesn't have a limit on it, via Magnuson, if that helps make sense of it a little bit more.

MR. GRINER: It does, to the extent that you're suggesting we should change management measures to not discard the fish, either drop them down to ten-inch fish, or eleven-inch fish, be able to increase the bag limit so you keep more, and, therefore, your risk rating goes down, because your total catch went up in relation to your discards, and so, yes, that does make sense, but those are management issues, right, and so that's -- I guess that's what you're saying, is you change the management issues, and you turn those into -- You turn those into landings, which changes your risk rating.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I mean, the risk rating is the management portion of the ABC control rule. That's where management is able to contribute to the ABC control rule, and, when you all established this ABC control rule, you wanted to be able to have the management contribute to it, along with the scientists from the SSC, and so the scientists contribute their evaluation of the stock assessment, and the uncertainty of the catch projections, and the management ability to come into that is to evaluate what is the risk of the management policies, what have been in place at this point, and what have we seen coming out of this stock and the major sources of mortality that affect it.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so if then the criteria is not total catch, and the denominator is -- It was specified out here, and perhaps erroneously, but out of total removals, then we're looking at 74 percent, much higher than 40 percent, and so it would be a high risk of overexploitation. Are we in agreement? Great. Okay, and so, when you add all those up into the scoring matrix, you have a final risk score of 1.889, and qualifying it as a high risk of overexploitation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Is the dead discard information that we're looking at here -- That's coming from MRIP?

DR. CURTIS: Correct.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Do we have any other data collection, or do states that have information on black sea bass, that we can look at? I mean, I think everybody is concerned about the dead discard numbers here, as we have been with everything else, and the consequences that roll out of this, and I'm not really sure what to do here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Have any of the other states considered an EFP, or some project for this, to try to get some better data on black sea bass? I mean, we're kind of running out of time. I don't know if there's a benefit to anybody thinking about that, or doing that, or would it be helpful?

DR. CURTIS: All right. Okay, and so, if we're in agreement then, if you all are in agreement then on the final risk score, the way this works then is this high value gets integrated along with the biomass estimate from the assessment, that you'll review here shortly, and that is what is used to generate the -- What we call the P*, or the risk of overfishing, and that is your difference between the OFL limits and then your ABC limits.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, I'm almost inclined to go with a medium risk score, just because of the unknown and concern for being overly conservative here, but I don't know where everybody else falls on that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: In order to get to medium, I think you would have to go back and change some of these numbers, to get a number that dropped you to medium, and so we could go back through there, but we went through there, and not a lot of folks had much to say. Tim.

MR. GRINER: I did. No, and I'm kind of with Robert here. I mean, this is very important. I mean, I'm having a very tough time wrapping my arms around that -- Black sea bass is one hardy little fish, right, and you're telling me, on one hand, you're throwing back -- Every year, we're throwing back two-million, or millions and millions of fish, that are ten inches long, right, or eleven inches long, or twelve inches long, and only 15 percent of those are dying, yet we've got -- The risk is extremely high that we're overexploiting this fish, and it just does not make any common sense.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, Judd can correct me if I'm wrong, but, even if you change the risk rating for discards to something that's less risky, you're still going to have a high risk score, based on everything else that we've scored in this matrix. Am I not correct about that?

DR. CURTIS: So, if we did adjust that to a two, it would bring up the score slightly, but it would still fall into the high risk category.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and so my point is there's a lot of other factors that are resulting in risk, and discards is certainly one where I can hear the criticism. The reality is that the discards have gone through a stock assessment, and the stock assessment is reviewed, and this stock is in trouble. The population is collapsing. The fishery-independent abundance indices, regardless of landings or discards or anything else, are telling a pretty bad story right now, right, and so we can argue about whether the discards are accurate or not, how we should calculate them, whether we should use other surveys, and I recognize that's going to get into the management approaches, but, when we're just looking at a risk matrix right now, it really doesn't play a huge component to the overall decision making that we're making here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and, just to add to really what Andy was saying, I mean, if you look at the default score, it says medium, and what has pulled it up, for both us, and the AP even, and the SSC, is the environmental pieces of that, and, to me, that's -- I think, even thinking about from the discussions with the SSC, there's something environmental going on, and maybe it's something we can't control, but I think the take-home story from all this is it -- I think it's reading correct. It's at high risk. You know, we do have high discards, whether they're dead or alive. It's a mostly discard fishery now, and we've got a bunch -- We've got environmental attributes playing into this, and so I think what we have come up with at this point is appropriate.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you. Nothing else needed here for me, Jessica. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Next up is the SEDAR 76 update assessment presentation. Mike, who is going to to give us that?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think we've got John Walter.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think we had John Walter scheduled to give us that. John, are you online? There you go. You should be unmuted now, John.

DR. WALTER: All right. Thanks, Mike. Good afternoon, everyone. Too bad I'm not there in-person. I would have loved to catch dinner at Dixie Crossroads last night. I hope everyone got to try all the different types of shrimp. It's pretty awesome there. I will be giving the update on SEDAR 76, which is the black sea bass stock assessment, on behalf of our Science Center, and so if you can move to the next slide.

The background was that SEDAR 76, the original assessment, was done with a terminal year 2021, and the model did not estimate steepness and used the SPR proxy for MSY. The stock status was overfished, but, at the time, not overfishing with the proxy SPR 30 percent that was on the books. Subsequently, there was concern expressed by the SSC, as well as our analysts, that the analysis didn't match the decline in the indices, and that it would not be giving particularly good catch advice, and that we needed, and really should, update the analysis with data from 2022 and 2023, given the substantial decline in the stock that we are seeing.

That update of the stock assessment was done, and then the SSC requested enhanced projections that incorporated as much of the available data. We had enough data to update the full stock assessment and the projections. We had updated age composition data, the MARMAP SEFIS index, as well as recreational and commercial catch and discards.

There were a few changes to the model that happened. Again, all the data was updated until the 2023 year, which was the terminal year for that model. There was a selectivity change that accounted for a change in size limit that occurred during that time, and, as is our usual standard practice, we prefer to try to estimate the stock-recruitment relationship, if possible.

That's the standard approach, and then only use the proxy if the stock-recruitment relationship is either deemed unreliable or inestimable, and so the stock-recruitment relationship was estimated in the model this time, and then the recruitment assumptions were modified in the last few years to reflect the long-term decline in recruitment and match the recruitments we are estimating in the model, which are, unfortunately, quite low, as I'll show in a few future slides. Then the benchmarks were estimated using maximum sustainable yield, using the stock-recruitment curve, and they're based on total harvest, in weight, including landings and discards.

This is the estimated stock-recruitment relationship, on the left. One thing that you can see is that there's a lack of fit during the recent time period, where most of the recruitments are under the stock-recruitment curve. Those are reflected in another view of the time series of recruitment, on the right, where you see recruitment over time, since about 1978, and then, since 2010, recruitment has been on a long-term decline, declining pretty substantially since that time period of fairly good recruitments back in 2008, 2009, and 2010, and it's that long-term decline in recruitment that's a particular concern regarding the status of the stock.

There's been a lot of hypotheses attributed as to what might be causing that, whether it is an environmental shift, predation, unidentified, or unaccounted for, mortality, but I think the bottom line is that recruitment is low, and we don't have a clear, or clearly identified, smoking gun as to what mechanism might be causing that recruitment. There may be many things that could be involved in that.

Here are the BAM estimated landings and discards. The model estimates the landings and discards, but fits those quite precisely, but also allows for variability in those, or uncertainty in them, in the way it propagates uncertainty throughout the model and the estimates.

Here you see the estimates of landings, in weight, in the top-left, and then in weight and number on the bottom, and then by fishery type, commercial and recreational, and one of the main take-homes here is that we're seeing about the lowest landings and discards of the entire time series, model time series, with a slight increase in the recreational landings in the last two years, but, in general, commercial landings are at their lowest, as well as recreational, and so we're not getting the yield out of this fishery that we should be getting out of it, and that certainly should be of concern, in terms of not getting that yield.

Here is the model-estimated abundance at age, and this is reflecting a pretty substantial decrease since that 2010 peak, as you can see, and that is about a 16 percent decline in total abundance since 2010, per year.

That is a population that is hemorrhaging, and I think, if there isn't concern as to the vulnerability, or status of the stock, this slide alone should say that this is a stock that's in freefall, and, right now, we haven't addressed, or done anything, that might arrest that, because this -- We had this kind of decline back with the previous assessment, and it has continued to decline since then, and so it's certainly something where there needs to be concern as to how to protect the spawning biomass that remains in the population.

On the right side is the fishing mortality at age, and, while there is a spike in the most recent years, I would like people to focus on we're using a three-year geometric average, that smooths out that spike in fishing mortality, but, in general, the fishing mortality is above target levels, and it's increasing, largely due to the decline in abundance.

Remember that fishing mortality is mostly -- In general, it's the catch divided by the fish that are present in the population, and, as the fish that are in the population decline, while the catch stays fairly constant, or even could stay low like this, with a declining number of fish in the population, you're going to get an increasing fishing mortality rate. Then you see that fishing mortality rate by age, where the mortality is highest on the older age classes, due to the selectivity of most of the gears.

Here's a figure of stock status relative to the minimum stock size threshold, and then SSB at MSY, showing that the stock is, in both cases, below those thresholds, and then F over FMSY, indicating that the stock is above -- Or the fishing mortality rate is above, and quite substantially above, the fishing mortality rate relative to the model-estimated MSY.

The projections use the Beverton-Holt stock-recruitment for recruitment forecasting. For the interim years, it uses the geometric average F for the years 2021 to 2023, as the best approximation for what the fishing mortality rate might be in those years, for that interregnum period. The recruitment projection specifications use the Beverton-Holt relationship for -- Then the recruitment deviations for 2024 to 2028.

If you remember that stock-recruitment time series, it takes those low values for that time period, randomly samples from the recruitment deviations, and then runs that through the stock-recruitment relationship, then estimating recruitment, which is going to reflect the low recruitment we're seeing during that recent time period. That's consistent with the working group on stock projections recommendations to use recent recruitment for the most likely recruitment that we would see in the near-term.

Now, from 2029 onward, the model then assumes the Beverton-Holt stock recruitment relationship, then estimating using the average recruitment that you would get from the relationship and the spawning biomass that is present at the time. That has stochasticity, in terms of it. That's all randomly sampled to provide an uncertainty distribution around the catch limits.

Now, we present two scenarios here. One is fishing mortality for landings and discards set to zero. This is the zero mortality run. There's a particular reason for that, and I'll allude to it in the next slide, and then the fishing mortality for landings set to zero, and F for discards assumed to be at the current rates. That is basically if there was no allowable catch, but there was no action that would be taken to reduce the discarding, and that was a subject of an extensive conversation in the previous section, where we do see that the discards are a fairly substantial fraction of what is actually caught, and the dead discards, as we saw in the calculation, are about 75 percent of the landed and obtained catch.

This is the projection with F equals zero, and here you see on the top is the fishing mortality rate, which, once the catch goes into effect of zero in 2027, F goes down to zero. The spawning stock biomass begins a slow trajectory of rebuilding, and it would only rebuild with a 50 percent probability by 2047, and that is, if all mortality was stopped, this stock would only rebuild by 2047.

Then the plots on the right show a condensed version of the same plots, without the historical time period, showing, again, fishing mortality rates, the total removals, and the discards reducing to zero. This is an unlikely scenario, but the rationale behind this is, if indeed a rebuilding plan were needed to be put into place, you would do an F equals zero projection to determine when the stock could rebuild by. If the stock cannot rebuild during that time period, then the rebuilding scenarios would allow for that minimum time plus a generation time.

The next slide is assuming that the total landings are zero, but then discards remain the same as what we're estimating now, and, in this case, we see that the population does not rebuild to SSB MSY at any time, and that is a certainly concerning scenario, given the recruitments that are currently low right now and the desire to build this fishery back up to what it once was.

The summary of the assessment results is that adding more years of data demonstrates a continued decline in the stock. It did allow for estimation of steepness. However, the SSC, and I think we'll hear from the SSC chair more on their view of the assessment, had a lot of substantial debate about the stock-recruitment relationship and the potential for factors that might be affecting whether there is the assumption of stationarity, and that is that the benchmarks are constant over time.

We saw a presentation that showed how our estimates of steepness, or which proxy has been chosen, have changed over time for this stock, and I think we've seen, in a lot of the indicators we have, changes in this population. We're certainly seeing changes in the population throughout the Mid-Atlantic and the Northeast, where populations are now increasing in those areas.

The bulk of the uncertainty in the runs indicates that the stock is overfished, or depleted, and that overfishing is occurring in the recent years, and the key sources of uncertainty in this are natural mortality and discard mortality. Those uncertainties affect all of our models, particularly ones where there is high degrees of discards, but the stock status is robust to the range that was evaluated in this assessment, and it looks like there's a pattern of low recruitment since 2014.

Then, in terms of the hypotheses that I alluded to, it could be an increase in cryptic mortality, i.e., something else causing that mortality, because recruitment deviations are really the factor in the model that can vary over time, and you could get low recruitment either because the fish literally don't recruit to age-zero, or young-of-the-year, as we talked about earlier today, or because something else is affecting their ability to become adults in the population, such as increased natural mortality, increased predation, or increased discarding, unaccounted for discarding, in the fishery.

The stock does not rebuild with zero landings and continued discarding, and so that's particularly problematic, and I think I want to focus on a couple of key take-home messages, because we've talked about, a lot about, benchmarks, SPR, a lot of really technical kind of things, and I think we might get lost in the weeds here.

If staff could pull up the slide from page 13 of the stock assessment report that was given to the SSC, I want to just kind of land on one particular image of the survey, because I think we do need to be cognizant of what the basic indicators are, because we can get kind of lost in the modeling jargon, or in the assumptions that go into models, but the bottom line is that we've seen a long-term decline in this stock, and it's reflected in an index that we think is a pretty good index of the stock.

Sea bass get caught in traps pretty well. That's one of the main fisheries for them, and that's one of our main line advice surveys, and it's showing a long-term decline. We'll get that figure pulled up here, and I think that's the main thing that the council is going to have to deal with, is, regardless of all the other things, what can be done to protect the spawning biomass that is in existence now in the water, and hopefully begin the process of building the population back, and I don't know if we've got that.

DR. CURTIS: John, were you referring to the presentation that was given to the SSC or the actual report file?

DR. WALTER: The presentation, yes, and it's page 13, and I think that's the SERFS index. I just wanted to highlight that the model fits the SERFS index quite well, and I think, you know, sometimes it's been said that you can tell how the stock is going to be when you look at an index, and I think this picture says all those words that we need to know. We've got to try to do something to arrest that decline, if at all possible, and I think that's where I'll end, and I'll be happy to take any further questions from the council. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you for that presentation, John. I had a question about this summary of assessment results, this last bullet on the slide, that the stock does not rebuild with zero landings and can continue discarding. Is that just no landings from federal waters? Is it no

landings from state and federal waters? I was just trying to seek some clarification here. You might have said it and I missed it.

DR. WALTER: That's landings from state and federal waters.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Other questions here? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, John. A quick question, and I just need some better clarity to understand, and so, when you were doing the projections in the interim years to use that average F, and you included that spike in 2023, how does that weigh into the projections, and, if that spike were to be either smoothed out, or a chunk of years going prior to that large spike, what kind of effect would that have on the projections?

DR. WALTER: If we could go to one of the projection files, either one, and probably the one with the discard is F current, and so you've got to squint. There on the upper-left one, you see F current right there is those three years. I think it's two or three years. I call it the interregnum period. It's before management goes into place, and so that's what that geometric mean fishing mortality rate is, and you can see it's pretty substantially smooth, because the geometric mean knocks down those big spikes, but it is a high fishing mortality rate relative to say five years ago.

That's what is assumed to happen in those three years, and then what the impact of it is, is it has a further reduction in the population in the short-term, until management goes into place, and it's not till 2027 that the stock would be on the pace of whatever direction it would be once there's other management.

In terms of its influence on the population trajectory, it probably is going to influence -- If there was a projection that actually had yield advice, it might affect that. In terms of alternate data points, I think that the SSC debated that fairly extensively. I would defer to the SSC chair on the decision to use the geometric mean, but that's usually what's done in those situations where you've got one high data point. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Come back to me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions or comments here? Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you for that, John, and I guess, as I listened to the SSC discuss this assessment, one thing that kept coming back, and I didn't really -- I never could get my arms around it, and I don't think anybody else really did, but I'm asking you if maybe there has been more discussion, or where do we think happened -- Or what is happening to all these released fish from inland waters?

You know, for the last five years, they've ranged from 2.3 million fish to 3.5 million fish, you know, while landings are -- From those same waters are barely 100,000 fish, and where are those fish going, if they're not showing up in the recruitment numbers, and only 15 percent of those are dying, and where are those fish? What is happening to them?

DR. WALTER: Well, Tim, it's a great question. You know, stock assessments don't answer all the questions. They provide stock status and catch advice, and so, when you're presented with low abundance, and really the only tool in the arsenal is to try to address that -- It would be great if we had the answer to where they went, but I don't think answering where they went is going to change the management response, and so I would love, from a scientific perspective, to find out where they went, but I don't think that changes the decision before the council. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert, then back to Tim.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, we talked about this a little bit earlier with Luiz, and I don't think we know where they're going, but drawing a correlation, again, between the explosion of the abundance of red snapper and the decline of black sea bass, and, I mean, it appears to me that, if red snapper are impacting black sea bass, what we're seeing is that that's coming through in the fishing mortality rate.

Whether the red snapper are eating the black sea bass, they're displacing habitat, their larvae is competing for resources, I don't know, but I mean -- That's where I just say it would change how you fish these, because you're not going to correct it with correcting fishing behavior, right, and there's some other factor here that's driving this. It's something else, and --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and Robert is alluding to what I was trying to get to is -- Well, I mean, because those 2.3 million fish that got released in 2020, only 15 percent of them died. Well, even if you don't know where they are, they're somewhere, but they're four years older, except for the natural mortality rate that took something away from those fish, unless there's something else going on, and we're sitting here trying to make management decisions, but we don't really know whether the fish are out there or not out there, and how old they are, but we do know, from the data that we are relying on here, that, every year, all the way up until the terminal year of the assessment, we are releasing 3.5 million of them in our inland waters, and so it's not that they're not recruiting.

It's not that we're not having, you know, that young-of-the-year, or whatever it is. It's that they're continuing to be put back into the water, and they're disappearing, and still growing somewhere, and we don't know, but that does affect management decisions on how we move forward to manage the catch levels of the fish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other thoughts or comments here? Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: John, just going back to the estimation of the stock-recruitment relationship, looking at the figure on the left here, I guess I'm wondering -- You know, thinking back to the discussion of proxies, and estimation of MSY, and estimation of steepness, and also thinking back to how this assessment progressed through time, I mean, there were points where there was an evaluation, you know, that used some -- I think was a point change analysis looking at the different waves of recruitment, or the different patterns of recruitment, in the recent time versus the previous time.

We can see, especially at those smaller spawning stock levels, overestimation of the recruitment by the stock-recruit relationship, and so I guess it seems like there is a pattern to those residuals,

and it seems like there's been a lot of discussion of a change in the recruitment, and so is this a situation where a single stock-recruitment relationship adequately portrays a population with these conditions, where we've seen potentially a change in recruitment, a decline in the pattern of recruitment, over time?

We can clearly see, and like you can kind of follow that 2023 line backwards, and the last twelve years or so of observations are underneath what the model estimates them to be, and so I guess I wonder, and is this a case where steepness is adequately estimated, or is this a case where an MSY proxy might be a viable option?

DR. WALTER: Well, Mike, since you asked me, in large part, I think this discussion occurred at the SSC, and there was a lot of discussion about non-stationarity, and what that decline might be. You know, I certainly see a pretty strong residual pattern there, and so I think that there is -- It's an ample place to look for whether there's non-stationarity, and, you know, I think one of the challenges we face, when we give management advice, and when these change so often, in terms of whether we've estimated MSY or we've got a proxy, is that we lose sight sometimes of the big picture.

I think we've spent hours and hours on the discussion of the proxy, when, regardless of the proxy, your recruitment is really, really low, and on a long-term decline, and I would argue that debating the proxy for another couple of months, while not doing something to at least try to arrest this decline, and see if this stock could come up on an upswing, would be missing the forest for the trees here, and so, you know -- I think that, to answer your question, probably, if the SSC took a hard look at this, they could have found that there was non-stationarity.

I think, in the time they had, they just made their decision that the steepness was estimated, but I think, in either case, there's other factors in play here that are much larger, and more important and compelling, than what the benchmark is right now. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and I don't want to keep harping on it, but something is not right with this recruitment model, because, from 2019 through 2020, the releases have increased 50 percent, and so, if the releases have increased 50 percent, how did they increase if they weren't new recruitments?

You know, I think we need to figure that out, you know, because that's very, very important. You're trying -- We're saying that there's a recruitment issue, but the numbers don't bear that out. The numbers bear that, just based on inland releases, that there's 50 percent more recruits in 2023 than there was in 2019.

MS. MCCAWLEY: C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you. Obviously, this is not a shared stock, but this is a concerning picture you guys have, and, even just if landings stayed at zero, the stock would still not rebuild, just based on discards, and so I guess my question, relative to the discussion on the table, is for our Mid-Atlantic liaison. Are you seeing an increase in catching black sea bass in your neck of the woods?

MR. GWIN: Thank you for that question. As a participant in the pot fishery, this year, I've seen more small fish than I've seen in the prior five years. I've also seen more larger fish than I've seen in the prior five years, which is very unusual for me, especially when I catch the jumbo fish, which normally is a small portion of my catch, and I'm seeing a large number of jumbos also with that small amount of fish, or the smaller fish, six to nine-inch fish. One more thing, and that's east of Ocean City, Maryland.

MS. MCCAWLEY: When was that stock assessment? Sonny, did you all have a stock assessment?

MR. GWIN: I think the stock assessment, if I'm not correct, was last year.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You all have an annual monitoring method, like an index monitoring method, for black sea bass in the Mid-Atlantic? I'm looking at Sonny or Bob Beal.

MR. BEAL: Sonny is looking at me, and so I guess by default. More often than not, there's what is called a management update to the stock assessment each year that feeds into the spec setting process.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Hands are going up. I think we've figured out where the fish are, but okay. Robert, and then Jimmy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and I'm glad we got there, because that's where I was starting to think, and, I mean, if the fish are moving, there's nothing we can do to change that. I mean, what action are we taking here?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, and then Tom.

MR. HULL: Along those lines, we, obviously, don't have the fish anymore, and zero harvest, and we can do that. We can make it to where you can't harvest them, but we certainly can't stop the discarding, and so I don't know that there's much we can do, other than to think ahead and try to look for signs of life in the future, and try to preserve what -- But I don't know how you're going to do it with inshore discards north of -- You know, north of Florida, for instance, and we're at the very southern end of the range, but, you know, we have no bass at all, or very -- I mean, just basically nothing, and so it's just -- I don't see how we can ever rebuild it, and that's what they're saying, and I agree. It's -- You know, we just -- I don't know what in the world we're going to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom, and then back to Robert.

MR. ROLLER: But, on the mention of the Mid-Atlantic stock, it's important to mention that that's a genetically-separate stock. There's some questions about the boundaries, and I guess -- Are we going to be getting some more updates on the genetics of that? I mean, I live on the boundary line, and so -- It's important to point that, you know, the habitat north of Hatteras is very different than south of Hatteras, where the stock boundary is.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Maybe that's not the boundary anymore, because --

MR. ROLLER: That's the question, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert, then Amy, then Trish.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: You know, Jimmy, my fear is -- You said there's nothing we can do to stop the discards. Well, if they close bottom fishing, they'll stop, right, and so, that's my fear, where we're headed to with this, unless we get some real understanding that is this stock moving, or is it not something we can do anything about, or, you know, what's the end game here for this council, based on the information we're looking at?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy, then Trish, then Tim.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and I get it, Tim. The math, and looking at the numbers, is definitely a hard pill to swallow, and, even when we see two to three-million releases, that doesn't actually equate to two to three-million fish. It's potentially the same fish being caught over and over and over again. I think my heartburn is that there's a single discard mortality rate being applied to all the fisheries, regardless of where the fish was caught.

There is no other data to support a lower discard mortality rate to something like the inland fish, or the nearshore fish, versus the offshore fish, and it's almost like an ecological recruitment versus a recruitment to the fishery, and so I'm with you. It's tough, and I struggle with it as well, but we started talking about what's going on with the stock.

As most of you may be aware, there was a genetic analysis of some data collected through a South Atlantic Fishery Management Council-funded black sea bass study, and that study is complete. However, they are still analyzing the data and working on the final report. Again, the objective of that study was to assess, or actually, in fact, reassess the genetic structures for black sea bass along that Atlantic coast, basically from Maine all the way down to Florida, and we collected fin clips, through many partnerships with our fishery-independent surveys in 2024.

We collected them all the way down from Florida, with the trawl survey, all the way up to the NMFS bottom trawl. We also had SERFS data collection, and ChesMMAP, and NEAMAP data were also taking genetic fin clips for us to analyze. The bottom line is that there is still a genetic break in the stock, and it has a similar output from past studies. However, there are high levels of mixing between the southern and the northern populations, and that there is potentially still a transition zone, but still that transition zone is still likely to be in the northern part of North Carolina.

Like I said, that final report should be done in the next couple of weeks. It will be presented first back to the council, since that was the funding entity. However, and correct me if I'm wrong, I believe that there will be presentations both to this council as well as to the SSC this fall to further dive into that. Unfortunately, with it still being not quite final, the final analysis is still going on, and the final report is still happening. Everybody’s just a little bit more patience with the agency would be helpful. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to suggest -- I've kind of been waiting to hear the SSC report, before I had the comments that I had to say about all this, and I was just wondering if we could go ahead and move into that, and then we can continue the conversation, because I think just hearing the SSC stuff is going to be helpful in our discussion as well, and so if everybody is good with that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I'm going to look to the other people that have their hands up, and so Tim was one of them, and Andy was one of them. Did you want to speak now?

MR. STRELCHECK: That was going to be my suggestion, and so Trish and I are on the same wavelength.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just before we go to the SSC, just to respond to one of the questions about the Mid-Atlantic's black sea bass assessment, I just looked it up, and they had their stock assessment completed in 2024, and they actually used like a dual space model, where they had a North Carolina, or the North Carolina-Virginia border, up to I presume about Long Island, I would say, as a southern region, and then above that, into like the New England region, as a northern region. The biomass trends for that southern portion were more or less even, with a slight increase towards the last couple of years, maybe five years of the time series, and, in New England, it was exploding up, with a very rapid increase in overall biomass estimates.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: All right. Well, thank you. John already updated you guys on the background of this update, but I just wanted to remind the council of my presentation in December, where I reported on our request to the Science Center for an assessment update, and the SSC reviewed that update in April, and, because we considered that a new assessment, we applied the new ABC control rule.

As John mentioned, there were several updates compared to SEDAR 76, and they included the general rec and headboat fleets now share a selectivity curve. The Beverton-Holt stock-recruitment relationship was mentioned by John already, and, also, the recruitment in the last two years was calculated from the Beverton-Holt recruitment relationship and the mean recruitment deviates from 2014 to 2021.

For those of you who listened to the SSC meeting and webinar, or were present, you know that we extensively discussed this assessment, and the projections, and the topics included the model assumption, stock-recruitment relationship, discards, combining selectivities, the high F in the terminal year, and John already mentioned that, and also the recruitment, and I've tried to condense the extensive discussions to the essential points, and I'll go through each of these in the next couple of slides.

The SSC noted that some of the model assumptions, in particular one about stationarity in a close population, may no longer be accurate, and this was also discussed in previous SSC meetings, and I believe I included that in some of my previous presentations to you.

This probably led to a considerable amount of uncertainty, and I will come back to that point on various occasions in my presentation, and thanks, Amy, for that update on the genetics. The SSC

discussed this, and, given the information we had at a time, we felt that at least the assumption of a closed population was reasonable, given the genetic and other information, but perhaps that may change.

The SSC extensively discussed the low biomass, and we concluded that that's likely resulting from fishing mortality, environmental factors, and ecosystem interactions. They affect, among other things, natural mortality and recruitment. However, the extent to how much each of these factors contribute is unknown, and that's something that the SSC struggled with.

In terms of the stock-recruitment relationship, and, again, John mentioned some of these. The impact of the changes from mean recruitment in SEDAR 76 to the Beverton-Holt stock-recruitment relationships, that came out of the update, and the ability to estimate the steepness are substantial, and it also goes back to some of the conversations you had earlier about proxies, et cetera.

The steepness, the SSC mentioned that steepness value of 0.39 seems low for a species like black sea bass. Some mentioned that they are probably more characteristic to some longer-lived species. The SSC mentioned also that a steepness value of maybe between 0.6 and 0.8 is more typical for short-lived species, such as black sea bass.

Again, long discussions about the stationarity, the stock-recruitment relationship. As John also mentioned, I believe currently assumed stationarity. A low steepness may suggest some of the non-stationarity, and I think that goes back to the fact that some of the points in the stock-recruitment relationship fell under the curve, and there seems a temporal directionality over time, and, as I said, it doesn't fit many of the most recent years.

Historical biomass trends in the previous black sea bass assessment looked markedly different than the updates, and the SSC mentioned that that may be attributed to the MSY estimate in the update, versus the proxy used in previous assessments, and the SSC recommended -- They recommended further investigating uncertainty in steepness and related use of SPR-based MSY proxies for future assessments, and, again, that goes back to the conversation the council had earlier, and also relative to Luiz's presentation on SPR proxies.

There was a lot of discussion about selectivity and discards. A single selectivity curve for headboat and general rec fishery landings and discards was applied, and, although the landings selectivity may not be as influential, we discussed that the discards selectivity likely -- Is likely very influential, because the majority of the discards are coming from inland and state waters, and you started some of that discussion just now.

Discard selectivity for ages-zero to two is low, and probably not reflective of the length at age of the fish caught, again, in state and inland waters. Those catches have nearly doubled over the time series, while federal catches have halved, and that's something that the SSC noted. Discard lengths for the rec fishery are obtained from the headboat observer discard data only, and none from the private sector, in particular the inland and shore mode, and that may create some uncertainty in these estimates.

What was somewhat counterintuitive was that the inshore versus offshore discards were trending in opposite directions, and I think, Robert, it was you, or someone else, that asked if other

information was available to characterize the general rec discards and discard selectivity for the younger age classes, and so the SSC asked the same question, and, at the time, it was unknown if there were additional information that could be used in these assessments.

Again, extensive discussion within the SSC about the high F in the terminal year. The SSC noted that, and I put this between brackets, a possibly unreasonable high F. This was tenfold higher compared to FMSY in the terminal year, and we talked a little bit about that, and Erik Williams made a similar remark, relative to explaining that high F, but it may be an indication that the model has a hard time predicting the cost of that low recent biomass.

The model can adjust M, the natural mortality, or fishing mortality, or recruitment to account for that low population biomass. In the model, however, natural mortality is constant, and the recruitment is fixed in the terminal year, and so that means that the model can only adjust F, and so that's an important point that the SSC discussed, and there were some other potential reasons for the low biomass in the model, that came out as an elevated fishing mortality.

Those included potentially incomplete cohorts. There was little age structure to inform the model to estimates of fishing mortality. Perhaps incorrect selectivity curves were applied. There may be an under-reporting of discards, and also possibly an unaccounted increase in natural mortality, as I think was also mentioned earlier, and, also, the low recruitment, and I think I'm talking a little bit more about that later, the low recruitment that the model is explaining by these high fishing mortality rates.

Some other thoughts about that high F in a terminal year, and I think John mentioned that the SSC discussed if perhaps a different range of years, for instance from 2020 to 2022, should be used, and that would eliminate that last year for the F over FMSY and the biomass benchmarks, or the projections. However, the SSC also discussed that this assumes a more optimistic starting point for the biomass projections, and this is the figure that I think John also showed at the end for the SERFS index of abundance.

Given that the SERFS abundance index shows further decline in 2024, which is a data point that was not included in the stock assessment, the SSC ultimately recommended that the use of the 2021 through 2023 was more appropriate for the projections.

In terms of recruitment, low recruitment and biomass declines in the recent time period, at least the last fifteen years, are highly uncertain, and likely a combination of fishing pressure, environmental factors, et cetera, and that's what I mentioned earlier. The magnitude of each is unknown.

The SSC was also reminded of the presentation that the Science Center gave in April of 2024, and one of the conclusions of that, and that was the low recruitment working group, and one of the conclusions was that, for black sea bass, likely both fishing and environmental factors are playing a role, and, also, Lauren Gentry provided the SSC with an overview of the ecosystem model, in our last SSC meeting in April, and we feel that that may -- That those efforts may help in assisting investigating possible interspecific and other interactions.

I know that Lauren mentioned that there was still some calibration to be done, but the preliminary information that she presented to the SSC seemed to indicate that there's a possible interaction

between, for instance, red snapper and black sea bass, and so we are looking forward to seeing more of those analyses in the future.

What I think is important to realize, and, again, extensive discussions within our committee, that if environmental factors are an important driver of continued declining recruitment, and if that pattern continues, then the assessment model is likely misspecified, and that means that the population is possibly less productive, and MSY is poorly estimated.

The SSC noted some concerns with the estimation of MSY and steepness that may affect the, quote unquote, overfishing stock status, and that goes back to explaining some of the fishing mortality figures that came out of the assessment, especially in the last year. Fishery-independent index values estimate probably a 95 percent decline from the historic maximum, supporting the overfished determination. Sorry, and, when I mentioned it earlier, I was referring to the overfishing stock status determination. Within the SSC, there was broad consensus that the black sea bass population shows indication of a depleted state, and that was mentioned earlier by John and others also.

In the April review, the consensus recommendation is that, after this extensive discussion, the assessment was considered best scientific information available, under the assumption of stationarity using the Beverton-Holt stock-relationship to estimate productivity. Some model assumptions, including the stationarity, the closed stock, and the constant mortality, may not be realistic and can result in a considerable uncertainty.

Regardless of the cause of the population decline, and, again, that was echoed by many others, the stock is at very low levels, possibly depleted, and fishing effort will need to be reduced, and so the -- Continuing the SSC recommendation, the SSC recognizes that the stock is not expected to recover under current conditions, again, given the Beverton-Holt stock-recruit model predictions, unless the stock recruitment improves. The likelihood of rebuilding is contingent upon recruitment returning to historical levels, and, right now, there are no indications that that is happening.

There was some disagreement within the SSC if the stock has the capacity to rebuild, even with significant reductions in fishing effort, and, if the stock recruitment -- If the low recruitment is a result of environmental factors, that means that there's a change in stock productivity, and shift in the MSY benchmark, and, again, apologies for some of the repetition in my presentation, but that may be a reflection of our discussions at the SSC.

We recommended to use the long-term recruitment for OFL and the short-term recruitment for projections, and that's consistent with the workgroup recommendations, and SSC working group recommendations, and also with general accepted procedures. F current for F 2021 to 2023, and that's that range that I mentioned earlier for the interim years, 2024 to 2026, and then FMSY for OFL projections starting in 2027.

The stock risk rating, and you went through that procedure just now, and the SSC, as you saw on the Excel spreadsheet, was high risk, with low biomass, and, since the council seemed to agree, that meant an ABC was based on a P* of 20 percent, and the requested projections were reviewed in a May webinar, a couple of weeks ago, and so the projections -- A review, and the model assumptions of stationarity and recruitment, based on the Beverton-Holt stock-relationship and

steepness, are carried forward in the projections, and so, all the uncertainties that I talked about earlier, they were carried forward in the projections.

The projections assume landings and discards will go down with decreased F. A large proportion of the discards, as I mentioned earlier, are occurring in state waters, and discards are likely not reduced as much with the new catch level recommendations. Also, the projections assume that discard selectivity from the base model, that I mentioned earlier, that are mostly ages-three and four, and ages-zero to one, are largely unaccounted for in the discard selectivity curve, and that is a potential issue that we discussed, that, again, may have resulted in some model misspecification.

As you discussed, the recreational discards remain high, in spite of a decline in the recreational effort, and, again, the SSC felt it was counterintuitive, and that may actually have some implications for the assessment, but it's important to investigate, in particular, whether it's data-related or something else is going on.

As I said before, fishing is likely not the only cause for the black sea bass population decline, and there's an urgent need to further investigate this, and, if any information is available, the SSC recommends we include it as soon as possible in potential future updates. A reduction in fishing effort is necessary to encourage the stock to rebound, and to protect the remaining spawning stock, and I was reminded by Jeff Buckel, who gave a presentation to council back in 2023, and who mentioned the same at that point as one of the recommendations from the SSC.

Projections, and other information, indicate that rebuilding black sea bass will be very challenging, something that was also mentioned earlier, and that's irrespective of available management options, and then my last comment is that the SSC recommended an ABC based on the provided projections, and they're in Table -- I apologize, and I didn't put them in my presentation, but they're in Table 3 in the SSC report, and, Madam Chair, that completes my report, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Marcel. Questions? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Can we see Table 3 in the SSC report? Can you bring that up?

DR. REICHERT: We'll pull it up, real quick. Sorry that I didn't add that to my presentation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. While we're getting that up, Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Marcel, just a quick question, and so one of the things, that kind of came up through the MRIP pilot study, was a concern about the bias on shore effort, especially in state waters. Was any of that discussed, or talked about, amongst the group? I just know, in Georgia, that's one of Doug's largest concerns, is it looks like our effort is dramatically inflated, and so this, you know, concern about discards in state waters, and is there a chance that that's MRIP, and was that talked about?

DR. REICHERT: I don't remember having extensive discussions about that, but I may be wrong. Perhaps Judd can jolt my memory on that, or someone else who was there, but I do remember we talked about that, about uncertainty relative to those estimates, but I don't remember, and I'm sorry,

but I don't remember specifics of that discussion. Okay. Here we go. This is the table of the SSC report.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Other questions? John Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thanks, Chair. I just wanted to respond to a couple of points that -- One, I think that we have -- We were talking about like the potential overlap between black sea bass and red snapper, in terms of whether one might be affecting the other, and I think that the trends report for the SERFS survey might be useful, in terms of showing the spatial distribution of the two species, which don't necessarily completely overlap, and so certainly there's areas where black sea bass are declining that don't have high populations of red snapper, based on the maps of the fishery data.

That might be a useful reference for the council, particularly because it's got the spatial maps, and it's also got the trends for all of the species there, and so I think, just in terms of an overall reference to document, it's an excellent one. It's authored by Margaret Finch. She's the primary author and it's a South Carolina DNR publication, but thanks for our partners there for putting that together.

The second point is that we have, I think, looked at that movement hypothesis, as to whether the fish are moving outside of the region, and both the genetics would suggest that the determination by the SSC was indeed correct, that they're not moving. Otherwise, you would have a genetic mixing, and, also, when we look at trends in movement from that SERFS data, we're not seeing evidence that the population is moving, and so, to the extent that we've been exploring that, it doesn't look like the fish are simply swimming north and out of the region.

I guess the other question I have is I'm still confused as to what Tim is alluding to, in terms of this loss of fish between the inshore and the offshore, and so I don't really -- You know, I can follow-up offline, as to what's meant there, but thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: A quick response to your first point, John. I think that's probably very useful to look at. One caveat is that to make sure that, and I'm not sure what year ranges are currently in the trends report, but, obviously, the distribution of both, of occurrence of both red snapper and black sea bass, have changed over the years, and so it's good to -- If people look at that, to also take into account the years over which those maps are constructed, and so, anyway, just as an additional comment. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you.

DR. WALTER: Do we have the maps over time that would indicate that, Marcel?

DR. REICHERT: That's probably a question for the SERFS folks. I know that we did that in the past. I think there is one available for red snapper, but that can certainly be constructed. Usually, what we have done in the past is use a number of years, and that creates a little more data, and so I think we did every five years, and so I think that information is available. I'm not sure if it's readily available, but -- I don't want to speak for Wally and Tracey at South Carolina DNR, that usually do those analyses, but they can definitely be made available. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I thought I saw a hand up over here. Clay.

DR. PORCH: Thank you. I agree with John. I think it's going to be hard to pin this on red snapper. There might be some interactions going on, but I don't think that's going to be the primary driver, but one thing I did want to throw out there is we certainly wouldn't want to discount the environmental changes. I mean, we're all seeing it, and they do have some impact, and some of the preliminary work we've done does suggest that the winter/spring spawners are tending to show declining recruitment trends, whereas the summer/fall spawners, like red snapper and vermilion snapper, are starting to increase, or continuing to increase.

Then, of course, one of the reputed competitors with vermilion snapper is red snapper, yet vermilion are still increasing, and so I think we have to be careful about blaming red snapper for declines and everything. However, what we are seeing is, because of the warming temperatures, warming sea surface temperatures, we're seeing a decrease in upwelling, which would affect primary productivity, and you could imagine, and this is particularly happening during the winter months, that would have an influence on recruitment, and so it is quite possible that there's a changing environment affecting the recruitment of young fish to the population. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'll look to Amy. I think Tracey is online, and ready to answer some questions for us.

MS. DUKES: That is correct, Madam Chair. If it's applicable to this council, I would like for her to be able to address that question that Marcel had mentioned about the maps, please.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Sounds great. Can we unmute her?

DR. SMART: Can you all hear me?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. Go ahead.

DR. SMART: All right. Great. To the distribution questions, yes, we have things over time. A couple of options for looking at that. Nate Bachelor recently was a lead author on a paper describing the distribution and habitat associations for red snapper, and then Julie Vecchio was the lead author on a paper describing the changing spatial distribution of black sea bass, and both are primarily based on the SERFS survey, and so those are good comparison. I know, at least in Julie's paper, there's year-by-year maps, and then, additionally, you know, from the trends report, we have five-year blocks, and so we could certainly show over time.

You know, historically, black sea bass was really widely distributed. Now it's much more concentrated in that Georgia to North Carolina area. Red snapper, when it first started coming back after 2010, was really concentrated in that northern Florida. It has spread out, but the decrease in black sea bass has certainly happened in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and, you know, maybe a little bit less in North Carolina, just based on some preliminary data that we've looked at.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right. Trish, you had your hand up.

MS. MURPHEY: I don't know, and so maybe we can just get some more discussion going, but I listened to -- I'm not a stock assessment scientist, and everybody knows that, and so I'm not a

mathematician, but, in listening to both SSC meetings, and all the concern and uncertainty discussion, and, you know, all this, like the concerns of non-stationarity, the more and more I hear people speak, I think that assumption is very possibly wrong on this non-stationarity.

I mean, even just what Clay was saying about how things are changing, and we're getting warmer, you know, warmer springs. You know, we've got a changing environment, and so I am assuming that's a piece of what we would call non-stationarity, right, and so that, and the discard data. I mean, there's lots of concerns about the discard data. I know there was concerns about the commercial logbooks.

One of the big discussions, and also talking with our staff at DMF, using the headboat data for discards, in both the private rec and offshore, I think is probably a big reach. I mean, I am making the assumption that the majority of headboats go greater than three miles. That may be a wrong assumption there, but my guess is it's probably pretty correct, and so just using that data for, you know, discard data is probably just not appropriate, and it's got something to do with selectivity.

So, you know, again, I think Marcel said something about, you know, this model, if it doesn't know what to do with the numbers, it feeds it to F. That's why we've got such a high F, and so M was -- Or natural mortality is fixed. Everything is fixed, and so where is all the unknown numbers going to go, or that cryptic mortality, if you will? The model itself is going to send it to F. I think that's why we got that crazy high F.

You know, even the SSC themselves were talking about there's a lot of environmental factors that could be impacting black sea bass, and so -- Then, you know, in the presentation that John gave, we get there, and we have, what, F set at zero, and discards at what's current, and it can't rebuild. That, to me, screams, you know, is there a regime shift going on, and is there non-stationary? Is there a regime shift going on? Are those assumptions that were made in this particular stock assessment the correct assumptions?

I just wonder if we -- If the question of regime shifts should be, you know, looked at again, and, you know, are those assumptions right on the stationarity, you know, and then just, you know, these ABC recommendations, and, I mean, we're not going to -- It ain't going to work. I don't see -- I mean, I get this assessment may be BSIA, but I'm not sure if it's useful for us to manage. That's my concern about this.

I don't know whether there's an option, and I know we don't want to push it on down the road. I know we're working on an amendment right now that's got some things in there that we could use to, you know, try to address, you know, protecting what spawners are out there, but there's a lot of unknowns. That inshore/offshore thing is a big -- It seems to be a big deal, and it looks like it's becoming a bigger deal, and I just don't have faith in this particular stock assessment, and no offense to the agency.

I don't know whether -- You know, is there some way that somebody outside can look at this and, you know, see if they can just make me feel better about it, but the biggest thing is I just feel like there's a lot of assumptions that are wrong, and I just don't think that this -- I just don't think these recommendations are helpful for us, and I'll stop there, but those were my thoughts after spending some time on this, and so thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Marcel, I had a question about this table. Just to add, and I don't know if you wanted to respond to anything that Trish said, but those ABC recommendations, going through time, they're going down between 2024 and 2028. Is that because of uncertainty in the model, or is it because recruitment is thought to continue to be going down?

DR. REICHERT: That, and maybe John or Clay can address that also, but that is because the interim years, until management is taking place in 2027, those are based on a different set of assumptions than the start of 2027. I hope I explained that clear. The 2027 is based on the OFL that rolled out of the assessment, and then the -- Does that make sense?

DR. WALTER: I can answer that, if you want.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you.

DR. WALTER: Yes, and so the biomass is declining. It's using a constant fishing mortality rate, multiplied by a declining biomass, and that's why it has declined between 2024 to 2027, and then management kicks in in 2027. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, you had your hand up a minute ago.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so this is a tough one, and I hear, obviously, the criticisms of the stock assessment, and I'm not going to defend the assessment. I think what I'm trying to think of is how do we move forward from here, right, and what's the next step, and I appreciate all the work that's gone into this, from the science to the SSC's work.

I did maybe have a few questions, either for John or Marcel, in kind of thinking through this, but, setting aside the stock assessment, we obviously have this very dire, you know, looking trend in the SERFS index, right, and so that's a leading indicator that is giving me, obviously, a lot of concern, and pause, with regard to the health and status of the population, whatever the drivers might be.

With the assessment, kind of breaking it apart, the decline has been happening, and it was estimating overfishing to be occurring for some time, but then it has this, obviously, spike kind of in the last year. Marcel, this is for you. You know, you made the comment, in your presentation, that -- I forget what you used, but that -- Sorry, and I should have had it up in front of me, but that, by using the three-year average, essentially, that it would be -- For 2020 to 2022, that that would be less -- That would be more optimistic, right, and so you guys decided to, you know, include 2023, because it's essentially less optimistic, right?

My concern is not so much the optimism as the realism of that 2023 estimate, because I could look at it the opposite way, is that we're being overly conservative, and we're having to reduce far more than what's really going to affect the stock, right, and so was there conversation around that, because I feel like there has to be a balanced approach there, with regard to really looking at why is that spike happening, and how confident are we in that one estimate?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and there was extensive discussion about that, and, initially, the SSC felt that perhaps we should eliminate the last point, and then, ultimately, because several people in the SSC -- Several members in the SSC brought up that point, and then, looking at the continued

decline in the SERFS index, the consensus ultimately by the SSC was to include that last data point, but there was extensive discussion about that. I get your point, in terms of how conservative you may or may not want to be, but that's where the SSC ultimately ended up as a consensus, but there was extensive discussion on that point.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and then, kind of related at that, and not that there's a one-to-one relationship between fishing mortality going up and an index dropping, right, but the index essentially has been trending kind of at the same rate downward, a very low level, but there's not like a significant drop in 2023 that represents the spike in fishing mortality, and so I just wanted to note that.

Regardless, whether we use the last three years or we drop 2023, I think the point, from the assessment, is fishing mortality, even at this low abundance, is higher than it needs to be, and we need to look at bringing down fishing mortality, right?

The second question maybe goes to John. The stock-recruitment relationship, versus F 40 percent, you know, looking at the residual patterns, those, you know, low recruitments were happening with the prior stock assessment, before the update, and so I'm just curious what led to the stock-recruitment relationship being able to be fit with two years of additional data, because that, to me, I think, is an important discussion as well about SPR 40 percent, versus using the actual stock-recruitment relationship.

DR. WALTER: Andy, thanks for the question. Well, when you get more years of data, then that feeds into giving you more information, you know, but I think the concern that, well, if we get two more years of data and rerun this, is it going to give us something different? That always, from a stock assessment analyst's mind, always is a bit of a concern, and you do want something that has some stability for your benchmark, and so, you know, I think that's -- We did see that it has changed pretty substantially over time, in terms of what we have either employed as a proxy or estimated, and I don't know that it's been given that much more real information to do so, and so I think it's -- The concerns noted by the SSC, that this wasn't one of those rock-solid estimates, I think were probably well-founded. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Gary.

MR. STRELCHECK: Hold on. One other point, and so, to my last point, and it relates to the non-stationarity, based on how we would define overfished, clearly a 95 percent drop in biomass is indicative that the stock is depleted, and, you know, whether it's fishing-related or something other, it's definitely depleted, right?

The concern I guess I have with the projections is not so much that we don't rebuild, but it's what do we rebuild to, right, and it’s the uncertainty about what's happening with this stock and whether we have a rebuilding target that's realistic to build back to, and so that's where I get back to the importance of figuring out ways to reduce fishing mortality, to see if the stock is going to respond, trying to also figure out how we address mandates related to overfished status, given the uncertainty surrounding the fact that we really don't know, at this point, I think, what we are going to try to rebuild to, given the changes in the stock biomass.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for those comments. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Okay. Trying to move forward here with this conversation, anticipating sort of how this conversation was going to go, ahead of time, some smart people got together and came up with a potential path forward, and I would like to make a motion.

I'll make the motion, and hope for a second, and I'll give some high-level rationale, and then, if needed, we can get into some nitty-gritty rationale. The motion will be, and I believe it can be up on the board, through Snapper Grouper Amendment 56, establish commercial and recreational annual catch targets, aka ACTs, that are equal to 50 percent of the average landings from 2019 to 2023 for each sector. The recreational ACT would be calculated using landings in CHTS units. The council will reconsider ACTs and associated management measures two years after implementation. Direct the IPT to draft actions that would be expected to lead to landings that are below the respective sectors' ACTs. Those actions would include making recreational and commercial size limits the same length, reducing the recreational bag limit, reducing commercial trip limits, implementing a spawning season closure, where harvest of black sea bass would be prohibited for both sectors, including January through April of each year. At a minimum, the closure would cover the months of March and April. Request that the SSC reevaluate the MSY estimate and reconsider the 40 percent SPR proxy recommended previously, in light of the uncertainties identified with the MSY estimates and the SSC recommendation to investigate, quote, the use of an SPR-based MSY proxy in a future assessment, because of the uncertainties in the stock-recruitment relationship and the potential for non-stationarity, end quote. Reconsider the use of the high terminal F estimate from 2023 and the estimation of the assumed fishing mortality rate for the interim years in the projection analysis. Direct council staff to work with SSC leadership and the center to conduct additional peer review of the SEDAR 76 assessment update. Again, if I can get a second, I'll give some very high-level rationale, and then we can discuss.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish, are you seconding? All right. Thank you. All right. Back to you, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Just real quick, you know, the sort of the thinking behind this is, you know, that we take action now, recognizing the decline and the need to take action, while the details of the rebuilding plan are worked out within the two-year clock. Instead of using the entire two-year clock to run -- You know, instead of running out that clock, and we could be doing nothing during that time, and so, in this way, we're being proactive and precautionary, but also while looking forward to the assessment being updated, and we're going to have to update this assessment with the new FES numbers. It's out there that that's an issue. We cannot make drastic changes at this point without that update, and so that's the high-level rationale. As you can see, this document contains a significant amount of detailed rationale, and I believe other people can probably weigh-in.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, if you were looking, so you could see the whole document at once, and John just emailed it around to the council members. Comments? Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, once you get the official notification in your clock, right, then that starts working towards your legal deadlines, but you have to end overfishing immediately, and I don't think we would be able to build a record to show that this ends overfishing. Maybe I'm not understanding that, but I think any action that goes forward, unless it's an

emergency request to reduce or address overfishing until you take action longer-term, and not emergency. Excuse me. Interim rule, and then I think any action you take needs to end overfishing, and I know you just put this up there, and I don't fully understand it yet, but I just put that out. That will be an issue for any action you guys take going forward. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for your comments, Shep. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I'm go back to the end of what Andy said before the motion was made. I was struggling a little bit with the idea that we know we need to reduce fishing mortality, when we just talked about there may be other factors, environmental or other, and so, even in the rationale, we say, you know, the council nonetheless agrees that fishing mortality should be reduced.

Shouldn't we also be looking at ways to try to reduce natural mortality? I mean, to the point -- I don't know, again, what bucket that goes into, predation and some of these other things, but the issue I'm having with ending overfishing is, even if we stop fishing, you're not going to correct it, and so, you know, on that basis, there's nothing we can do to end overfishing, based on the information we're looking at.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that. Yes. Other folks? Tim.

MR. GRINER: I guess I need to be refreshed on where we stand with an actual absolute determination of overfishing or overfished. You know, our clock is not ticking, because we don't have any -- We haven't received that, and when does our clock start ticking? As far as I know, until we've agreed upon that 40 percent, we're not overfished, or overfishing, and I guess I'm a little confused on where we actually stand with that portion of this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I'm going to go to John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We haven't received a letter yet, and so we haven't received a determination of overfishing. The overfishing question, obviously, hinges quite a bit on what the actual reference point is going to be. There is overfishing, over the last seven or eight or maybe more years, relative to the FMSY estimate. Recall the original SEDAR 76, and you weren't overfishing, except for slightly in the very last year. You know, you weren't overfishing, and you had a discussion about that, even at the F 30 percent SPR. At the F 40 percent, you were overfishing a little bit in the last year.

The absolute Fs are actually lower in this update than what they were in 76, during that period. The severe overfishing, and particularly going back in history, comes from the FMSY being where it is, and so I think, depending on how the SSC interpreted the last few years of the assessment and looked at say the 40 percent SPR that's been talked about, we would have to see what the overfishing determination would be in that case, but I think, regardless of the numbers, in a practical sense, this stock probably is overfishing, and needs to be responded to, but I think, you know, understanding where Shep is on ending things immediately, if there were a rebuilding plan, we're going to be under an obligation to take action within two years.

As Kerry pointed out, we could, as the council has often done, play this game out over those two years, and don't take any action, and I think that would be the most unfortunate thing for this stock,

and we know we're not just going to stop there, because we know the FES numbers are coming out to us, and we know that the discards are a big problem, and those are uncertain in FES, and we know that the insure has been particularly uncertain, and we've already talked about, at this table, about the inshore effort being particularly high, and so, in my mind, we have like this trainwreck of things coming.

This is an effort to try and get the council ahead of it, to do something to stop the bleeding on this stock, that's substantial, while we work through these issues, and several that Andy mentioned. What are we rebuilding to? What is the appropriate rebuilding target? Can we do it? What is the non-stationarity in the environment doing?

I think, if we acknowledge, as this table seems to have done, that non-stationarity is likely occurring, and I reflect on the SSC's recommendations that it's BSIA. If you assume stationarity, and it's overfishing relative to the FMSY. If you assume stationarity, their report, later on, says non-stationarity seems likely. We've heard several reasons from Clay and others about non-stationarity potentially being likely.

I think that, to me, supports asking the SSC, or somebody, as the motion says, some type of additional peer review, and another look at this and so, to me, that essentially says the council is questioning, and, you know, not accepting, or what have you, these current ABC recommendations that you have, and it doesn't provide a basis for generating a status determination at this time, but I think the status determination is coming.

I think, whether you've got one or not, you should consider taking actions to try and recover and rebuild this stock, and end overfishing, and the sooner the better, and so, if we can find a way to get here and do this, while all of those other pieces play out, I think we're ahead of the game for the stock. That's really the impetus behind this.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, John. That was very helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So we only have three more minutes before we need to break for public comment today, and so, unfortunately, we have a hard stop right there. Are people ready to take a vote on this? I saw a hand up over here. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was glad to see this motion come up, because at least we're trying to do something, rather than nothing, because, in my view, the only thing we can do is prepare ourselves, to try to protect the slim chance that we get some recruitment, and we need to protect that recruitment in the future, and that means not catch it, and, you know, a lot of it's just a hope and a prayer at this point, in my opinion, because I don't see where we're going to get any eggs from, and so I'm glad to see the motion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, lots of questions here. I guess my main concerns is how this all fits together with determinations of best scientific information available, the ABC advice, obviously, of the SSC. I'm not necessarily disagreeing with a number of the statements. I guess one question I do have is the basis for just the 50 percent reduction in average landings from 2019 to 2023. How is that calculated? Was there any rationale behind that?

MR. CARMICHAEL: It's in there. There's a statement in there about that. It's really looking at the F, and recognizing that there's a lot of question about the F over FMSY, but it's still using that as part of the justification nonetheless, and the average F over FMSY -- Yes, and it's up there. The average F over FMSY, over ten years, is two, so the idea is a 50 percent cut is in line with saying you're two-times overfishing, and I think that's kind of conservative, because, if you were to look at the F 40 percent SPR, you're not overfishing as badly, but I do feel, just looking at the trends in the fishery, that a 50 percent cut is not unreasonable, given all that we're seeing, and certainly, if you look at those projection tables, you're seeing a bit even more, in terms of the cut.

That's basically the rationale, and I think this really further highlights the issue, as noted there, with just how high that terminal F is, considering you've got near twenty years of F being around like 0.6, and then you get this spike in the end, for lots of reasons the SSC talked about, and it just seems like that really drives the stock down in those projections, in those interim years, and, I mean, I think, if you look at the F value that's in there, and you factor in the M, and so you look at the Z, which is the total losses, that model is essentially removing 87 percent of the four-year-old fish and 97 percent of the five to eleven-year-old fish between -- During 2023, and so you're just devastating this population.

Now, not saying the population is getting better, and the landings actually dropped 20 percent in real terms over that time, but I don't think the population dropped 80 percent. Like Andy said, the survey is going down, but we don't see any signs of this huge, precipitous decline, and so I think we really have to question that terminal one, but that's basically it. It's kind of a hybrid of, you know, what we have in the assessment, and trying to use what we can, and thinking maybe that's not a ridiculous reference point to consider.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so thank you for that explanation. **So, given the length of this motion, just the inability to digest it in a short period of time, as well as I think the need to just talk about the legal ramifications, I'm going to make a motion to table this for discussion until tomorrow.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. A motion to table is not debatable, and so we need to go ahead and take a vote, and so you're taking a vote not on this motion, but you're taking on a vote on the motion to table until a time certain, which would be tomorrow morning, when we pick this back up, because we're going to go into public comment tonight, and so we're getting that motion on the board.

All right. **We didn't know what day it was up here, and so the motion is to table the discussion of the black sea bass motion until Thursday morning.** All right. Okay. A second? I saw hands up over here. Okay, and so the motion has been seconded. No discussion. **If you are in favor of tabling this until tomorrow morning, please raise your hand. Twelve in favor. Those opposed has got to be zero. Those abstaining, zero. I don't need to vote on this. Okay, and so the motion passes.** We will be tabling this discussion until tomorrow morning, and, Madam Chair, I'm going to pass it back to you as you take us into break here before public comment.

MS. MURPHEY: All right. Thank you, everyone. We will adjourn until four o'clock, and then we will just take on the public comment, and so we'll just break, or, actually, yes, we'll break, and not adjourn, and come back at four o'clock.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on June 11, 2025.)

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JUNE 12, 2025

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council reconvened at the Radisson Resort at the Port, Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Thursday, June 12, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We are going to start back, as stated yesterday, back with black sea bass. We had a motion that we laid on the table until we could come back today, and so I believe that Mike is going to go right into that motion, and let's continue discussing that. We're having some technical issues. Standby. All right. We're good. We're back. Thank you for that side quest. All right, and so we're back on this motion. Let me see some hands for some discussion on this. Don't everybody jump at once. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you, and good morning, and so I support this motion. I like it. I think it addresses a lot of the concerns that the agency has, that I have, about what we need to do to try to rebuild this black sea bass stock. I've talked to the last commercial sea bass pot fishermen that I know of, and there's not many left, and explained this to them, and both of them support it. I'm the last one in Florida. I support it, and so it's supported by the commercial sea bass pot fishermen, and they think it was the right thing to do, and so I don't -- That's what I have to say so far. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: Thank you. Good morning, everybody. Let me see what I was going to write here, or what I was going to say here. I do think there's something besides -- Going on with the black sea bass besides overfishing. I do believe that the fish are moving towards the north, or possibly having some kind of change, because, for over fifty years, we've caught large amounts of black sea bass, especially during certain times of the year, at the artificial reefs and the live bottom areas located at the Gulf Stream and the snapper banks.

I am agreeing with making recreational and commercial size limits the same length. I'm trying to move something on my screen, and I can't do it. Okay. Let me see this. Reducing the recreational bag limit, and reducing the commercial trip limits, and implementing a spawning season closure, and the consolidation of power within this council has the ability to streamline and speed up the decision process. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Judy. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, first, thanks for those that helped put this motion together. I'm in general agreement with it as well, and so I guess one thing, and we didn't untable this, did we?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I talked to John about that, to see if we needed to untable it, and he said, since this was the time certain, we would just go with it, and so I did have that conversation with staff.

MR. STRELCHECK: All right. Thank you, and so a few thoughts that we've had, and so one is you do have ABC advice from the SSC, and so this is potentially contrary to that ABC advice, because Magnuson, obviously, requires you to set catch limits at or below that ABC advice. The hard part is it's an apples-and-oranges comparison, because the ABC advice is in FES units, and this would be in CHTS.

You have to either have the SSC retract the ABC guidance going forward, if this is used for 2027, or a best scientific information available determination made that it's not BSIA, and so we just wanted to flag that, because we're not necessarily opposing this. I think it's just a hurdle, a legal impediment, that we need to think through, and it probably would be good to return back to the SSC for consideration, if this motion passes.

With that said, the main thing I've talked to a few people about is trying to do something for 2026, which we don't have ABC advice for, and so this would certainly be able to be done for 2026. We could move Amendment 56 forward, maybe in a scaled-down version, and try to get something implemented by the middle of next year, and so, from that standpoint, I support this, and then the only other thing I'll add, if you can scroll down in the rationale section, and it's the third bullet.

It says, as part of that, the council considers the burden of proof to be high, given the consequences of the recommendations, and then provides a list of, you know, rationale. I think we need to really be careful about some of this rationale, because I think it truly needs to be tied to the scientific advice we're receiving. Some of the statements in the, you know, rationale below talked about the complexity of this action being significant, taking longer to implement, slowing down development.

That's not reason to not accept the scientific advice, right, and that is the management challenges of acting on the advice, and so I would suggest striking a good portion of this language, in terms of the rationale, and maintaining the information above about, you know, the council, given the SSC's input, lacks the confidence in the accuracy of the projections, for the following reasons. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Shep, I think you had your hand up.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. I'll go a step further, I guess, with the rationale and advice. I would remove the entire rationale. We don't usually include that as part of the motion. You would include that in support of the motion. I would echo what you just heard from Andy, in terms of not providing, you know, a management-based rationale to address a science issue, right? You want them to reconsider this, and focus on the scientific concerns you have, and not the complications that will arise for management as a result of following the scientific guidance you've been given, but, just in terms of the motion, you know, the substance of the motion overall, I do see problems, potential problems, with using the CHTS units.

At a minimum, we're going to need some sort of explanation for why we used that, versus FES. We've done that before, but it's always been on an availability of ABCs through FES, which is not an issue here, and, again, as Andy mentioned, you have the existing ABC recommendation from the SSC, and so we have to deal with that.

The other point I wanted to mention, relative to CHTS, is can we track going forward if we set an ACL in CHTS? Can we track that going forward in CHTS? I mean, I know we've done that in the past, and we'll know if we still do that, and so that's just something to consider. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Shep. John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Just to clarify, I don't think it was the intent that the rationale is part of the actual motion. That's why it's separated out there, but it was intended to provide the council some sense of, you know, justification for this, to really support this discussion here this morning, and I think it's completely appropriate for, you know, as Andy suggested, tweaking some that third bullet there, and that additional detail, because the intent here is to end up with something that does --

That the entire council agrees to, that summarizes why we're taking that action, and I think provides some guidance, and clarification, to the SSC on why we're not, you know, potentially accepting those ABC recommendations as they now stand, because that's always one of the huge challenges that you face whenever you're kind of -- You know, are you not jumping right on that, and the SSC is always curious as to why, and so it intends to provide a little more background, and hopefully some language that helps in the amendment itself, as to why we're doing what we're doing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I had other hands up. I'll go to Amy next, then back to Shep, then to Jimmy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair. Mike, would you go back to the motion, please? Thank you, sir. I will support this motion. I think this is, again, kind of piggybacking on what Kerry said yesterday. This is a proactive step by this council. It definitely has some caution in there, but it's showing the fact that we recognize that there's a need for us to do something.

I will say that, from the science side of the house, that winter closed season could be really essential for this stock, and this potential to rebuild. I would ask that maybe the IPT look at spawning season closures in two-month waves, or two-month sections, a little bit differently. Perhaps it might be neat to have the IPT look at perhaps a February and March closure, because that better aligns with the spawning season, more so than a March and April closure, just if that is food for thought for the original motion maker.

I will add too that, as some of the observer coverage programs continue to come onboard, specifically in the for-hire fisheries in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, as well as the South Carolina red snapper discard project, which does include observations of both for-hire and recreational boats, there is the potential for some discard data that could become available in the future as well, and so hopefully we'll have a little bit more information on the table, too.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Shep, and then Jimmy.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to note, relative to the ABC, that, when the SSC provides an ABC recommendation, the council doesn't have to accept it for it to become binding. When they provide it, it's binding, and so we have it, and you have to go back and get another one before you would be able to set a catch level that exceeded that recommendation. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, then Tim.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I think, the talk about the rationale, the second bullet point, which states the council agrees with the overfished stock status determination and the need to notably reduce black sea bass harvest. Survey results and fishery trends reflect a declining stock, and we, obviously, all agree with that, and that's the main rationale I see for doing this.

Then the next question is what is a dynamic management response? I mean, what falls under that category as a dynamic management response? Is this an emergency action? Is this going to be a full-fledged -- How long is this going to take?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I'm going to briefly bring up the timeline that's in the Amendment 56 document, just because that gives a little bit of a frame of reference of where we were planning to go with 56 to begin with, and so we're here in June 2025. The plan originally was, in September of this year, to have a draft amendment come to the council and for you all to consider approval for public hearings. Public hearings then would be conducted in the fall of this year.

We scheduled kind of an extra meeting in between, as an approve all actions, also knowing that black sea bass is a pretty complicated situation. That originally was planned to allow the council to have any additional analysis, requests, anything like that. If you take that step out, and you just move the approve for formal review up to December, then you would be approving for formal review in December, and so we would have a public hearing draft in September and final approval in December, from the council end.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks. That was helpful. Tim.

MR. GRINER: I don't know if I've ever done this again, but, Shep, could you repeat yourself? Could you say what you said again, please? I'm not sure I caught it all.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. The last statement I made relative to the ABC?

MR. GRINER: Yes, sir. The statement about the relative to the ABC, please.

MR. GRIMES: Well, yes, and I just said that, when you get an ABC recommendation from your SSC, it doesn't become binding after you accept it. It's binding on you when they provide it, right, and it isn't that the council reviews the ABC recommendation, and accepts it and says, okay, we're accepting this one, and now it binds our ACL. When they provide it, it binds your ACL.

You need to go back to them and get a new one if you want to exceed that recommendation, but one of the things that Andy just mentioned to me, that I wasn't thinking of when I said that, is, technically, your ABC recommendation, your reductions in harvest, don't kick in until 2027, because that's what the SSC provided. Those interim years are specified what they would expect you to catch, because 2027 was the earliest it was expected that you could get it in.

I would not guarantee, or I wouldn't bet, that, if we were in litigation, a court would read it the same way and say, oh, well, you really don't have an ABC recommendation until 2027, because that's how they mapped it out in the table. I think another interpretation might be that you've got an ABC recommendation, and that's the earliest that it was expected that you could implement it, and that's how they provided it to you in the table, and so I wouldn't guarantee that we could say, oh, well, we don't have an ABC until 2027. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Tim, and then I'm going to John, and then to Carolyn.

MR. GRINER: Thank you for that. There's never any guarantees in court, and so that could go either way. Thank you, Shep.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You know, because I think people are thinking that there are instances where various councils have asked SSCs to reconsider ABCs, and maybe that's what you're saying, Shep. It's in effect, but the council still has the right to ask that the SSC reconsider that ABC, and I think, you know, if we have a motion that says things like we think additional peer review is required -- If we're saying that, you know, the basis of BSIA hinges on an assumption of stationarity, and we've discussed that non-stationarity seems to be the truth, then, yes, I think there's a number of reasons to ask that the SSC reconsider this ABC.

I guess the question is, you know, and maybe it's for Andy, given like -- I feel like we've got a path forward that lets us deal with this, regardless of that. You know, is that really necessary at this point, or can we get this forward, and let the SSC do their stuff, and avoid it, you know, because we don't want to create friction with the SSC, and we don't want to seem like we're not following the scientific advice, but there is a legitimate question. We need the right path forward that, you know, ensures that the council doesn't just yield all of its ability to question things and make decisions and follow-up.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: I just want to make sure -- I have a question, and so it's -- I just wanted to make sure that there's conversation, and I don't want to derail that conversation with that first, but --

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think it's fine. Go ahead.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. I just had one question relative to the spawning season closure, because three states don't do the recreational sampling in Wave 1, and are we going to be underestimating what a closure is actually going to get for us, if that's what we're asking for? Again, if we're trying to quantify what we're getting, and we're talking about Wave 1 sampling, but that's not in place, or we don't have a time series that's in place for Wave 1.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, and then Trish.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think having that knowledge is useful, and we can make sure we note that within the IPT. Obviously, if there's no data there, then we're going to have to use some type of alternative method, and maybe use the wave before, or the wave after, something like that, to inform any estimates of the harvest change that would result from that, but it is helpful to have that information, and we can bring that to the IPT. I think we have information that we can work with to come up with an estimate of what the potential harvest change would be. We'll just need to make sure that we communicate with the SERO staff that does the season length and the different analyses that go into the amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Well, I was going to say North Carolina does do Wave 1, and my sense is that we're still getting some black sea bass, and so that may be helpful, that at least it's North Carolina that does have the sampling for Wave 1.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn, did you have more questions? Okay. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I appreciate the changes to the second bullet point. I think we're getting there, but where it says "the council agrees with the overfished stock determination in SEDAR 76 and the need to notably reduce black sea bass harvest", I think it's black sea bass mortality, in various different ways.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm just going to assume we're good with that. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Here, I think "harvest" is appropriate here in this bullet, and the reason saying is that is something we can control. We can't really control mortality, and so I think -- I understand where Robert is coming from, but I think it's probably more appropriate to keep it as a harvest.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Harvest could be a mechanism to reducing mortality. It just gives you the option, but --

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I was struggling with, and I think that's what Trish is saying, is some of the mortality, or the lack of maturing and other things, could be environmental, and we don't -- We've got a big old question-mark on that, and we can't control that, and so I think she's saying we're picking the thing that we can control here. All right. Other comments, or questions? Otherwise, we need to vote on this motion, but just making sure folks are okay, they feel like they have everything answered. One more thing from Mike here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I just wanted to make sure that it was clear. Given kind of the timeline discussion that we've had so far, and the actions that are included in this motion, if Amendment 56 is the desired mechanism for this, that means that the actions for Amendment 56 would include these actions that are bulleted here, and so commercial or recreational size limits, recreational bag limit, commercial trip limit, the spawning closure, and the annual catch targets.

The following actions that are currently in Amendment 56 would be removed, and so that would be changing the ABC, OY, and ACL, changing the status determination criteria, changing the fishing year start date, reopening the near-shore commercial pot seasonal closed areas, and prohibiting multi-hook rigs, and the reopening here, the closed areas to on-demand gear. That's what was being considered, and so those five actions would be taken out of Amendment 56, if the motion is proceeding as written, and that's how you want to process this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that clarification, Mike, and so people need to look at that list. Andy, I saw your hand, and then I think I saw Tim's hand.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and two things. I want Rick to speak to amendment versus framework, because there's a little bit of a time savings with a framework, and all of the actions there could be included in a framework. The other comment, if you go back to the motion, under the requests of the SSC, and we have re-evaluate, or reconsider, to me, it would be appropriate to potentially also reconsider ABC advice for 2027 and beyond, based on, you know, this motion, or this, you know, recommended catch levels by the SSC, or by the council.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Got that on there. Tim, I had you next.

MR. GRINER: No, and I think I understand it now.

MS. MARHEFKA: Everyone should understand it. Do you want me to explain it?

MR. GRINER: No, and I just -- Can you go back to the part about what we were going to remove from the amendment? So we're removing -- I just want to make sure I understand that we're removing the reopening of the near-shore commercial pot seating closed area, and we're still looking at that in some other --

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes.

MR. GRINER: Okay. I didn't want that just to totally go away forever.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Think about speed. We're trying to pull the things out that go with this, that can move the fastest. Kerry, and then, Rick, can you speak to the timing, and then Charlie.

MS. MARHEFKA: Well, to that, so it's clear for everyone, there will still have to be a rebuilding plan amendment, and so those items, in my mind, would be included in that, and so they're not going away. It is just a speed thing, but remember that there's this amendment now, and then the rebuilding plan amendment, just so we're all on the same page.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're adding that, so that that's clear. Rick, and then Charlie.

MR. DEVICTOR: Looking at the list of actions there. I believe that you can do this through framework, and there would be a time savings to this, because, when you do a plan amendment, you have to -- There's a comment period with that plan amendment, and so, if you do a framework, we wouldn't have that, and so that would help us meet our timing goals with that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Kind of along those lines, what we've been talking about is the intent is to try to get this in as soon as possible, and potentially impact the 2026 fishery, to start addressing this problem quickly on the stock, and so, yes, if we can get some savings, then we just change this to a framework, and it gets it in quicker. That sounds very good.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Rick, just to clarify, you all would not need to do a comment period, for kind of the NMFS and the rule-making process, but the council would still need to take this out for public comment, through the council's amendment development process, and is that correct?

MR. DEVICTOR: We would still have to do a comment period affiliated with the proposed rule, but what you wouldn't have is the comment period with the amendment. When you do a plan amendment, you have a comment period with the rule and the amendment, but you don't when you do a framework, and so we have one less comment period.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and we would still do public comment, just to be clear. Clay, you had your hand up?

DR. PORCH: Yes. Thank you. I was curious what the thinking was on the spawning closure, if this means only just closing to landings, or does that include just not fishing during the spawning season, and the reason why I bring that up is, I mean, obviously, we have more discards, a lot more discards, than landing. If you're worried about disrupting spawning from the fishing process, just prohibiting landings isn't going to make much difference, and so, if you were really wanting a spawning closure to have a potential impact on spawning, it would be better to not fish during that period, at least not bottom fish in the area where black sea bass are.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Just to that note, from a fisherman's point of view, when you have these species available to harvest, because they're close, you're not -- You're probably not going to go fishing, and so there will be a definite reduction in effort if this was included in say the shallow-water grouper closure, at the same time, and you've already got all those groupers closed, and now you've got sea bass closed, and, well, red snapper stays closed mostly, but the -- So I would say that it's definitely going to affect effort and how fishermen perceive whether I'm going to go spend the money to go fishing. I would say that they're not. They're not going to go bottom fishing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, and then Tom, and then Judy.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just in response to what has been developed to this point, the spawning closure has been considered -- Up to this point, it has been a harvest-related spawning closure, and so no harvest of black sea bass, and not -- But not affecting other snapper grouper species that would be open. As Jimmy noted, there are several species that are closed during that time of the year, due to the shallow-water grouper spawning closure and various other closures that are in place for the snapper grouper fishery.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to bring up a little bit of difference in North Carolina. The North Carolina component of this fishery, I would argue, is probably the most important of the southeastern states, right, and there are a lot of trips in North Carolina that specifically target black sea bass, whether it's private rec, for-hire, and particularly headboats in those winter times, and it's just important to point that out, that we do have those directly targeted trips during that time of the year.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John, and then over to Judy.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I think that I've seen the same in South Carolina, at least in the past, and I'm not so sure with the status of the stock, but I do know that, not all that long ago, and I think it still goes on, people really did go out and take specific black sea bass trips during these months, and so I think, because of black sea bass being such a targeted component, unlike many of our other species -- I think in this case, a harvest prohibition really does affect overall effort, versus some species, you're right, it's not -- It's not going to have much impact, but, at least over the northern areas, and Florida could be entirely different, particularly south Florida, but I think it will have a pretty big impact for North Carolina, South Carolina, and probably Georgia.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Judy.

MS. HELMEY: I'm just trying to understand. Are you saying no fishing occurring during this time?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: No. It would be no landing of black sea bass, no harvest or landing of black sea bass.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I just want to go back to John's point. Particularly in -- I can't speak for, you know, Georgia and South Carolina, but, particularly in North Carolina, we will see a considerable effort reduction, in my opinion, right, particularly in those spring months, and, you know, and that's the one thing that is my concern. We all know this stock is in trouble, and we need to take action, but, you know, I've talked with our North Carolina delegation. I said that we're going to hear the most consternation about the changes that we're going to have to make, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything else? I'm sorry. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and I wanted to go back to the rationale, if that's going to be part of the record for this. That third bullet, if you could scroll up just a little bit, or scroll down just a little bit more. Right there.

What I would suggest is that we say the council, based on a review of SSC input, lacks confidence, and then let's see. All the way through "stock distribution", and then put a period, and delete everything, the remainder of that bullet, because, to me, what we're saying is we lack confidence based on the scientific information, but then a lot of the rationale below that, in my view, got into the management response to that scientific information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thoughts on that? I'm letting people review, and see what all is gone now. I see thumbs-up from some folks. Thumbs-up. Okay. Andy, did you have more?

MR. STRELCHECK: No.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are we ready to vote? All right. It's hard to see the whole motion at once. It's kind of big, but it's mostly on the screen there. There's a little bit of the request for the SSC that can't be seen on the screen, and so there's a little bit more than what you can see there. All right. **All those in favor, please raise your hand. All right. There were twelve in favor. No one against, and no abstentions, and so motion carries.**

All right, and so the next thing that we're going to do is we're going to dive into Amendment 56, and we're just going to go look at those few actions that you saw on the list, make sure they're good to go, because, you know, our timeline is shorter now, and so we're going to try to focus in on those few things. Tim, while we're getting that pulled up.

MR. GRINER: While you're getting that pulled up, and, John, don't go anywhere. While we had this -- During this discussion, it -- I want to make sure I'm clear in my mind about what the council can and can't do once an ABC comes out from the SSC, and so I'm not real sure exactly -- If I'm understanding everything right.

So we -- If it hasn't been peer reviewed, we can request a peer review, and that's why I was asking yesterday, and what -- What's peer reviewed, and what's not peer reviewed, and when can we send something back for additional peer review, or even a first peer review? I'm not sure I understand what the council can and can't do there.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, it has been peer reviewed, but I think the council always retains the right to ask that to forward questions, and follow-up responses, and ask that something be looked at again. I guess, you know, based on what Shep said, that ABC would still sit there and be binding while this played out, but it doesn't remove your right to ask that, hey, answer these questions for us, and we don't understand, and I think that's something that happens quite often with various councils, about, okay, well, you gave us this, but these are the questions we have, and we've looked at what you said, and these are our concerns, and did you consider a B and C and, you know, to say, yes, we want you to look at this again, or bring in somebody, or peer review, or what does it take, and so that's -- That's sort of what we're trying to achieve there.

MR. GRINER: Thank you. That's helpful, and that's something everybody should keep in mind as you move forward.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to dive into the actions.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so, as Jessica noted, I'm just going to be going over the actions that were included in that motion, and so one that we had not developed, in preparation for this meeting, was one considering ACT, and so I am going to go ahead and throw -- To make sure I have that note in there to establish commercial and recreational annual catch targets.

Okay, and then we'll go through the other actions, as were noted in the motion, and so, first, looking at revising the recreational bag limit, and you all had requested this to be included in Amendment 56 earlier in the process, and so that's how it's included here. We were waiting until we had the catch level alternatives, so that the analysis could be developed, but these are the alternatives that have been included to this point. It's a range of bag limits, in one-fish increments, from three to eight. The current bag limit is seven.

At the last council meeting, you all had requested including eight as a bag limit increase, just to be able to have a comparison of what the difference would be, and so that's why that eight fish is included there, but this is the range of alternatives, and I guess I can pause here, to see if there's any comment, or if you want to do anything with these alternatives at this point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: It seems, to me, that we want to be as narrow as we possibly can, while still having a nice range, right, and I would guess that eight is not palatable, that increasing the bag limit is not palatable. I know we're trying to get at 50 percent of the -- We're trying to cut 50 percent, and so I think, if we keep maybe three and four, and get rid of -- I'm open to five, if someone else wants to keep it in, but, in my mind, we would get rid of five, six, and eight and keep no action, three, and four.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're putting lines through those. Just looking around the room, and that was a suggestion, a good suggestion. I see heads nodding yes. Is everybody okay with that? Okay. I see heads nodding yes.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Kerry, just to clarify, the numbers that you were mentioning, of removing five, six and eight, those were referring to the bag limit, the number of fish, and not the alternative number, correct? Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I don't have strong feelings, and if others do, but just remember if we -- If we leave this in there, we have three to seven as our range, and so we cannot go below three, if analysis shows us, and so, without analysis, I'm not sure, but I'll just throw that out there for discussion, that we cannot go below three if it's not in there now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so I think she's suggesting -- Do we want to add two or one, is another way to say that. All right. What do people think? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: My mind just goes to do we need the analysis of that, right, because, you know, in dropping the size limit, or making the size limit, and what are we -- Anyway, and so -- I know we're looking at the bag limit, but I'm thinking big picture, right, and so the question is how much analysis do we need to have in there, you know, and that's what I'm asking, and so I'm generally supportive of putting those others in there, going lower, if we think that we may need to look at that, and Mike has his hand up.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I do think it would be useful, that thought, just because we've kind of been jumping around within this meeting, and we did not go over the advisory panel recommendations,

but I do think that they may be useful for this conversation, and so I'm going to go ahead and run through those really quick.

So they -- The advisory panel discussed Amendment 56 at their April meeting, and some of the summary points from this discussion, and you can look at the -- The full report is available in your briefing book, but some of the summary reports from that discussion included, in considering the recreational bag limit, minimum size limit, and any fixed closures, the priority for the for-hire component, including the charter and headboat, is to keep the season open as long as possible, even if this means at lower levels of retention.

I do remember Cameron Sebastian commented, within the meeting, that he didn't care how low the limit had to go, as long as there could be an open season and the potential for customers to catch the fish, and so that was -- That was something that was stated at the AP. There were some AP members that continued supporting the recreational size limit, reducing that to eleven inches, and that would align it with the commercial minimum size limit, and then, on the concept of the recreational fixed closed season, and this is different terminology, but the same thing that's being talked about.

Fixed closed season is equivalent to the spawning closure that's being talked about here, where it would be prohibited to have harvest of black sea bass, and so some AP members noted that less fishing happens overall from January through April, and a closure during this time may be beneficial for the spawning of black sea bass off of North Carolina.

Black sea bass were noted to be an important recreational target during the January through April time period, especially because few other species that are available in that area are open during that time of year, and then there was a comment that, while black sea bass have generally declined off of Florida, there are some that are caught off Jacksonville, at the beginning of the year, while the cold winter waters are still there, and so just some AP comments for you all to consider as you develop your range of alternatives.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So, Mike, thank you for bringing that up. That's an important point, and I think that we need to take that into consideration. I do -- I will say that if we -- You know, be prepared, when we have that option for one fish, and I think people aren't going to like seeing that, and so I'm going to add the rationale here that we're doing this for analysis sakes. I guess my point of clarification, for some discussion, is, if we just had an alternative for one fish, do we also need one for two, or, if we just do one, does that allow for us to potentially drop it down, if need be, once we get more information?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I think you can still select within your -- You can select within your range without having to go out for public comment again. I guess that's the -- That's the big hurdle, is, if you have something outside of your range and you go out for -- If you have your range set, and you go out for public comment, and then you want something outside of that range, then you would need to go out a second time for public comment, and so, if you just added one fish, and

you went out to public comment with the one through seven range, you could select anything within the one through seven range.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so we added one, but we didn't add two. Are we good with that? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I just recommend that we analyze one through four, and, I mean, adding two won't add a huge burden to the analysis.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're adding that.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right. Next up is looking at the minimum size limit change, and so, right now, the IPT, kind of in discussions, noted that what the council has talked about at this point is really changing the recreational minimum size limit. It doesn't seem like the council has given like very strong direction of wanting to consider a change to the commercial size limit, and so, as it's been developed, it's been looking at the recreational minimum size limit, with this being the range of alternatives.

We can continue operating with this range of alternatives, if that's what you prefer. If you wanted to include anything considering the commercial size limit, then that's something that can be added, but I'll put this back to the council, to see is this range of alternatives appropriate and what you would like to see as far as size limits for either sector within the black sea bass fishery.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Jimmy, and then Charlie.

MR. HULL: I'll speak to both sectors. First, on the recreational size limit, I believe that it should be reduced equal to the commercial, eleven inches. I mean, the largest source of mortality for black sea bass is due to discards, and so we need to reduce discards in the recreational sector by reducing the size limit, so that they can catch their bag limit and be happy and not sit there and keep discarding animals, trying to catch an animal that's a big animal that doesn't exist.

As far as on the commercial side, we do not want to increase discards in the commercial fishery, by increasing the size limit, or doing anything. We are a pretty good spot, with the gear we use in the pot fishery, that we don't have that many discards. We've been through this discussion before, and we don't have any different type of mesh to use, so that we should be messing with the size limit commercially.

Back when it was a ten-inch size limit, we had zero discards, because those animals got through the mesh. We went to eleven inches, and it increased our discards considerably, and there's been big studies on the different pot mesh size, and the discards that you have, and so I would leave the commercial size limit the same and reduce the recreational to eleven inches, that they both be eleven inches, and I think that would be our best bet.

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

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I was at the table when we made thirteen inches, and, had we known at the time how bad the discard issue was going to be, we would have never went to thirteen inches. I think we got that analysis after the amendment was down the road too

far to change it, and the stocks were in a much better condition, and so discards weren't quite an issue, and we didn't think there was going to be much discard mortality on a shallow-water fish, but, yes, it was after we had already gotten too far down to change it, to go back and do anything, without more public hearings and stuff, and, again, for the commercial, I would leave it at eleven. Selling those three-quarter to one-pound fish, they're not worth a lot of money, and so we really don't want those fish anyway. We would rather leave them in the water. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, and I appreciate those comments, and, you know, I'm going to go -- I'm generally supportive of lowering the size limit. I am a little concerned that we could see some increase in harvest there, because we do have, you know, obviously, a lot of small fish being caught in the fishery. However, we likely will see a big decrease in discards, but, to go back to my previous comment, I think that's why we need the analysis of down to one fish, right, because we're just going to need to look at that in context of the size limit as well.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Then what I'm hearing is it sounds like we're good with this range of alternatives. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: I think it should be eleven inches too, because, when we are fishing, most of the fish are between eleven and twelve inches, and we're catching a lot of those, and so we would be able to limit out real quick and quit fishing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thank you, but I think we've got enough for the analysis. I see heads nodding yes, and we're going to move on.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and what I took from that conversation as well is, even though it's in the -- The motion is written of considering the size limit, to make them equal, and, really, the intent here is reduce the recreational minimum size limit, considering alternatives as far as making it equal to the commercial minimum size, and so we'll take that direction for the IPT.

All right. The next action is to consider a recreational annual fixed closed season for black sea bass. Again, you can term this as a spawning season closure. This was kind of the language that was developed within the IPT, just because it's a similar language to other actions that have been developed, where it's a set time of year, at which there is a beginning date and an end date, and this is the closed season for harvest of that species, and so this is what was being discussed for a spawning closure.

We note the other species within the snapper grouper FMU that are closed around this time of year in the bullets below, as far as any benefits or potential changes in effort at that time, and, as of right now, we have alternatives that are considering a closure from January 1 through April 30 and then another alternative that considers closing black sea bass from March 1 through April 30. Is this the range of alternatives that you would like to see? I know you mentioned two-month waves. Do you want another one in there of January through February?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so just a reminder that we're trying to figure out what we need to analyze, and so, Amy, you were the one that spoke to this earlier.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just prefer to add one additional alternative and have that recreational harvest and possession to have a zero bag limit from February 1 through March 30, as that aligns better with the spawning season closure, and so it's just that February 1 through March 30, Alternative 4, would be a request to be added, please.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're making notes there. Just making sure that no other alternatives need to be added here, and I'm looking around the room.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just pointing out this was -- Like it's in the language, but I don't know if I said it verbally, but this would be for recreational harvest and possession. Do you -- Is that the intent of the council is for this closure to be a recreational closure, where the commercial would not necessarily be closed at the same time?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see heads nodding yes. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and this is where I don't know how the reduction would impact landings, and so we're saying we're reducing landings by 50 percent. The commercial sector hasn't been, obviously, hitting their catch limit, but I would assume the likelihood goes way up that they would hit a catch limit, under a much reduced catch level, and so it seems like there's at least a benefit of analyzing the commercial in conjunction with this, and whether we consider it as a preferred would be a different story.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're trying to get that language added there, and so, once again, he's asking for this to be analyzed for commercial as well. All right. I see heads nodding yes. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Just to make sure that we're clear, there's thirty-one days in March.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Are you trying to get an extra day there?

MS. DUKES: Sorry, Madam Chair.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You're good. She looked at her phone. I saw her look at a calendar. Just saying, and it is early in the morning, but she did verify.

DR. BELCHER: My backup in the office was the one that caught it. Thanks, Kathy.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I think we're good here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay, and then I think that is the end of the actions that we had within the amendment already, but, as we are trying to move this to a consideration for public hearings, there was one action within -- There were two actions. We talked about the ACTs, the range of alternatives that you would like would be the current, or, well, the current is, there is no ACT, and establishing an ACT at 50 percent of the range of years that was included in the motion. I think it was 2019 through 2023.

The other action that was noted in the motion was for a commercial trip limit change to be considered, and so we would need to know what is the range of alternatives that you would like to see for that, and kind of pardon the scrolling, but I'm going to go down here, to the kind of summary

table of the management measures, and so these are the trip limits that are in place for the commercial fishery right now. We see a thousand-pound trip limit that is in place, and a hook-and-line trip limit from January through April of 300 pounds, and so what would the trip limit alternatives be that you all would like to see in this amendment?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any thoughts on trip limit? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Yes, and I think it would be informative to see what, you know, what's the mean that we've been catching over the last few years. Has it been 500 pounds a trip mostly being caught, or 800, or have we been reaching a thousand pounds? What has it been, for starters, just for information, and then we definitely need to make a reduction, because everybody needs to reduce, and so, you know, then we could think about it and come up with an informed number.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I would really like to talk to some of the guys off in North Carolina and see how much fish they have to make a profitable trip. I don't want to set a trip limit at 300 pounds, and they're losing money to catch 300 pounds, and so we could put some ranges in there, and then pick between the ranges, once we get information back from the fishermen, and that would be my suggestion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so, based on that comment, Mike and I are going to make a suggestion here that people can work on this, and then we'll put the numbers in at Full Council. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I'm fine with that, but I'm just throwing out, for consideration, do we want to consider a different trip limit for the different gears, because the pot guys are directing at trips, and the hook-and-line guys, for the most part, and maybe somewhere in North Carolina are, but the rest of us are not.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think that's a great idea. Can you get ready for it at Full Council, and you all be ready at Full Council with some numbers? Charlie too, and so different gears. Okay. All right.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just trying to give information -- Chip, would we be able to get like an average harvest per trip available? You're working on that? Chip is already working on it. Two steps ahead of us.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I think we're done on black sea bass. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Rick pointed out -- So we need to discuss having an annual catch target, versus a catch limit, and so we don't currently have catch targets for sea bass, and, in order for us to trigger an accountability measure, it would be contingent on the catch limit, and so do we just want to specify catch limits, and not catch targets, for sea bass? I guess I need to go back to the original person who made the motion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let's come back to that. I think it needs to be specified, but we're having some debate here about some other options here.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to say that, right now, it's in the motion, isn't it, the ACT?

MS. MCCAWLEY: It is. We need some more conversation on it. Staff needs to work on something that goes with this, and so we will come back to that at Full Council. All right. I think we're done with black sea bass. We have people have some homework for when we come back to Full Council, and, next up, we're going to dive into the Commercial Subcommittee report, which is going over Amendment 60. Most everybody was here during that discussion, and so I think that this will go rather quick, but there was one question in that document that we need to resolve. All right. We found the version.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so the Snapper Grouper Commercial Subcommittee met earlier this week, and the subcommittee is working on Amendment 60. That is going to be the amendment that addresses the commercial snapper grouper unlimited permit, and so the SG 1 permit, and any changes to those that the policies surrounding that permit, as well as commercial trip efficiency, and so you can look in the report. This is Attachment 3. It was added a little bit later, as the subcommittee just met earlier this week, on Monday.

You can look at some of the notes surrounding the various actions, but the subcommittee developed the actions that would be going into Amendment 60, the first action being to revise the two-for-one snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit policy. We have several notes included there discussing some of the questions that are going to go out to the public, but then also some of the questions that are going to need to be addressed by the council through this process.

Next, Action 2 would be revising the requirements to acquire or retain a snapper grouper commercial permit, and so this is basically talking about, if the two-for-one policy is removed, then would there be any requirements that would replace it, in order to get that SG 1 commercial permit?

Action 3 would be looking at establishing a framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season, based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season. There were a couple of different trains of thought. One within the subcommittee was to have a higher trip limit to begin the season, and then step that trip limit down as the season goes through, step it down if necessary. The other train of thought was to start off with a lower trip limit at the beginning of the year, and, if there was enough time, and enough available harvest later on in the year, then step up the commercial harvest, and so that's one of the questions that we're going to go out to the public with in scoping, is would you rather have a higher trip limit at the beginning or at the end of the fishing year, kind of noting these different ideas that are going on in the subcommittee right now.

In any of these cases, everything would be -- It would still be constrained to the annual catch limits, and so any step-up or step-down policy would be determined based on the landings and how they're tracking relative to the annual catch limit.

Another action that was considered was establishing a non-target, or out of season, allowance for harvest, and there have been a couple of different discussions. Number one, talking about how this would be intended to be an incidental catch, and trying to make sure that it's not a targeted catch.

Another idea is kind of having an aggregate group of species that would be able to be included in this non-target or out of season allowance for harvest. This would potentially affect the length of the fishing season, because, in any estimation of tracking the annual landings versus the annual catch limit, there would need to be kind of this set-aside portion accounting for any out of season harvest that would occur after a closure goes into place for that species, and so that is something that would potentially be affected, but that's one of the actions that's being initially considered within this amendment.

Another way that was brought up, and I think we still had a bit of a question on whether this is, you know, included in one of the considered actions for scoping, or, if it's not at this point, was the idea of considering a revision to the existing gear onboard restrictions, and so this is not intended to be changing the type of gear that is used for fishing, but there are restrictions right now for the commercial fishery on what types of gear they can have onboard on certain types of trips, and so this would allow a given trip to be able to access multiple different species, and different types of fishing, within the same trip, but not necessarily changing any of the regulations that would be associated with fishing for a particular species.

There was some concern about enforcement, and knowing what fish were caught on which gear. It was brought up that VMS could potentially help with verifying the catches and the gear that were caught, but it also may complicate the development of the amendment, because there have been some complications that have arisen when VMS has been considered in other contexts, and so I guess one of the questions that I have for the committee is, is this an action that you all would like to see included in kind of the suite of things that is being considered at this point for Amendment 60, as it goes out to scoping, or not at this point?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thoughts on this? Jimmy.

MR. HULL: I certainly would. I think it would definitely improve trip efficiency, and I can give examples, but so, if you're a snapper grouper, targeting snapper grouper species, but you also have the ability to use a short longline for sharks, for instance, you can't do both with the gear restriction.

Now, how can we -- How can we make it where you can? Well, you can disable the longline gear, for instance, when you're snapper grouper fishing, and that's things that have been done in the past, so that law enforcement, if they intercepted you while you're engaged in, you know, hook-and-line, snapper rod-and-reel, bandit fishing for snapper grouper species, and you still have your longline ready for use, then you're -- You're going to get an infraction.

You can't do that, and so you disable it, just like in transit. You could implement that in there, and then that would make this enforceable. That answers that question somewhat, but it would definitely be helpful and increase our trip efficiency. We can -- We've got multispecies permits on the same trip, and we should be able to target them when we use different gears.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike, and then Charlie.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, Jimmy, you're thinking along the lines of replacing the restrictions that prohibit certain gears onboard, possibly with stowage requirements, such that you would not be able to -- If you are using a particular gear, for a particular fishery, then you can have the gear for

another fishery onboard, but it needs to be stowed according to whatever regulations are put in place.

MR. HULL: Exactly.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see heads nodding yes. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, we've -- We've been told that they didn't even want the gear on the boat, period. Like gangions, and, if we're wreck fishing, and we use half-a-dozen gangions on the bottom of our wreckfish, but we can't have a bucket full of gangions. We've got to take all of our golden tile gear off, mostly all the gangions, but, if the tide is bad wreck fishing, or even golden tile fishing, those areas aren't that far apart, and so it would be really helpful if we could work between those -- You know, those fisheries, but I don't know that storage is going to cover it.

I think they're just -- You can't longline wreckfish. I mean, you just -- You just can't. You're going to lose all your gear, but, anyway, yes, it would help a lot, and VMS, I can live with that, you know, as a verification, you know, and maybe you get an endorsement to be have multi-gear, and, with the endorsement, you have to have VMS, or something like that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're capturing that. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Yes, and I'm supportive of this. Another justification I was just thinking of is we've heard often, I think especially from the guys in the Keys, or at least the Florida guys that are golden tilefish longlining, and there's been several instances in which their season has been closed and then come back. They've reevaluated the landings, and they've reopened the season, but those guys have already taken that gear off the boat, and it's a pain in the butt for them to go back and forth, and so that would be another time in which it would be a benefit for them, and so over -- I love the idea of increasing efficiency with these multi-gear trips. I just want to make sure that there's a way to, you know, enforce it and do it, and so I'm very supportive.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and Mike is capturing some of those things there. Remember that we're just trying to get some things out there that are going to go to scoping. All right. I feel like we're good on that action, and so then we need somebody to make the motion that we're recommending all of these items for to the Snapper Grouper Committee, but, Andy, you might have a different question. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Before we go to that, in listening to public testimony yesterday, there was a couple of things that came up. One was not supported during subcommittee, and that was the idea of multi-day trip limits, right, and I feel -- I continue to feel pretty strongly, and this was an idea that emerged, I think, out of the advisory panel process. I don't think it hurts us to go to scoping and have people talk about the idea, and hear from people about the pros and cons of that, and so that would be a recommendation that I would suggest, is multi-day trip limits.

The other thing that I heard, and this goes back to I think Chip's analysis, and I don't know if there's a lot of fisheries that would fall into this category, but are there any fisheries where we have a trip limit that is imposed that's preventing us from reaching the catch limit, right, and is there any growth in fisheries, that we're artificially kind of depressing the harvest because of trip limits, and can we at least get some input and feedback from folks on the suite of trip limits for our various

species, in the event that there may be something we could actually change, or increase, to allow for additional harvests within the catch limits we already have?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and we're capturing both of those things there, and so I would look around the room, to make sure folks are good with putting the trip limit, multi-day trip limit, back in. Jimmy, then Charlie.

MR. HULL: Then, along those lines, like a flexible -- The ability to be flexible with the trip limit throughout the fishing year, so if -- When you look at your quota monitoring, and you see that you're nowhere near, you know, your target, and there's not much time left in the year, and maybe it's -- Of course, we talked about that, with adding increasing in the beginning, and so it's going to be talked about there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I felt like it was already covered. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and a multi-day trip limit might also be something that you would need a VMS endorsement for.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Got it. Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Real quick, I'm fine having that in there. What I would want to do is specify that -- Or can we look at letting them know that there may be some ranges, and maybe multi-day trip limits are appropriate for species like vermilion snapper, but inappropriate for deepwater groupers, and, quite frankly, any groupers, as far as I'm concerned, at all.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Mike is capturing that. Are you okay with that, Andy? Okay. Do you want to say the species one more time, Kerry, so we can capture it?

MS. MARHEFKA: (Ms. Marhefka's comment is not audible on the recording.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We got that. Vermilion is an example. All right. With all that, is someone willing to make the motion to recommend that the Snapper Grouper Committee approve Amendment 60 for scoping? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: **Madam Chair, I make the motion that we approve Amendment 60 for scoping.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It's seconded by Jimmy. Any more discussion? **Any objection?** All right. **The motion carries.** Okay, and we're going to go over the timeline for this one one more time.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and so just noting the timeline that was -- That is brought up for Amendment 60, and so we'll take this out for scoping, kind of using the process that we've used for the last few rounds, where we make a recorded presentation, and we'll post it online, and we'll send out announcements, via all of our communication channels, letting folks know the comment period, and people will be able to submit their comments via the online forum, or in writing as well, if someone chose to do that, and then we'll bring those comments back to you in September, in September of this year.

The timeline that we're kind of currently working on would have a final approval in September of 2026. The subcommittee did state that they want to continue meeting in-person, and then reporting out to the full Snapper Grouper Committee, and so we'll continue to work, from the staff end, with the subcommittee, to try to figure out the best times for them to meet, if we're able to continue doing it as part of council meetings or if we need to get folks together in conjunction possibly with an advisory panel meeting.

One question that we did have, from the staff, and I guess to the committee, and especially subcommittee members, and do you all -- I know the wreckfish subcommittee -- At a certain point, they were continuing to do work, but their reports out to the full Snapper Grouper Committee were coming at every other meeting. Do you all want to do a similar process to that, where you might be meeting once a quarter, whether it is within a council meeting or not within a council meeting, but your report-out to the committee would be every other meeting?

MS. MCCAWLEY: My short answer is no, and so I felt like wreckfish was a special item, and we were considering workloads at the time. That's why we agreed to that, and so I don't think so. I would rather have that conversation when we get to the workplan.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Okay.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. All right. Before we go into the fishery management unit revision, let's take a ten-minute break, and, when we come back, we'll work on the FMU revision. Thanks everybody.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get going again. We are on the snapper grouper fishery management unit revision, and I'm going to turn it over to Mike. I think he has a presentation for us.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so we're going to go through the snapper grouper FMU evaluation. I do want to note that Attachment 5 is within your briefing book, and just kind of setting -- Before I go into the presentation, I wanted to set the objective for today's meeting, and so, in the March meeting, the council identified seventeen species within the snapper grouper fishery management unit that were to be evaluated more in-depth to determine whether they are still in need of conservation and management. You can see the list of species listed there in the attachment.

The council directed us to update the information in the Shiny application that was previously used to evaluate the need for conservation and management for several species in December of 2020. As I started to update that, it kind of became apparent that that was going to be a very cumbersome way to go through this, in a one-by-one type of format, and so we did pivot from that a little bit, in developing the materials, and that led to the development of the survey that was sent out to you all ahead of the council meeting this week, and was filled out and turned in earlier in the week, and so I'll go through a presentation kind of going through those survey results.

That's going to kind of set the stage for you all to then consider, of those seventeen species, which of those do you want to take the next step, and the next step would be to begin an amendment that would change how these species are included in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, and, as a reminder, there are kind of two alternatives that you can take with these species.

One would -- Well, I guess three, and one would be to keep them in the FMU as they currently are, and one would be to consider them as ecosystem component species, which I'll give a little bit of a summary on ecosystem component species in the presentation, and the other would be to remove them from the fishery management unit, and so that is kind of the end result today, is, if there are any species that you all want to take to that next step, then we would be looking to the committee for a motion to initiate the amendment to that effect.

Now I'm going to go into the presentation, and so going into the survey results, and I have it just for the view that we're using here. I have it in an editable view, because there's going to be a lot of back and forth of me pausing and going back to the committee for you all to give feedback, and then I may edit the slides, based on your feedback.

The survey was developed in Google Forms, and distributed via email to all of the council members, and, as I go through the presentation, I will show a results table for each species, that goes through each of the ten criteria that are listed in the Magnuson Act for evaluating whether a species is in need of conservation and management. We had a total of twelve respondents. You will see, as we go through the tables, not all respondents answered all of the questions for all of the species, and so there are some times that it won't add up to twelve. You can still kind of have your discussions, and we can still move on. That will be fine.

For Factors I through IX, an answer of yes -- As we go through this, that indicates -- I should have had that up there, but a yes indicates that the species is in need of conservation and management. For Factor X, which is the adequacy of state or other forms of management, an answer of yes would indicate the species is not in need of conservation and management with respect to that factor, noting that there is another entity that is managing that species adequately, and so keep that in mind. I do have that italicized, as we go throughout the tables, and just to note that Factor X is a little bit different than Factors I through IX, but, if you need that reminder, I'll be happy to provide it as we go along.

This was semi-arbitrary, but I did feel like it would be helpful for you all to have it highlighted to you when there is more or less agreement among all of the respondents, or nearly all of the respondents, with response to a certain factor, and so I set that threshold to be if there are less than two respondents that disagreed from a majority, or if there was a majority of more than ten respondents, then I did highlight it, to say this is kind of general agreement among the committee that this factor is in one direction or another, and so I used kind of this dark turquoise font to indicate that a species -- That there was agreement that a species is not in need of conservation and management.

Then the bright red font is to indicate that there was general agreement among the committee that the species is in need of conservation and management. There's nothing special about the thresholds. I picked the thresholds, just because that was an indicator that, you know, we didn't have a large swing, or that we didn't have kind of an even split on those categories, but if it -- If you see a response that is nine-to-three, and you feel like that is pretty representative of the

majority, or of how most people are feeling, then there's nothing that holds you to that threshold and what your decisions would be.

As a reminder, and this information was laid out for you within the survey, and so I'm not going to dive into everything of it, but I do want to remind you of a few things as we go through each species, and so the Magnuson-Stevens Act does weigh factors I through III more heavily than Factors IV through IX, more heavily than Factor X, and so these are not necessarily all equal weights to all of these considerations. There is a stronger consideration for things like how important the species is to the fishery, and whether it's being caught, things of that nature, than necessarily some of the other factors.

Ecosystem component species are stocks that a council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but they do desire to list them in an FMP, in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives, and so this would be particularly important if you're trying to make sure that there is enough of say a prey species that is a primary source for a particular predator. You want to make sure that there was enough of the prey species there, and so there may be monitoring of that.

There may be information that's provided like through -- You know, requested and provided through the Science Center on those types of species, but there wouldn't necessarily be catch limits that would be associated with that. You wouldn't be managing the harvest, or limiting the harvest of those species, and it would more or less be making sure that you have periodic check-ins of that species is okay, to provide what it needs to the ecosystem, to the species that you are trying to harvest, or the fishery is trying to harvest.

Some examples of ecosystem component species within the FMP right now would include bank sea bass, rock sea bass, longspine porgy, ocean triggerfish and cottonwick, and so those are all in the Snapper Grouper FMP right now, but they are ecosystem component species. They do not have things like accountability measures or catch limits that are associated with those.

As I discussed before, the goal for today is to identify any of the seventeen species that you've selected for further evaluation, to see if any of those should then go to the next step of the process to be considered for removal from the FMU or designation as ecosystem component species through an amendment, and the process that we'll go through is we will review the survey responses, and so we'll go to -- As you'll see when we go through the slides, the slide will show the survey responses.

There will be an opportunity for any additional discussion that is needed on that particular species, and then we'll look to the committee for an end decision of either retain the species as it currently is, as a managed species within the amendment, or consider for removal or EC designation through an amendment, and so you'll see there's kind of a decision question at the bottom of each slide, and we'll look to the committee for that decision for each of these seventeen species.

The information that was provided within the survey, you can see kind of some mini images of it here on the screen, and it included diet and predatory information related to each species. You saw different pieces of data related to targeting by the recreational or the commercial sectors for each fishery, proportions of landings that occur in state waters versus federal waters, landings over time for commercial and recreational fisheries, as available, commercial values associated with

different stocks, relative landings for each of the species in relation to the rest of the snapper grouper management unit, and then, finally, the state regulations that are in place for each species.

I'm not going to be presenting each of these in each of these slides, and that would take a very long time to go through, and all of that information is available to you within the survey, and so, if you just pull up that survey link, you can see all of the information that was there for any of those species. However, if you do want me to bring that on the screen, I have all of the images that were provided to you available to me here, and so, if there is a particular piece of information that you really want to zone-in on, I can pull that up onto the screen, and you can have whatever discussion is necessary at that point.

The first species that we'll address, and I think I arranged these in alphabetical order, and so we're going to start off with Atlantic spadefish, and you can see the results of the survey. The only point that there was highlighted general agreement on is is there a need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among the user groups? There was general agreement that, no, there was not a need to resolve competing interests. There was kind of some split opinions on the other regards, or on the other factors rather, and the end question for the committee is would you like to retain Atlantic spadefish or have it considered for removal or EC designation through an amendment, and I'll turn it back to the committee.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I had a couple of questions, Mike, and so the first question, about is the stock an important component of the marine environment, I found this question hard to answer, because I feel like everything is important in the marine environment, plankton and everything, and so is that really the nature of that question, because I just feel like how would you ever answer no to this? I was thinking that it meant is the stock an important component of this particular fishery, of the snapper grouper fishery, and can you talk about that question a little bit more?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and I will preface this. These questions are statements turned into question form directly out of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and so there isn't always necessarily additional information specifically addressing these, and I think there is a level of interpretation that the council would have. I will note that GC is raising their hand, down at that end, and Shep may have more information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. I was just going to say, technically, it's the regulations. These come from the National Standard Guidelines, and it's verbatim out of that, and not the statute per se, but, on this one, I agree completely with what you said, Jessica. I always encounter that, and these are just general considerations that you go through, and I think the same thing. If you're looking at it, certainly from an ecosystem perspective, how do you say anything is not an important component of the marine environment, but I also think you weigh that accordingly in your evaluation of the factors overall. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Just to kind of clarify some things as far as North Carolina, as far as X, which I understand is not as important as the rest, but, right now, and this is how I answered the questions, was, right now, we do adequately manage all these species, but, once they are removed from the

FMP, we will lose that ability, until -- We'll have to either go and do rulemaking, or figure out if we need rulemaking, or probably make an amendment to our interjurisdictional FMP, which we have it, which kind of -- That's the tool we have to stay in compliance with anything the council -- Any council rules, and so, once those species are removed, we are going to lose that ability. It would take us time to do rulemaking, and/or do something with our FMP, and so just -- I just wanted to throw that out there.

I'm not saying stop all this, but we're going to -- You know, in North Carolina, we'll be dealing with some -- Having to address management of some of these, possibly, as we -- If we remove them, and it's unclear to me, if they remained an ecosystem component species, if it's still fits in our IJ, and that's kind of unclear to me yet, and so -- But I just kind of wanted to let you know, when I answered those questions, it was today that they meant, and so --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That's helpful, but I want to go to another thing that you brought up there, and so I guess I wanted to understand, from all the states, what -- You know, kind of go through that exact same thing that you're saying, what it would mean if it was removed, and there would be, it sounds like for some states, for North Carolina, a gap, at least until you could change regs, and then, when you go to change regs, do you have the ability to -- Once it's removed from the FMP, is it - I guess your commission, and are they placing regulations in state waters, and then extending into federal waters, and how do you all do something like that?

MS. MURPHEY: So, typically, when there's a rule or change, or as far as the feds, we have proclamation authority, and we go ahead and just make the same changes in the state rules that are in our federal rules, through proclamation, and so, when these -- If these species get removed, we lose that proclamation authority on those species, and we would have to go to rulemaking. Proclamation authority, we can do like in a couple of days, and so that's kind of the bigger thing. I don't know if Tom might want to add.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just one more question, and then I'll go to Tom, and then I wanted to hear from the other states, too. So then are you also suggesting that you would automatically do what the council has done, which is remove it from the FMP, or would North Carolina go through a process to see if you want to apply some general regs to it, or does North Carolina have like a default reg for something that's not otherwise regulated?

MS. MURPHEY: No, and we would -- We would probably go through the list and determine if we need to have some rules. Probably our example is sheepshead, when sheepshead got removed, and we went through rulemaking for that, and now we have rules on sheepshead, but I'm guessing how we would go through it. We just go through the list and determine whether we needed rules and/or -- I don't know, and we could even make a -- I mean, if we could even do a proclamation authority rule for these, or whatever, and it's -- You know, that’s way down the road, but just I really wanted to just make sure everybody realized that we'll lose the ability to manage, to use proclamation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and then you would have to take another action. Tom, do you want to speak to this, too?

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and I'm speaking directly to it, and I'm glad that you brought this up, Trish, because I wanted to approach this from a macro level from the State of North Carolina. This is --

You know, I'm a state commissioner, and one of the tasks I have personally taken on is trying to put some regulations in place for unmanaged species, because we don't have an overarching rule, like Florida does, which has been a great example for us, and I -- My understanding is that would be very difficult for us to do, like to say, hey, for all unregulated species, we could do this.

Now, I will also add that, even to get a rule on one species has been an extraordinarily difficult lift, and so, when I look at all of these, my next question is if -- I have hesitation about removing stuff from an FMU, not because I don't think we should, but because I'm concerned about taking co-occurrent- caught species, right, and not having the ability to regulate them in our state, and so my question, which, you know, Trish said we need to get clarification on, is, if we move to --

Take them to an ecosystem component species, would that still give us the authority in the state to have some sort of basic proclamation authority, and I wonder, and maybe is this the sort of thing that there should be an aggregate bag limit for, is like a list of ecosystem component species, just to -- Because I'm -- Again, you know, you have some of these fish that are caught while we were catching some of these other heavily-regulated species, and I would hate to be increasing discards in that, if those fisheries were to gain popularity.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Thanks. That's helpful. Amy, can you speak to South Carolina? What would happen, and is there a default limit, and then what happens if something's removed, and what you would have to do either to remove it or to put additional regs in place? Can you speak to that?

MS. DUKES: Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you. South Carolina will be in a very similar boat to North Carolina, where our current regulations state that, if a species is under regulation from a federal government standpoint, under the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, it then also becomes applicable law in South Carolina, and that is with respect to seasons, fishing periods, gear restrictions, bag limits, catch limits, size limits, you name it.

The 219 bill, that has just now recently become law in South Carolina, is only applicable to state waters, and how that is specified is that it is technically tied to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, and that the lawful catch of any of those species under the current plan, that are published in last year's rules and regulations, would be applicable to state waters, and that you would be able to keep them under the current size limit. It would just take out the idea of a season closure.

If it is -- If a fishery is removed from the fishery management plan, if a fishery is removed from federal regulations, then it would then be an unregulated species, in the eyes of South Carolina, and then would have to go through the General Assembly, to determine if regulations would be applied to that particular species, and how it would be applied, bag limit, size limit, seasons and such, and so it's going to take us a lot of time, considering we do go through the General Assembly, and we would have to have sponsors. It would be a strenuous exercise.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So our legislation recognizes eight of the fifty-five species. They're identified for seasons, size, bag limits. None of the species that we're looking at here are those, and so any of those species -- Basically the question -- Like if we were asked a question, at the agency, about

say one of the tomtates or something, the question would be is it -- Is this in state waters, and is it possible to catch this in state waters, or is it only in federal waters, because, if it's in both, it becomes a problem for law enforcement, depending on where they're on the boat, because it would be enforced in federal, and it's unregulated in state, because we don't identify it. If it's not on our list, you can pretty much have, whatever in any amount, at any time.

MS. MCCAWLEY: But you could go through a process to regulate it, and it would have to go through --

DR. BELCHER: We have to go back to the legislation, to get it added to the list. At that point, then the board would have authority to be able to do creel and season and bag adjustments, but we would have to go to the legislation to add them, and the first questions we would be asked is, is it in state waters that it requires to be regulated?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so, for Florida, we do have this default bag limit, which is a hundred pounds or two fish, whichever is greater, and so anything that doesn't have any regulations on it defaults to that, but also, at FWC, we could go through a process of regulating -- You know, deciding whether we wanted to regulate it above and beyond that default bag limit in state waters, and then also considering extending the regulations into federal waters. It's not necessarily an arduous process. The commission could do it in one or two meetings, and so probably less than six months. Anything else on kind of these state issues? Tom, and then Robert.

MR. ROLLER: So I guess my other question is, you know, we talk about putting in rules in place if we didn't have them, and, you know, I'm not just concerned, necessarily, that we would have potential increased recreational catch in the meantime, but what about increased commercial sales as well? I mean, if we didn't have that in North Carolina, we could potentially see what -- So I'm looking at the other states, to see how that would affect things, right?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't know that I understand the question.

MR. ROLLER: So like, if we remove them, and we didn't have regulations in place, we could potentially have, you know, unregulated commercial landings of this in this fishery. I just -- That's -- Anyway.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You wouldn't in Florida. That’s kind of --

MR. ROLLER: Okay. That's what I'm just --

MS. MCCAWLEY: You wouldn't in Florida, because you would have a default limit, but --

MR. ROLLER: So your default limit is commercial and recreational?

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's recreational, but then there's -- If you're going to go above that, then it switches to commercial, and there's additional requirements that come into play, proper licensing and all sorts of other things that have to happen for you to do those things commercially, but that's why I'm saying --

MR. ROLLER: The same in North Carolina.

MS. MCCAWLEY: If you would want something above and beyond the default, like default licensing and all those other requirements, then we would go through a process, and so, in the past, every time that something has been removed from the FMP, we usually -- Sometimes we try to do it and like get our state process started while the federal process is nearing completion, so that it can be more of a smooth handoff, but it -- Like I said, it could be done in probably about six months. All right. I saw a lot of hands going up on this. John, did you come to the table to answer something in particular? Okay, and so I have Robert next. I saw another hand, and then I have Clay, and then Charlie. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I was just wondering if there's some middle ground here that allows us to achieve the objective we're getting here while maintaining the state's ability to deal with some of these species, and I would ask -- If we moved them to ecosystem, or something else, if there's some other place where we can keep these as federally regulated, but make the change we're looking for here that gives the state's ability to continue with what they're doing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Did you want to speak to that, John? Then Mike.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and it's -- We're not sure that there is some sort of middle ground. You know, we've run into this before, with ecosystem component being things that don't need management, and then if you were to say include them all under some aggregate limit, that could be considered management, and then it undoes it. We do know, however, that the Mid-Atlantic has put in aggregate limits on stocks that are ecosystem component stocks, and, in fact, they have an aggregate limit on bullet and frigate, which are ecosystem component stocks in our FMP, and not even in any of their FMPs, and so there's definitely some variations in interpretation on this.

The need for a middle ground is something that I pointed out at the CCC, for reasons like ours, with many species that are never going to receive the assessment attention of black sea bass and red snapper, but it doesn't mean that people are comfortable just throwing them to the wind and letting whatever happen happens. You know, there's a dire need for some sort of middle ground.

I don't know how, if we moved things to ecosystem component, how that would affect the state situations, like that Amy faces. You know, that's a question for me, and it's probably a question the states would have to look at and see what that would do for them, but, you know, there's definitely a need for this.

If we could find some way, I think, to ensure that there's some caps that prevent fisheries from running away, and that we continue to keep tabs on it, and, if fisheries develop, we can bring them back into the fold, and I think there's a dire need for that, for us to move forward under certainly the past data conditions, but definitely the future data conditions, and it’s just we need to find that mechanism, if any exists.

MS. MCCAWLEY: So I think that this is something that would need to be covered in the document, the amendment, as it moves forward, and make a suggestion from staff, but I have lots of hands going up. I had Clay, Charlie, Shep, Carolyn.

DR. PORCH: Thank you. I definitely think there's a middle ground here. A couple of things that we're talking about at the national level is managing more in terms of species complexes, and, in

our case, we now have the SADL survey, the South Atlantic deep water longline survey, for some of the deeper water species, and we have the expanded video trap survey, and it looks like we're going to be able to maintain those.

Those are high priorities for the center and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and so what we could do is -- I'm not proposing to do stock assessments for spadefish and all this. I mean, we can't keep up with the load now, and we're not going to add a bunch of species, but we could use index-based methods to manage these stocks pretty easily, based on those two indices, and, in some cases, where you might set up a complex, but not all the species are prominent in the survey, you could just key it to an indicator species, and so I think there is a way forward here that's kind of intermediate between just calling them an ecosystem component.

Another possibility that's being discussed at the national level is to have an ecosystem cap, and so an overall catch limit. You would have specific catch limits for the species and complexes you care most about, and then the rest get wrapped up in an overall ecosystem cap, and so I think there's two possible ways to go forward that are probably a little more satisfactory than just throwing things in as an ecosystem component like spadefish.

If you had said this to me thirty years ago, I would say, yes, throw them in an ecosystem component, but now people figured they'll eat, and they taste like a grunt, at least to me, and, heck, I even trained my kid to spearfish with spadefish, when he was ten years old, and so, you know, people realize those things -- As other stocks go down, those are alternatives, and so I don't see taking them out of the FMP, or calling them ecosystem components, but they could be in a complex.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so that was helpful. I'm wondering, and I'm looking at Mike, that maybe we can put some of that information in the document, when we get there, some of the options that Clay is talking about that they're looking at. Okay. Mike is taking some notes. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, yes, this is tough, because none of these species are, quote, unquote, commercial. Spadefish is probably mostly caught by recreational. I've had some come into the dock that I sold. I sold them once. I didn't -- I wasn't able to sell them twice. That didn't work, and so -- But, yes. If there's a middle ground, that takes the load off of the Science Center, and kind of gets us where we want to go, I would love to hear the options.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. Just two comments. Based on the discussion and comments relative to South Carolina, Georgia and North Carolina, I guess I just wanted to give you a note of caution relative to that Factor X. It's worded in the present tense, right, the extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by the states, but, as we've discussed, obviously, if you make changes to that, it's going to change the state's ability to regulate it, and so, you know, you can use that factor considerate, but I think that, you know, the facts kind of change the nature of it, and how much maybe you can rely on it, because it -- You know, change will change the authority of what the states can currently do.

As to the ecosystem species aspect, and John said, you know, we want to keep an eye on it, and make sure it doesn't run away, and it doesn't have to be a managed species for you to require reporting, right? Once you -- In the commercial sector, as a condition of the permit, you have to -- You can be required to report everything you land, and so we monitor it. We can keep track of landings without managing the species, or constraining catch, and so, just because you're removing it from the FMU, or considering an ecosystem component species, you don't necessarily lose the ability to monitor it.

It's a little more complicated in the recreational sector, whether you're not permitted, right? Private recreational vessels, and individuals, aren't permitted, and so you're not requiring reporting that way, but, as we all know, we're, you know, considering those issues, and MRIP monitors catches regardless of what's in the FMU for the FMP. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. Mike has a question for Shep on that.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, Shep, I'm kind of thinking to the Mid-Atlantic example, and would one of these middle-ground solutions that the committee seems to be looking for potentially be to have some form of -- Like, if they designate species as ecosystem components, they would no longer be required to have an annual catch limit, but would they still be able to have some form of an aggregate bag limit on ecosystem component species?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. I think that's a little harder to justify, but I wouldn't say no, and so, when I look at it, and as we've discussed, and as you laid out, right, you can have an ecosystem component species, and you can have regulatory requirements that apply to those, those species, because they are intended to achieve some management objective relative to managed species.

I have always thought of bag limits on those species as being direct management, for the sake of that species, right, and, otherwise, what other tangential benefit are you getting, but I heard Tom mentioned the bycatch aspect of it, and so that made me think maybe you could have a rationale that's related to preventing bycatch of grouper and snapper species that you manage, and you're helping prevent that bycatch, by placing limits on these ecosystem components species, so they're not sitting -- Or let's say non-managed species, whatever, you know, and like an incidental harvest allowance, so recreational anglers aren't out there targeting those and having the effect on your managed species. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks. That was helpful. We're taking some notes up here. I have Carolyn, then Amy.

DR. BELCHER: I'm looking across the table to Amy to help me with this too, because Mel and I had these conversations a while back, because of HMS species, specifically sharks, and so there's language that was used in South Carolina law that basically allows them to adopt -- So it's not like they have to keep going in and changing the state regs to mirror the federal regs, and they adopt by proxy.

Because our shark groups did not align exactly the same way, we did not choose to go that route, but we had an issue with billfish, a while back, because you were not allowed to land them in Georgia. Even if you had all the permits and all of that, you could not bring a billfish swordfish into Georgia.

We had prohibitions, and so we ended up writing into the code: "Except as otherwise specifically provided herein state waters, the size, catch, creel possession limits, fishing period, closures requirements pertaining to the taking, release, landing, sale, purchase, trade, or barter of billfish shall be prescribed by federal regulations implemented under the Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan", and so there is a way to reference elsewhere, by proxy, to say that, for these things, we can do that, and it just keeps us from having to keep adding new species, new regs, that are harder for us to put in in a timely fashion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and, yes, Carolyn, you're right. I mean, the whole intent was to have the federal regulations be declared that of the state. It makes things easy. There are a few exemptions, but those exemptions are few and far between.

Kind of getting back to what Shep was saying, honestly learning more about this survey, as we're talking about it, I completely can tell you that, for Question X, I wasn't thinking about it of, oh my God, it wasn't a federally-managed species anymore, and that's going to completely affect the way that my state manages it. Because it's federally-managed, it's also state-managed in the same light, and so I'm thinking that perhaps some of my answers could have been a little differently, but I am -- I'm thinking about it too more holistically, and this idea of maybe the complex would take into account some of these troubles that the states might have in having to put regulations in play.

I think, if we were to look at this, and maybe say a single species, or maybe two of them, where they can come back to the state, I think that could be a potentially manageable number of species, but we just looked at over a dozen, and that's going to be a very complex time thing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was just thinking some about how this is going, and, to get things moving along, is there -- Do we want to go ahead and state the intention of creating our middle ground third category here, and so, as we go through these species, we don't get so twisted up here into the consequences of just a simple yes or no, and say the intent is to create some sort of ecosystem component complex, and that you would set like possibly an overall of all the species in that complex aggregate limit, and you would also have the right, due to the bycatch concerns and the different abundances of different species, that there may be some species in that complex that you further set like no more than one of these.

It's not so specific toward an individual species. It's more overall, which seems to be more in keeping with kind of what Shep was saying is probably the best opportunity to put this in. Maybe we should go ahead and start building this middle ground thing, so that we can evaluate it and understand it and work out the details.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I thought the same thing. I get the devil is going to be in the details, and that we're going to have to look at this again, and rehash some of these species, but I do think that maybe this could move a little faster. C.J., then Mike, then Andy, and then we're going to try to -- Then Tom, and then we're going to try to dive in here.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Madam Chair, and so I think John is on the right path there for what -- I mean, I would look for the other states -- To see what would potentially satisfy their rulemaking ability for these species, and so I get that concern there, how you remove that, and then, all of a sudden, it's a free-for-all.

I mean, even looking at spadefish, and that's probably -- It's a good example, first example, that we have here, because 660,000 pounds for the recreational sector is probably one of the largest landed species that you have on this list here, and so this is a good first example here, and I think what John is highlighting potentially could satisfy the state rulemaking requirements to keep that managed in some capacity, and so you're not -- But I completely agree about having that kind of middle ground here, because I think spadefish is kind of that perfect example of a middle ground, and, just given the landings that you've seen on here, it kind of probably makes sense to be in that middle-ground category there.

I mean, I guess the way that some of us at the Gulf Council are looking at this also, is it is kind of -- Just looking at what these catch limits are, and whether the council is actually going to do anything to manage these, or assess these, and, obviously, the species you're talking about, they're not really assessed species whatsoever.

Some of these catch limits are extremely low, but I do -- You know, this has been a good conversation, I think, because now I understand the state concerns for -- Especially for Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina about the potential ramifications of removing that, and so I think, John, you might have found a nice little middle ground there, that could potentially satisfy the various other states, while not creating substantial issues in being able to monitor these fisheries, and so, if you need to do something with it, you can bring it back into the fold.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I'm going to go to John to address that. Then I'm going to go back to my list, and then we're going to dive in.

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, and I just want to say thanks to Tom too, because we were sort of working out this idea here together, and so not just all me. Thank you, Tom.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I've just been listening to the conversation, trying to take it all in. I'm maybe an outlier here. I went through the survey, and, for nearly all the species, I was essentially indicating that they weren't in need of federal management, right, and I hear, obviously, the states' concerns about then what does that mean for having to manage these species, but a lot of my focus, in terms of why I thought they weren't in need of federal management, is, you know, we weren't really doing anything to manage them in the first place, right?

A lot of the harvest, a majority of the harvest, for nearly all of them, was occurring in state wires in the first place, and so we may have mis-specified even them being in the FMP to begin with,

and then what can we do about it, even if we are managing them, because of the resources and limitations, right, and so I think we need to think about it in that light.

I agree, obviously, we need also think about it from the standpoint of either the burden this puts on the states or the need for the states to, obviously, manage the resources independent of any sort of federal restrictions, but we're going to have to pare back some of the species we manage, especially those that were really not actively managing, given the resources we have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to kind of rehash kind of where I'm going, given the conversation John and I -- John Carmichael and I were kind of discussing some of that middle-ground activity up here, and I really appreciate Amy's comment.

When we look at these, it would be a lot more manageable for the states if we only said maybe one or two of these that really adequately should be completely pulled out, right, and I'm certainly in favor of that middle ground, because, in my opinion, for the justification of this, if we remove these helter-skelter, I'm really concerned that we are going to be increasing discards of some of our managed species, right, and so that's kind of the basis for my rationale of hopefully doing some sort of middle-ground aggregate limit that says something like any ten of these species, but no more than one misty grouper.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are we ready to dive in here. Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thanks, Madam Chair, and I'm kind of going to go back to Andy's comment about a lot of the landings being in state waters, and I don't necessarily disagree with you, when you look at the data, but then, if you bring in the fishery-independent component, and we look at what's happening on those camera indexes and trap indexes, I mean, you could easily use the fishery-independent data to provide excellent abundance for tomtate, and we do it. It's our number-one species, and white grunt and scup and knobbed porgy.

These guys are absolutely still hanging out, and thriving, in federal waters, and so I don't want to necessarily just look at the landings in state waters and think, well, let's get rid of it, and all the landings are in state waters, because these guys don't just live in state waters. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so Mike is going to highlight that, you know, for each species, we're really looking at that question at the bottom, and that's the conversation that we're going to have, but I think this is going to be challenging, because, based on what we've heard already, I think we're in different places about what to do here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Thank you. Yes, and so, as we go through the -- The survey is simply a tool to shape perspectives, okay, and the question, the important question, for the council is the one at the bottom of do you want to keep it in the FMP, as it is right now, or do you want to take it to another step? If we go to an amendment, there will be an entire amendment process, where, if you have this middle-ground ecosystem component complex that you want to form, that's something you would have to do in that amendment.

Right now, the question today is are any species going into an amendment in which they will either be considered for removal or they will be considered for some other form of inclusion in the FMP, such that they would be ecosystem components, form this complex, however you want to process that.

The question of what to do in that amendment that can be for a future meeting, and we can set the stage and provide you the information for what you want to do in that amendment at a future meeting. The question for today is do you want to start an amendment that would include any of these species, and then you would take that step of what you want to do with them in that amendment, and so I just wanted to kind of frame that as maybe the course of the discussion today, as we're going through these, and we don't necessarily need to go through each of the questions. They will be on the screen for your reference as you have your discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me first say that it seems like we had already identified these seventeen species, and so it seems like one of the first questions is do they need to remain kind of where they are in the FMP? Otherwise, I agree. I don't know that we need to figure out if it's complete removal or ecosystem component today, but it seems like we're going to be doing something with all seventeen, that we're bringing all of them into the amendment, but I guess that there might be a couple that we're like, no, they need to stay exactly as-is, and then they would be bumped from this process, if that makes sense.

So that makes it so that we're not solving every aspect of this today about where it goes. It's just is it going into this amendment to do something different with it, yes or no. Does that help? Okay. All right, and so back to spadefish, which is an interesting one to start here, but so back to spadefish.

I don't think we need to go through all these questions. You can see the answers here. You've heard about what would happen if it completely comes out, but just are we wanting to take spadefish from its current place in the fishery management unit and do something else with it in this amendment, yes or no? I see heads nodding yes, that we want to do something else with it. I see some people saying axe it, and we want it completely out, and then you've heard from Tom that he's going to be suggesting we use a third category for most of them, but the short answer is, yes, we want to do something with spadefish in this amendment. Okay. Yes. Thumbs-up. Thumbs-up. All right. Yes.

MR. ROLLER: That was a pretty adamant yes, and so I'm going to be -- I'm going to be fast. Of all the species that we looked at, the one thing I will say about spadefish is they are different in their behavior. These are not a fish that are often cocaught while you're fishing for other grouper snapper species. They are a jellyfish eater. Right now, they're in the same places, and you can target them, but you do it differently, but, that being said, I want to go back and say I do agree that we should do something with them, whether or not that's an aggregate or look at state management.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I love it, and I love that comment about the behavior. We're taking some notes over here, so we can get that into the document. All right, but thumbs-up. All right. Banded rudderfish, in the amendment for change or keep as-is? Do we want to keep this, or do we want to put it in the amendment and change what we're doing with banded rudderfish? Thumbs-up. Thumbs-down. I see -- Go ahead, Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: You know, we don't get many of them. We do sell them. They are easy to sell, because it's a good fish, but, again, we get very few, fifty pounds or something, at a time, and so I don't know that we get enough commercially to warrant not putting them in another bin somewhere, and so I'm good with moving them.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Can we see some thumbs-up, or thumbs-down, or I have a question, or I want to make a comment, and so are we good with considering changing its status in the FMU? That's a thumbs-up. Thumbs-up. I see most folks -- I don't see anything from Tom. Are you thumbs-up to move this into a -- Okay. All right. Thumbs-up. Okay. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Just, on clarification, some of these species, and thank you for commenting on that, Charlie, have much different values and catches commercially versus recreationally, and so I have to look to my counterpart, Tim, here to make sure that we are discussing it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just to clarify, from Mike, what you're talking about here will also go into the amendment? Okay. All right. Just to be clear, that type of analysis, and looking at it more closely, all of that, for rec and commercial, will be in the amendment, and I like how you brought in the behavior. Okay. Bar jack, and remember that yellow on these tables is -- Those rows are pretty much clear agreement on the answers, if you were glancing up there quickly. Okay, and so thumbs-up to do something with it in the amendment, yes or no. Okay. I see thumbs-up. Okay.

Blackfin snapper, what do we think about this one? Do we need more discussion? Are we thumbs-up to do something with it in this amendment? Andy, were you thumbs-up? Thumbs-up. Okay. I see lots of thumbs-up here. All right. Cubera. This is becoming more important in Florida. Okay. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: You know, cubera, blackfins, banded rudderfish, we never catch much. I mean, that's kind of a given, but they are -- I wouldn't want them to go into some kind of regulation where we just can't handle them anymore, you know? So, as long as that's kind of on the table, we can still get our one fish, fifty pounds, and still move them through the commercial markets, and that is important, but, other than that, I don't have a problem taking it out.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Other thumbs up here to consider it in this amendment? Okay. Yes. All right. Jolthead porgy, consider in this amendment? Okay. I see some thumbs-up. I see heads nodding yes. Okay. Yes. Tom, have you got a comment on this one?

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and I'm going to vote thumbs-up on all the porgies, given the very small landings of them, right, and they're -- However, this is one of those species that I'm very concerned about, that, if we don't have some sort of third option, we are going to have some issues.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that. Okay. All right. Here's another porgy, knobbed porgy. Amy, what have you got?

MS. DUKES: Just a general comment with the porgies, and I appreciate Tom saying, you know, keeping all the porgies together. I think there's also a little bit of a species identification issue that was likely going on here, and so keeping them in this cute little aggregate would be really helpful.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so thumbs-up to consider it in this amendment. Okay. I see thumbs-up. All right, and we're taking some notes here on what you guys just said about the porgies. Margate, thumbs-up for consideration in the amendment? Okay. I see thumbs-up.

Misty grouper. Wow, and I see some thumbs-up over there. Andy, are you a thumbs-up on this one? Okay. All right. Thumbs-up. Okay. Queen snapper. Are we thumbs up on the amendment? Yes? Yes. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I struggled with this one, because this is becoming a very important fishery in the Gulf, but I don't know enough about the South Atlantic fisheries, and so I don't know if anyone fishes for queen, or could talk to this one, and, obviously, deep-dropping, you know, catching it with other deepwater species, and so I think it's one of concern for me. We don't have, obviously, much information, and I don't know how much it's being targeted.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Queen, like misty snapper, are small catches. However, given the deep-dropping nature, and their co-occurrence with some of our other managed species, like bluelines and snowies, we should be concerned of, if we're going to look at removing them, which I support, again, more of that third option.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, and, you know, we don't see them out, you know, at the wreckfish grounds, or, you know, anywhere like that, where you would think you might incidentally catch one. We might catch an alfonsin or something, and just -- Tom might know more about it than me, but I was looking at a sportfishing video, and they said, basically, north of Florida, the tide changed, and there was no sense in even trying to catch queen snapper north, because of the tides, and they just weren't here. They were more south, toward the Bahamas and Florida area, and so I think it -- I don't know how it would be a potential fishery. If there was, I think somebody would already be doing it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. It seems like, based on that discussion, we're still thumbs-up to consider it in this amendment. Okay. Sailor's choice, and what do we think? Thumbs-up to consider in this amendment? Some of these crack me up. Okay. We're considering in this amendment.

Sand tilefish, thumbs-up? Okay. I see thumbs-up and heads nodding yes. Okay. Saucereye porgy, thumbs-up? Thumbs-up. Tom, okay? Yes. Okay. Scup, thumbs-up? Okay. Tomtate. Some quick thumbs-up over here. Okay. Yes. Thumbs-up. Trish, tomtate?

MS. MURPHEY: I'll go with the crowd, but I did notice, like on the headboats, that was like their number-one fish. I didn't know whether that, we need to consider that or not, but I'll go with -- You know, I'm good with either way.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: So, to Trisha's comment, and I can speak for North Carolina. They're one of the most common bottom fish you're going to catch, right, and so, when we discuss like a general aggregate bag limit, and stopping fishing, my first thought is I'm going to go out and catch fifteen tomtate and then quit, and so that's been a joke I've been telling.

Now, that being said, being that they're so important, being that they're caught in such high levels, again, just for the record, this is going to be one of those that I would consider for that third option, because of their co-occurrence throughout many water depths.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. We're capturing that. Thank you. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: Just for the record, we call it the fish of the future.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We just typed that in the notes. Okay. My favorite, white grunt. I would love to see this out of this. Put it in the amendment. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: That was like the number one or number two on headboats too, and so I don't know if that's something that -- I mean, again, you all put it where you all want to put it, but I just noticed that, that it was also a hot -- You know, number one or number two on those headboat, on the headboat report.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I'm learning a lot about what they're targeting on headboats in North Carolina. Tom. They're all about the grunts.

MR. ROLLER: Well, white grunt. I mean, if you look at the east coast headboat catches, it's one of the most important fish, right, I mean, and they are very good to eat. I know Tim loves them. We talk about it all the time, but, again, for the record, being how much they're caught with the other species, this is one that I would consider for that third option.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Whitebone porgy, consider in this amendment? I see heads nodding yes. I see thumbs-up. So that was the last one. Good job. I'm going to turn it to Mike to talk about kind of the timeline and what the next steps are for when we can see this again.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so I have been taking some notes. The next step that we would need to get this process moving is we would need a motion to initiate an amendment that would consider -- What would it be? Consider designation as ecosystem component or removal for the seventeen species that were noted.

At that point, then we would be able to work from the staff end, to start getting an IPT together, and getting the information together, for you all to go through that process, and we have noted that there is desire for kind of that third option that you're looking for, where there is some form of management, but not the full suite of required management through the FMP for the regularly-managed species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I was going to ask if you could start typing the motion, so we could wordsmith it before we have a motion, and have to go backwards, and we typically go through that process.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: All right, and so, for the third option, the third option, you all do not want an annual catch limit on this third option? Okay. So that would mean that it would be an ecosystem component, but it would be some form of ecosystem component that has a regulation that is tied to it. Okay. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Maybe. It sounded like, from Shep, that there was another way to do this, where you're not specifically calling it ecosystem component, that there's like a nationwide discussion about -- That's why I was a little hesitant to just call it ecosystem component. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: That was Clay who said that, actually, but I think I interpreted what he was saying as complex management, and, ultimately you have three options. You can remove it from the FMU entirely, you can leave it in the fishery management unit as an ecosystem component species, which can greatly constrain your ability to apply management measures to it, or you can leave it in the FMU. I think that covered this, but take it out, ecosystem, or leave it in are your three options.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, Shep, in the -- In the context of like if it were complex management, within species that were not designated as ecosystem components, would Magnuson require annual catch limits for these species?

MR GRIMES: You could do it for the complex, and then the complex -- Whether you do it as an aggregate or indicator species, all that is, you know, to be determined.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Sorry, and I guess my question was would Magnuson require an annual catch limit for the complex?

MR. GRIMES: I would say yes. I mean, it's whatever stock is in the fishery. Yes, you're catching it, and you're managing it, and you need ACLs for it. We do that with all our complexes now, and I'm not aware of anyone that has a managed complex with no ACL.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. There were hands going up here. Clay.

DR. PORCH: All right. As Shep was saying, it -- You would have an ACL for the aggregate of the complex, or for a particular indicator species, and then, if you exceed the ACL, then, of course, then the harvest has to stop, but that ACL can be pretty easily determined, even if you just use the average catch approach that you have, and then, if you have the information, say an indicator species, you adjust that ACL up and down pretty simply by the trends in an index, and so this could be something fairly easy, and the ACL may or may not be particularly constraining.

I talked about, you know, for instance, if it was a really big complex, it could be affected by an ecosystem cap, and so I think there's a lot of flexibility. It's not as though you have to have an ACL for every single species.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I guess one of the reasons why I was asking about that clarification is because the majority of these are already in complexes, and so it would be reconfiguring a mega-complex, so to speak, where you're mashing together all these fish that are already in complexes into a bigger complex, and, if the desire is to have a large complex with an ACL, then that's something that can be done, or, if an ACL is what's not desired for these species, then they would need to be ecosystem components, and then have some regulation tied to them. That seems to be what the designation is, what would be required.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I don't know that I want to keep rehashing this today. I would just like to start this amendment, and then the IPT start talking about it, and discussing it, and then we can talk about options at another meeting, because I feel like we could debate this for hours, but go ahead, Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to ask that we focus the discussion on whether it's in need of conservation and management, and not how do we get out of ACLs for this stock, and I think that's the wrong starting point. That's a bad record to build, that would probably hurt us in the end. The question is are they in need of conservation and management, and then what flows from that. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I forgot I had my hand up. Anyway, but, to Shep's point, no, none of these species rises to the level of the conservation and management that say vermilion snapper or gag grouper needs.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for the clarification. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I'm kind of gathering my thoughts a little bit here. We've had a lot of discussion here. I guess I'm just going to go back to the fact that it's not necessarily the question of whether or not they're in need of management and conservation, but it's the fact that the species that you catch them alongside are in need of conservation and management. That's why I go back to the idea of what the Mid-Atlantic does. They have ecosystem component species, and they have some limits on them. I would like to see if that's something that we can do here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Once again, I think those types of things would be discussed when we get to the amendment. Jimmy.

MR. HULL: This may be just, as you said, we discuss it down the road, but my phone is blowing up, with people that are listening to this, and they're throwing questions at me like so, if you remove this from the FMU, and even if you put it in a third spot, it's still something we do federally. Would you still need a federal permit to, you know, harvest and sell these, or where's that going to land? Is this going to be you would just need a state license, perhaps, instead of a federal license?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that’s the --

MR. HULL: Those kind of questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and those are the questions that Kerry had asked in the past. I know she's not at the table right now. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think Jimmy's question is a good one, and we'll have to dig into this, and so I think, to move us along, and I just appreciate what Tom is saying, how the Mid-Atlantic is doing things. I'm just looking at the National Standard Guidelines, and it says, for ecosystem component species, that we can look at management measures for collecting data on ecosystem component species, minimizing bycatch, or bycatch mortality, of those species, protecting their role in the ecosystem, which I don't know how to interpret that, but I think there's an opening there, right, as well as addressing other ecosystem issues, right, and so let the IPT kind of dig into this, and work on with Shep and others, with regard to, obviously, the legal ramifications of maybe this third path that's being suggested.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Would someone like to make this motion? Robert, were you wanting to make this motion?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: **I would like to make a motion to initiate an amendment to consider removal from the fishery management unit or designation as ecosystem component species/ third category for misty grouper, margate, sailor's choice, tomtate, white grunt, bar jack, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, whitebone porgy, banded rudderfish, blackfin snapper, cubera snapper, queen snapper, Atlantic spadefish, and sand tilefish.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Is there a second? Seconded by Tom. Any more discussion on this today? It sounds like staff is going to do a bunch of work on this and bring it back, including discussions of a lot of the things that we've been questioning today. Mike captured a lot of those things, and notes, when we went through all the species, plus notes of this discussion at the end. All right. **Any objection to this motion?** All right. **The motion carries.** All right.

That's it for that discussion. We're going to move into yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and go over the assessment presentations for SEDAR 96 and SEDAR 79. I would ask, and do you guys think Shanae and Chris are ready to go? Okay. Can we take a five minute break, while we get them unmuted and everything? So five minutes.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're going to get started here, and so, first up, I believe we're going to see the stock assessment report on yellowtail snapper.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Chris, you should be seeing that request.

MR. SWANSON: Yes, I'm trying to choose which monitor that is. Let's see. Are you seeing a yellowtail presentation, or are you seeing a hogfish?

MS. IBERLE: We're seeing yellowtail, but let me -- I'm not sure why this is not. Can you put it in presenter mode?

MR. SWANSON: Yes, and I will. I just I just wanted to see which screen it was going to be. How's that?

MS. IBERLE: All right. We're good to go on our end. Thank you.

MR. SWANSON: Okay, and so you're seeing the presentation, and not the notes mode or whatever?

MS. IBERLE: Yes.

MR. SWANSON: Cool. All right. Great. Thank you. Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Chris Swanson, with USF and FWRI stock assessment group, and I'm going to be presenting the results of the SEDAR 96 yellowtail snapper assessment.

This was an operational assessment, which followed a terminal year of the benchmark that was completed in 2019, and then an interim analysis that had been completed in 2022, and so we'll start off just by looking at the updates to the data. As a reminder, the terminal year of the benchmark was 2017. For the interim analysis, it was 2020, and, for this assessment, it was 2023, and so, over the next several slides, you'll hear me talk about recent trends in those years.

Before we get into the details, I just want to orient you to the plot here, of which you will see several versions of, and so, in these plots, the total landings are the gray bars, while the lines are the various components that make up that total, which, you know, are going to vary by plot, and so, to get us started, this is the updated commercial landings, which were informed by the NMFS ALS data for the years 1981 to 1985 and then from Florida's trip ticket program for the years 1986 to 2023. Hook-and-line gears continue to be the dominant fishing gear here.

Recent landings you can see decreased in trend from the time series high in 2017, from about 2.7 million pounds to about 1.4 million pounds in 2020, and then kind of remained at those lower levels post-pandemic through the terminal year. You can see recent landings have been similar to those recorded in the mid-1990s and early 2000s.

Landings continue to be predominantly from the Florida Keys region, which is that blue line, and represented 98, 94, and 97 percent of those terminal three years of landings. The South Atlantic region of Florida, which is that orange line that's comprised of northeast and southeast Florida, it's been consistently less than 5 percent of the total landings in Florida since 2013.

Estimates of headboat landings from 1981 to 2023 were obtained from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, and also available were early estimates from the headboat mode of MRIP for the years 1981 to 1985.

Hook-and-line gear types were, again, the dominant fishing gear for headboats. Landings continue to be a small component of the total recreational landings, and have been variable, but stable, in trends since the mid 1990s, and, since the benchmark landings continue to be highest from the Florida Keys region, again that blue line, averaging about 64 percent of the total headboat landings. In southeast Florida, which is that orange line, landings have averaged around 19 percent, with those recent increases that you see there from 2014 to 2016. Also, something that you'll see in this recent data is just an increasing trend in landings from southwest Florida, which is that purple line.

Rec landings from MRIP were available from 1981 to 2023. Estimates were fully calibrated based on the APAIS and Fishing Effort Survey, and, like the headboat landings, they've been variable, but stable, since the mid 1990s. From about 2021 to 2023, landings were predominantly from the Florida Keys, that blue region, or the blue line, and Southeast Florida, which is that orange line, comprised about 98 percent, 90, and 90 percent of those respective annual landings.

Since about 2014, landings have been very similar between the two regions that you see there, and, like we saw with the headboat fishery landings from southwest Florida, which is that purple line, had been a recently-increasing trend, and all of this was, you know, recently corroborated as well at the mutton workshops from that part of the region of Florida. Landings come primarily from the private mode, and, since 2017, have averaged about 80 percent of that total.

For this assessment, a rec landings topical working group was created to review Florida's State Reef Fish Survey and determine its appropriateness for inclusion in the assessment. Ultimately, the group felt that the survey better characterized the private fishing mode for yellowtail in Florida, and basically recommended its use in the base model in place of the MRIP private mode landings, and so the full SRFS time series was, you know, therefore created in two stages.

That first stage combines the 2021 to 2023 private mode landings from SRFS, along with the ratio-calibrated-MRIP private mode estimates from 1981 to 2020, and then the second stage combines these data with the MRIP charter and shore modes, in order to become that full SRFS time series, and these data replaced the original MRIP time series in the base model, and so the graph here shows the full SRFS time series, which is that teal line, against the MRIP landings that we just saw, that are now in the red bars.

For the years 1981 to 2020, the differences that you see is being the difference in the private mode calibration, but, for the years 2021 to 2023, the differences are going to be due to that SRFS estimate, and so, in 2021, the full SRFS estimate was similar to MRIP that you see, but there's also a difference in trend, moving forward, where the SRFS trends downward through 2023, whereas MRIP trends a bit upward.

Moving on to discards, the commercial discards have primarily been estimated using the commercial discard logbook data. However, the Southeast Science Center concluded that they no longer recommend the use of the discard logbook data for estimating discards, and so an approach for estimating yellowtail discards instead utilized a discard rate from the Reef Fish Observer Programs and then total fishing effort from the Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program.

Discards were predominantly from the Keys, you see there in the blue line, while discards from southeast Florida, which is that orange line, are consistently declining through time, and, you know, stabilize around 2017 , and then you see, from southwest Florida, discards remain pretty low, that purple line.

From the headboat fishery, discards came from the headboat survey for the years 2008 to 2023, and then, since discards were added to the logbook form around 2004, proxy discards were needed to be created for the years 1981 to 2007. They were used -- They were done using that SRHS mean approach, given its better representation of the headboat fishery for yellowtail, and, since proxy discards were constructed by concatenating regions, the northwest, southwest and Florida

keys regions were combined into a West region, which is that purple line that you see, while the northeast and southeast Florida regions were combined into an east region, that orange line.

The discards were highest in the west, due to the Florida Keys, and, for 2021 to 2023, were 93 percent, 90, and 90 percent of those respective total discards. In the east, you can see they've been pretty low, but exhibited an increase for the years 2013 to 2016, similar to the landings trend.

These are the MRIP live releases for the years 1981 to 2023. Live releases were typically higher than estimated landings, and, since 2017, have averaged about 65 percent of the total catch. Following the time series high of about thirteen-and-a-half-million fish in 1991, which, you know, was considered pretty suspicious at the data workshop, but 2023 was actually the second-highest estimate, at five-million fish, and, like the trends in the landings, discards were mostly from the Keys and southeast Florida, right, those blue and orange lines, averaging about 97 percent across the terminal three years.

Discards from southeast Florida also increased around 2013, as seen in the landings trends, and, like the landings, live releases were largely from the private mode, but only averaged 58 percent since 2017. Releases from the shore mode were comparatively higher, averaging about 36 percent since 2017.

These are the discards for the full SRFS time series, which was developed in the same manner as the landings, and so, in our comparison plot here, again -- MRIP is what you just saw, but now in the red, and the full SRFS time series is the teal dashed line, and so, for the years 2021 to 2023, we see the full SRFS time series follow more of the MRIP trend, and this is due to that greater presence of the shore mode component, which also increased greatly in 2023, and so the trends between the data -- It looked more similar, because the private mode is about 58 percent, compared to that 80 percent we saw in the landings.

Moving on to the indices, the commercial CPUE was constructed from the Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program data. It's used vertical line trips in southern Florida from 1993 to 2023. Trips were excluded from the data if they fell during months when the fishery experienced a closure.

You can see the index has a gradually increasing trend, before becoming stable, but variable, with this distinctive V shape in the recent years, with dip in 2020, and, since this is a retained catch per unit effort index, the size and age range of the fish associated with this index is the same as that of the commercial landings, and so, you know, we took the index and linked it to the commercial fleet within the base model.

This is the updated MRIP CPUE developed from total catch data, primarily in the Florida Keys and southeast Florida, from 1991 to 2023, and only hook-and-line gear, again, were utilized in this data. The index has a more variable, but stable, trend, with that recent dip in 2019, similar to that dip seen in the commercial index for 2020.

Then, lastly, these are the updated RVC indices, and so, in SEDAR 64, the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas were combined, for overlapping years, to create one index, but, after that assessment, changes to the RVC sampling schedules occurred, and the surveys no longer overlapped, and so, therefore, for this assessment, we decided to keep both survey areas, but chose to make them

separate indices, and so on the left are the two indices, and their uncertainties, while the plot on the right normalized them and put them together to compare trends.

You can see, from the Dry Tortugas, which is the purple index, it has more of a gradually-increasing trend, while the Keys, in blue, has more of that variable, and stable initially, trend, but increased for a few years at the end, before showing kind of a dip in 2022.

Now I'm going to get into the results of the base model, and so these are the estimated biomass trends, in units of metric tons, where the total biomass is on the left, and then spawning biomass is on the right. They largely follow the trends produced by the two fishery-dependent indices. You know, just as we expected, and the total biomass is generally increased in trend across the time series through 2017, then kind of follows that dip through 2020, and increased, again, to a time series high in 2023, and then the predicted female spawning stock largely follows this trend.

These are the numbers at age, on the left, and then the total biomass at age, on the right, and so the numbers at age are primarily ages-zero to three years, which are those dark blue through light blue column stacks that you see, while the total biomass at age is primarily fish aged one to five years, or the orange to light green column stacks that you see there in the plots. The maximum age in this model was max age observed in Florida, which was twenty years.

This plot shows the estimated stock-recruit values, which are those dots, and then the predicted stock-recruit curve, using the Beverton-Holt model, which is that black dotted line there. Virgin recruitment was estimated at about eighteen-and-a-half-million fish, and then virgin spawning stock was estimated at about 7,500 metric tons. The end of the Beverton-Holt curve is the virgin spawning stock, and the recruitment estimates, and so, by looking at this, you can see where on the curve the stock is currently estimated to be taking space. It's kind of clustered more towards the lower end of the curve, but recent years have been shifting more to the right, rather than to the left.

Steepness was estimated within the base model, at 0.77, but the results of the likelihood profiling that we did showed that there isn't strong evidence in the data to suggest a stock-recruit relationship, and so, for example, steepness values ranging from 0.64 all the way to 0.99 resulted in model fits that were not significantly different than the base model, and so, in other words, like two likelihood units or less from the base model, and so, given this, and the committee discussions that were being had yesterday, I just want to reiterate that, you know, because of the uncertainty around the steepness estimate, MSY was not considered to be reliably estimated with this model, and so just kind of lending more support for the use of an MSY proxy.

These are the estimated age-four fishing mortality rates. They've been reliably stable, or relatively stable, since the early 2000s, and have decreased in recent years. Fs were higher in the beginning of the time series, when the stock was experiencing heavier amounts of fishing pressure, in the 1980s and 1990s, which had reduced its stock size compared to where it's at now, and then the next two slides relate to stock status.

On the left shows the age-four fishing mortality rate, and uncertainty by year, which is that black line. Then the MFMT, which is F at 30 percent SPR, which is that blue dashed line, and then the geometric mean of F for the terminal three years, 2021 to 2023, which is defined as F current, that red line there, and so you can see Fs have largely been below the MFMT since the early 2000s,

and then the plot on the right shows the posterior distribution from the MCMC for that F ratio, and it's just an additional way of characterizing the uncertainty of these derived quantities. The distribution that you can see is entirely under one, indicating a high probability that the stock is not undergoing overfishing.

Then these are the same kinds of plots, but for spawning stock biomass, and so you can see the plot on the left shows those SSB estimates by year. That's just the black line. Then the SSB at F 30 percent SPR, which is the blue dashed line, and then the MSST, which is 75 percent of that value, the blue dot-dash that you see, and then the red line is that geometric mean for the terminal three years, and so, since the mid-2000s, the stock has been above the MSST, and, since the mid-2010s, has remained above the SSB at F 30 percent reference target, and then the plot on the right, again, showing that MCMC distribution for that SSB ratio. It's entirely over one, indicating the high probability that the stock is not overfished.

All right. This last section, I'm just going to highlight some of the projections that were done and presented to the SSCs, and so, like I said, several of these projections were conducted to ensure that specific constant fishing mortality rates or constant catch scenarios were achieved. For this presentation, I'll just be showing the constant F scenarios, which explored holding F constant at the F 30 percent SPR, the F associated with the P* control rule, at 0.40, and then F current, that geometric mean of the last three years. In addition, the SSCs had requested projections where F was held constant at 75 percent of that F 30 percent, and also at F 40 percent SPR.

This is a plot of the retained yield, in million pounds, for the various constant F projection scenarios, and so, at the February meeting, the consensus of the SSCs was to set OFL at F 30 percent SPR, which is that mustard-colored dotted line, and, in this scenario, projected yields increased greatly at first, and then reduced to values still much higher than historic yields, and then consensus was also reached for ABC to be set at 75 percent F 30 percent SPR, which is that blue dotted line there.

Projected yields in this scenario are higher than yields from recent years, but are similar to those estimated for the mid-2000s, and then this slide just summarizes the consensus from that meeting, you can see highlighted at the green arrow there, and then tabulates those OFL and ABC values, and so, for the years 2026 to 2028, ABC was projected, from the model, to be about 3.9 million pounds, and that's it. I'll take any questions. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Chris. Any questions for Chris on this stock assessment? Just a reminder that this stock assessment has been run twice, because we asked for the State Reef Fish Survey data to be brought in, and so it was updated with State Reef Fish Survey information. I don't see any hands, Chris. Good job.

MR. SWANSON: Sweet. Thanks so much. Appreciate you.

MS. IBERLE: All right, Chris. I'm going to take back control, really quick, and then, Shanae, it will be coming to you in just a second.

MR. SWANSON: Sounds good. Thank you.

MS. IBERLE: All right. Shanae, you should be seeing that. Okay, we can see your slides, but if you could put them in presenter mode.

MS. ALLEN: How's that?

MS. IBERLE: Perfect.

MS. ALLEN: Am I coming in clear now?

MS. IBERLE: Yes.

MS. ALLEN: Great. All right. I'll start then. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Shanae Allen, with USF's Center for Quantitative Fisheries Ecology and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. Today, I'll be presenting the results of the SEDAR 79 mutton snapper stock assessment, and, as always, I welcome your feedback.

Just starting out with a quick overview, mutton snapper is a reef-associated species in the western Atlantic Ocean, and it can be found from Maryland to southeastern Brazil, but we believe that the populations from U.S. waters belong to a single stock, and they are most abundant in south Florida. Juveniles inhabit nearshore bays, seagrass beds, and mangroves before shifting to reefs, and they can live up to forty-two years, according to the age data available for this assessment. They are known to form large spawning aggregations, while peak spawning occurs April through July.

As for the fishery, they are targeted by commercial and recreational anglers, in both state and federal waters, using primarily hook-and-line gear. In 2018, the minimum size limit was increased to eighteen inches, along with lower bag limits, and there have not been any fishery closures due to reaching ACL.

The first mutton snapper assessment, SEDAR 15A, had a terminal year of 2006 and was developed using ASAP Version 2, for ages-on to twenty-five-plus, and I list here the fleets and indices that were used, if you're interested, but the overall message was that the model found that overfishing was not occurring, and the population was not overfished.

Then fast forward to the update assessment, SEDAR 15AU, and that had a terminal year of 2013. The software was updated to ASAP Version 3, and, also, a few of the fleets and indices were changed, as noted here, but, again, the base model found that overfishing was not occurring, and the population was not overfished. That brings us to this assessment, SEDAR 79, which has a terminal year of 2023, and the assessment passed review in September of last year, and you're welcome to find all the gory details about the data and the model and the stock assessment report on the SEDAR website.

Now I'll briefly review the data inputs, starting with this visual representation of the data inputs through time. Just starting at the top here, you have landings data for four fleets, that were used from 1981 through 2023, and those are the commercial longline fleet, the commercial other, which is primarily hook-and-line, followed by two recreational fleets, rec east, which includes landings from southeast Florida and north, and rec west covered the Florida Keys and the Gulf, and then, below that, you can see the years for which abundance indices, length and age data, and discards are available.

Diving deeper into the recreational landings and discards data, the Florida private mode incorporated estimates from the Florida State Reef Fish Survey, or SRFS. From 2021 to 2023, the Florida SRFS estimates were used directly, but, prior to that, the MRIP-FES estimates were calibrated to SRFS, using these region-specific calibration ratios. Private mode landings from outside of Florida, as well as shore, charter, and headboat landings, were not calibrated and come from MRIP-FES and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey.

Here is a comparison of landings by fleet, in thousands of fish, showing that the rec east and rec west fleets, in pink and green here, make up the majority of landings, and then the proportion landed by fleet is shown on the right. Releases overwhelmingly come from the rec fleets, and there has been an increase in recent years, as shown by the plot on the left, and so I'm going very quickly here, and so, if there's any questions, please ask.

Here's an overview of each index used in this assessment, along with the spatial extent drawn on the map, and so, from east to west, we have the Southeast Reef Fish Survey, the Indian River Lagoon FIM Young-of-Year Survey, the three RVC diver surveys in southeast Florida, the Keys, and the Dry Tortugas, and, finally, the Gulf combined video survey and commercial longline CPU Index in the Gulf, and here are all the indices plotted together, which mostly looks like a jumbled mess, I know, but you can see that, in recent years, most indices are above one, meaning that they're above average, except for the Gulf combined video index, but we did have reasons to treat this index differently, since it was determined that the survey expanded into suboptimal mutton habitat in 2016.

Now I'll move on to a brief overview of the model configuration and model results, and so this model was built using Stock Synthesis, and it's a single-season, single-area model, spanning the years 1981 to 2023. Spawning is assumed to occur on June 1, and recruits are modeled as age-ones on January 1. It's a combined-sex model with female-specific spawning stock biomass.

The discard mortality rate for all fleets was assumed to be 30 percent, and this included delayed mortality. Overall, 202 out of 241 parameters were estimated, and this included steepness, which was estimated directly, and so no priors were assumed, as well as growth parameters and many others. There were forty ages in the model, and natural mortality was fixed based on the most recent recommendations. Additionally, maturity at age was also fixed, and it was updated according to best practices, with the age at 50 percent maturity equal to three-and-a-half years, and finally here, fecundity was assumed to equal spawning stock biomass at length.

The stock-recruit curve estimated by this model is shown on the right, with spawning stock biomass on the X-axis and recruits on the Y-axis. The unfished recruitment and spawning stock biomass are shown by the plus sign, far to the right, while the initial values are shown by the X, and so a lot more points at the lower end, but, in recent years, much higher, and so steepness was estimated to be about 0.64, and this is a direct estimate, as I mentioned, since a prior was not used, and the approximate 95 percent confidence interval is also shown here.

According to this model, the total biomass started to increase around the year 2000, and then even more so since 2018, and, by age, the number of age-one recruits have increased since 2014, and, in recent years, the number of older fish have increased as well.

Discard fractions, shown here on the top-left figure, show an increase in 2018, corresponding to the increase in the minimum size limit. Below that, apical fishing mortality rates, by fleet, have been highest for the rec east fleet, followed by the rec west fleet. Looking at the figure on the right, annual fishing mortality rates have decreased since 2017.

The equilibrium yield curve, as estimated by this model, shows that FMSY, which corresponds to the peak of the curve, is about equal to F 40 percent SPR. The FMSY proxy for this assessment is F 30 percent SPR, which you can see is slightly higher, but the recent average F is below FMSY, and so, while FMSY can be estimated in theory, it is quite uncertain, and, for a multitude of reasons, the SSC has recommended basing the OFL on F 30 percent SPR.

With that, here's a list of definitions and values for mutton snapper, according to Amendment 41. The FMSY proxy of F 30 percent SPR is estimated to be about 0.15, while the fishing mortality rate associated with optimum yield, and that's F 40 percent SPR, is 0.11, and the recent F values are about 0.08. The model estimated that fishing mortality rates have fluctuated around F 30 percent SPR until 2018, at which point the Fs have fallen below this threshold. Thumbs-up.

The spawning stock biomass has been at or below 75 percent of the spawning stock biomass at 30 percent SPR until 2010, but, after that time, spawning stock biomass has increased to about two-times the threshold, but note that the uncertainty is greater in recent years. Thumbs-up.

So, looking at the results in a slightly different way, this phase plot shows how stock status has changed over time, with the green area representing a sustainable stock, where both spawning stock biomass is above the target, which is spawning stock biomass at F 30 percent SPR, and F is below F 30 percent SPR, and so you can see that, since 2018, the stock has been in the green. The overall picture of the health of the stock changes somewhat if the MSY proxy was 40 percent SPR, but it's still in the green in 2023, and so, overall, there's a very positive outlook for this stock, and it appears that the regulations put in place in 2018 have been very beneficial.

Before we move on to projections, here's the comparison between this assessment and the previous update assessment. The estimated fishing mortality rates and F at 30 percent SPRs are very similar, as you can see here, especially after 1993, and the annual estimates of spawning stock biomass are also very similar. However, the spawning stock biomass at F 30 percent is a bit higher in this assessment, as shown by the solid blue line, relative to the pink line.

Now I'll quickly review a few projection scenarios. The first is constant F at F 30 percent SPR, and this is what the SSC has recommended as the basis for the OFL. Next is 75 percent of F 30 percent SPR, that the SSC has recommended as the basis for the ABC. This also happens to equal F 40 percent SPR.

Lastly, for comparison, I'll show projection results assuming recent Fs continue into the future, and so, in this plot, the retained yield associated with the OFL is in red, and this scenario assumes that Fs remain constant at F 30 percent SPR, and recruitment stays constant at the recent above-average value. The green-shaded area here highlights the first five years of the projection. Then the dashed green line below that shows what would happen to retained yield if recruitment declines and follows the stock-recruit curve. Both scenarios still result in higher yields than have historically occurred.

The last two scenarios are shown here, and so the red line now in this plot is the retained yield associated with 75 percent of F 30 percent SPR, and this is what the SSC has recommended as the ABC. This, again, assumes that recruitment stays constant at the above-average value, and, again, this results in yields that are mostly higher than what has been observed in the past. By comparison, the green dashed line illustrates predicted yields if fishing mortality remains constant at the recent average values, and that's all I have, and so thank you all for your attention, and I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Shanae. Are there any questions for Shanae? I can tell you that, when the joint SSCs came together, they gave them a round of applause, both Chris and Shanae, and they felt like these stock assessments were a success, and so I think it's a great success story, but any questions on this assessment? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and always good news, right, stocks not undergoing overfishing or not overfished. Shanae, thanks for the presentation. If you go to slide 20, there's a sharp drop in fishing mortality between 2017 and 2018, and I'm just curious your thoughts on that. It seems like it corresponds with an increase in recruitment around that timeframe, as well as maybe some of the regulations that we were putting in place with a higher size limit, and some trip limit changes, and so can you kind of validate that?

MS. ALLEN: Yes, and I would say you got that mostly right, and so there has been an increase in recruitment, but I do think, especially with the fishing mortality rates, that abrupt decrease from 2017 to 2018 is reflective of the management regulations, and so the increase in the size limit from sixteen to eighteen inches, lower trip limits, and there have also been some spawning area closures.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? All right. I don't see any additional questions. Thanks, Shanae. Great job.

MS. ALLEN: Great. Thank you.

MS. IBERLE: All right. I'm going to snag control, and then we'll get, Marcel, you set up, and so give us just a second.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you. This is a relatively brief presentation. I combined both assessments, and Chris and Shanae have already gone through some of the things that I included in my presentation. There was a joint SSC review, seven South Atlantic and fifteen Gulf SSC members. I really appreciated the interactions with our Gulf SSC members, and I think we had some really good discussions.

A lot of the issues that the South Atlantic SSC is dealing with are, obviously, similar to some of the issues in the Gulf. Both SSCs operate a little differently, and so, in this review, the decisions are made by consensus, which is how the South Atlantic SSC functions, and we also used the South Atlantic ABC control rule.

For both species, the joint recommendation was that the assessment is consistent with the best scientific information available and appropriate for management advice, and, as Chris and Shanae

mentioned, both stocks are not undergoing overfishing and not overfished, and those determinations were pretty robust. Based on the current adopted SPR-based FMSY proxy of 30 percent, and, again, Chris and Shanae indicated why ultimately the estimate of steepness was felt too uncertain.

The joint SSC used an alternative ABC control rule approach, and that was mostly because of differences in characterization of the uncertainty in the OFL, and so we deviated from our regular ABC control rule. Ultimately, the OFL was based on an F 30 percent SPR, and the ABC was based on 75 percent of F 30 percent SPR, and that was done for the 2026 to 2028 projections.

There was extensive discussion about the SPR, as was indicated earlier, and, ultimately, the justification for using that 30 percent was that both stocks had been managed at SPR 30 percent, and still saw an increase in biomass, and so we were fairly confident that that was a reasonable SPR value. Also, the landings had not exceeded ACLs in recent years.

Also, we discussed the age composition showed that older fish are still present, and that's a good indication that fishing, or fishing pressure, hasn't affected the age composition. Also, it was mentioned that there are several closed areas that may provide a refuge for the population, and that contributed, or can contribute, to the recruitment, and that's something that I believe Luiz, who was part of that SSC review, mentioned earlier.

Life history characteristics, including gonochorism, and the fact that it's a subtropical species, that may indicate that an SPR of 30 percent may be more appropriate than an SPR of 40 percent that was discussed within the group.

In terms of recruitment, there was some discussion also about what recruitment to use. The recommendation ultimately was to use the geometric mean for mutton, and the arithmetic mean for yellowtail, for the most recent five years of recruitment, and that was 2019 to 2023, to inform both OFL and ABC projections. It's a little bit different than is usually done in the South Atlantic, where, based on the recommendations of a working group for the OFL, we generally use the long-term recruitment, but the group felt that this was justified, because management was likely not to be in place until 2026. Also, the fishing levels in 2024 and 2025 were below the new ABC, and that added biomass to the -- Adding fish to the unexploited biomass, and that could contribute to some recruitment.

In terms of update assessments, the group felt that that probably should be done no later than five years, or every five years, and, in the meantime, it would be good to monitor stocks, including landings, index values, and also some input from AP and stakeholders, to see if there were signs of concerns for the populations, and then the resulting ABC values, and, again, Chris and Shanae already presented those, but I felt it was good to add that to the presentation, and so these are the OFL and ABC values for the period 2024 to 2028.

I remind the council that the SSC generally does not provide ABC recommendations for a period longer than five years, given the increasing uncertainty in the projections, and then I believe my last slide -- I can skip this. You guys already discussed this, and I would like to say that I really appreciate the council's support for -- To address the recommendation of the council to talk -- To look into the SPR proxy values and uncertainty. I think this is a very important topic, that you guys discussed yesterday, and that completes my report.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Marcel. Any questions for Marcel? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: I don't even really know how to approach this, but I'm looking at the size at maturity, size of the fish, the trends going up, and I keep thinking about what is so different between mutton snapper and red snapper, that we have such different -- We're in such a different place. I just --

I know mutton snapper are in shallower water, and they're in warmer water. They don't -- They're not quite as old as some of the old red snapper, which is deeper water, and cooler water, and so I totally get that, but it's just such a major difference, and I know we're not talking about red snapper, but what makes mutton snapper so much different? Maybe that should be the question.

DR. REICHERT: Maybe life history, and maybe where they are caught. I think there's the center of catches, and I may need to look at Luiz, or others, is different between mutton snapper, yellowtail, and red snapper, but maybe Luiz can contribute to that discussion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and Luiz is coming to the table.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Luiz.

DR. BARBIERI: Sure, Marcel. Thank you, Madam Chair. Charlie, very good question, right, and Marcel already covered the issue of life history right between the two, but I think, in this case, if you think about where the center of abundance of those stocks are located, right, and so both yellowtail and mutton, as Shanae and Chris explained, are really centered in the Florida Keys, and so, at this point, we have not seen any negative environmental impacts on those two species.

Now, the reef tract there continues undergoing some level of degradation. Whether this is going to translate into some negative recruitment trends in the future is to be seen, but, at this point, you know, given the regulations that have been applied in the past, and given the closed areas, specifically where spawning aggregations are located, they have benefited from that, and you can see the positive trend.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: All right. Well, I've heard "spawning closure areas" twice, and so -- I don't know where they are, how big they are, any of those, but, just as a general rule, is that something that we might should look for for some of our other species, i.e., red snapper? Could that be one of the tools that would help us with red snapper, and so just a question.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Can I start? So, I mean, the areas for mutton that are closed are Western Dry Rocks and areas out in the Tortugas, and so it has to do partly, for mutton, with the way these species aggregate to spawn, and those particular closures, and they've been in place, the one in the Tortugas, longer than the one at Western Dry Rocks, but this council talked about Western Dry Rocks for mutton, and how they thought that should be closed, but the council couldn't do it. It's in state waters, and so the FWC had to do it.

Western is a multi-species spawning aggregation, but I think -- The Tortugas has been in place for a while, but I think that that really reformed some of these spawning aggregations for mutton, but that's different than how red snapper spawns, but I'll turn it to Luiz, to see if he wants to add to this.

DR. BARBIERI: Nothing else to add, Madam Chair. That's exactly it, that red snapper don't seem to form those spawning aggregations. They are much more distributed in their spawning habitat, and so it's difficult to have those area closures provide, you know, positive results.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: At the risk of bogging it down, this was a question I wanted to ask during black sea bass. I don't know much about that fish, but I was going to ask, and do we know if there's aggregations, or spawning sites, because we talked about closures during spawning, but -- No?

DR. REICHERT: From my knowledge of black sea bass life history, there's not spawning aggregations like you see in other species. They spawn in -- There's widely-dispersed spawning.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Clay.

DR. PORCH: I can't help but notice that these two species are also summertime spawners, and, as I mentioned earlier, we have some evidence that the winter/spring spawners are -- The recruitment is going down. The summertime spawners are -- The recruitment is going up, and there's been some oceanographic changes that could probably explain that. I'm just wondering if the SSC has talked about this at any length.

DR. REICHERT: Not in the context of these two species, but, as I mentioned in my previous presentation, that the Science Center did present a presentation to the council relative to the results of that recruitment working group, and we did talk about that, that there were indications that there's different patterns in the summer spawners and the winter spawners, and that may be a key to explaining what's happening, but I think that work -- You may be able to answer that, and I think that working group, at that time, was still working on finalizing their findings. I'm not sure where that stands right now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any other questions for Marcel? All right. Thank you, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you.

MS. IBERLE: All right. So, as far as committee action, I would just want to reorient you guys to what you had previously discussed as far as how to move forward with the assessment response, and so I believe it was in December of last year, and we talked about kind of separating -- Moving forward with this and combining yellowtail and mutton together, using that existing Amendment 44, which was a joint amendment with the Gulf, and then possibly using that amendment to establish the jurisdictional allocation for both species.

Then both regions would separate, and then the South Atlantic would have a separate -- Kind of right behind Amendment 44, an amendment that would establish the South Atlantic ACL, allocations, and then give you the opportunity to modify any management measures.

When you were looking at the workplan earlier in the week, that yellowtail amendment that you guys removed was what we had originally planned as that amendment to establish the South Atlantic ACL, look at allocations, management measures and such, and so I had prepared a draft motion to reinitiate work on that joint Amendment 44, and, again, when we discussed it in December -- Previously, when we worked on Amendment 44, the South Atlantic was the lead.

You guys had discussed having the Gulf as the lead this time around, and so I guess my question to the committee would be are we wanting to continue with how we looked at the workplan earlier, and then just include actions in that joint amendment to also establish the South Atlantic ACL, after we've jurisdictionally allocated, and then the allocations, and, again, this will be for both species, and so yellowtail and mutton will be together as one.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would say, in that joint amendment, I think that we should only deal with -- Because this is joint amendment with the Gulf, only deal with the minimum, bringing in these new numbers and establishing that jurisdictional allocation, and I'll look to C.J. to talk about the Gulf Council's discussion on this.

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and that's -- Thank you, Madam Chair. That's exactly what we did. We approved staff to direct -- Or we directed staff to develop a document, in conjunction with the South Atlantic Council, to update the catch level recommendations, based on the SSC's recommendations there, as well as looking at the jurisdictional apportionment, and so that's along the lines of what we did with this at the Gulf Council.

MS. MCCAWLEY: You did it for both species, and so it's basically like we're taking the previous amendment, that was just yellowtail and we're adding mutton to it, right?

DR. SWEETMAN: That's correct.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MS. IBERLE: All right, and so the draft motion I have up here, for you guys to consider, would be -- The way I worded it was to resume work on joint Amendment 44/Reef Fish 55, and that would be with the addition of catch levels and jurisdictional allocation for mutton snapper, and then I guess we would still kind of be thinking about, you know, a quick follow-up amendment, that would then establish ACLs and allocations for both of those species, that is just a South Atlantic amendment.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I think so. I don't want to put those things in this joint amendment. All right. Would someone like to make this motion? Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: **Madam Chair, I direct staff -- Make a motion to direct staff to resume work on the joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55, with the addition of catch levels and jurisdictional allocations for mutton snapper.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Is there a second? Seconded by Tim. C.J., did you have a question on this? Okay. C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: **Just for my clarification, do you need yellowtail in there too, or is that already included within that motion?**

MS. IBERLE: **Charlie, we also were going to clarify, instead of "catch levels", "ABCs", and looking to you to --**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Are you good with that?

MR. PHILLIPS: **All good.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and, Tim, are you good? Okay. Yes. All right. Any more discussion, or any discussion, on this motion? **Any objection?** All right. **The motion carries.** All right. Thank you for that. We're going to jump around here in the agenda, based on a little bit of time before lunch, and I'm going to see if Chip can give us an update on the MSE.

DR. COLLIER: So just a little bit of background. As you all know, we started the snapper grouper management strategy evaluation I think in late 2022. We had contracted with Blue Matter Science, in order to develop a multispecies management strategy evaluation, and that contract ended in December of 2024, and we put out a call for proposals just recently, and we funded Blue Matter to continue the work.

What we're hoping to do is combine the work that Blue Matter is doing with the work that Kai Lorenzen, at the University of Florida, is doing with the angler attitude and perceptions, in order to develop some, I guess, more -- Some management measures that can be analyzed a little bit in better detail, and I think what you guys are talking about with your innovative approach, where you're setting goalposts, and I think that can be incorporated into the management strategy evaluation.

I think all those things help to better develop these management strategies, because we need concrete ideas, and like we need a bag limit of X number of fish, and this season will be open, and this size limit. It has to be very specific, to compare the different management alternatives, and I think we're getting there with some of these species.

Black sea bass is one of them, and maybe we can use that management strategy evaluation to help compare what would be going on with black sea bass, under these different scenarios that you guys had just talked about today, and so, just to let you know, we're going to be working on that. We're going to have monthly meetings of the technical team, but they're also going to be -- Blue Matter is going to be working, like I said, with Kai, in order to get some private recreational angler input, and also look at the survey that Kai had done, in order to, and I'm sure he's contacted some of you, in order to get feedback on how to improve the management strategy evaluation.

With all that said, we hope to have that completed by September of 2026, and so we'll be bringing that to you all at that time. We're likely to be coming back to the council, maybe in September, in order to get some feedback on some potential management scenarios. That way, those can get incorporated with the feedback from the private recreational group that Kai is going to be talking with. All that being said, we appreciate all the effort that the council has done, and we're going to continue to work and move forward with the management strategy evaluation, hopefully having it ready to go and analyzing set scenarios in the near future.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Chip. Any questions? All right. I just want to also point out that, earlier in the week, we already had a discussion about kind of reordering the workplan, and one of the items here on the Snapper Grouper agenda, Amendment 46, we're not going to be discussing that this week. There was a presentation there, and we will get that presentation, I believe, at the December meeting, and so that's off our list as well.

With that, Madam Chairman, I'm going to turn it back to you to tell us about lunch and when to come back for lunch. When we come back, we still have a couple more items left in the Snapper Grouper Committee and an item under Other Business.

MS. MURPHEY: All right, you guys, and we're caught back up. Good job, Jessica, and so we'll just come back at 1:30, and we'll start out with the blueline tilefish, and so see you all at 1:30.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We're diving into Atlantic blueline, and first up is SEDAR 92 assessment presentation.

DR. COLLIER: Thank you. This is council staff giving this presentation, just because it's a little bit different than other results of stock assessments that we've had before. Just to give you a little spoiler, what's recommended coming out of the SSC's review is an average catch model for both the assessment for the region north of Cape Hatteras and the region south of Cape Hatteras.

Before we get into the results, I want to give you a bit of a background for the stock. The previous stock assessment for blueline tilefish was completed in 2017, with data through 2015. Over this time period, the combined ACL in the southern region was exceeded in every year except 2022 and 2024. Therefore, it's important to understand if the population was being impacted by these overages.

For SEDAR 92, the blueline tilefish are split at Cape Hatteras for the assessment, but managed with a split in management at the North Carolina-Virginia border, and this leads to some challenges. Due to this management and assessment regions, you're going to hear terms, associated with SEDAR 92, such as the south of Cape Hatteras model, north of Cape Hatteras model, and the sliver.

South of Cape Hatteras was previously assessed using a production model, while north of Cape Hatteras was assessed using a data-limited model to develop the overall catch recommendations. Further, the ABC north of Cape Hatteras has to be split, due to this management by both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic. The area that the South Atlantic manages, which is between Cape Hatteras and the Virginia border, is often referred to as the sliver. None of these areas are a biological split, but the split were based on data availability, trends, and/or management jurisdiction.

Now, getting into the stock assessments a little bit more, for the SEDAR 92, the model north of Cape Hatteras used a similar framework as SEDAR 50, which was the previous stock assessment. SEDAR 50 was a benchmark assessment that included Center for Independent Expert Review.

SEDAR 92 was going to rely on -- It relied on SSC reviews, and this required a review process that included both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic SSCs.

To do this, a review panel was set up of a subset of members, and the data-limited method explored for the area north of Cape Hatteras was a length of catch in recent years compared to average length over a longer time series, and then also average catch. Overall, the group recommended, for the north of Cape Hatteras, an average catch model. This average catch model ended up being 646,000 pounds whole weight.

Remember this area is managed by two different councils, and so the ABC, and -- Because this is an average catch, it is not indicative of the overall status of the stock, and so overfishing is not available, and so they're considering the value that comes out of this average catch model to be an ABC, or acceptable biological catch, and not an OFL.

Remember this area is managed by two different councils, and so this ABC had to be split between the two different areas, and so this apportionment in the past had been done on the pilot of the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey, and that indicated about 54 percent of the habitat was available north of the Virginia border, and south of it was 46 percent, and so that's how the ABC was split up previously.

As we've further developed the South Atlantic, or as the science centers have further developed the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey, the area north of Cape Hatteras has increased, or north of the Virginia line has increased quite a bit, and it's estimated to be about 70 percent of the overall habitat available in that region for blueline tilefish, and that means 30 percent is in that sliver in the South Atlantic. Given these new numbers, the ABC for that sliver region is about 193,800 pounds.

South of Cape Hatteras, we previous -- Or previous, in SEDAR 50, they used an ASPIC model, which is a surplus production model. This type of model incorporates landings and an index of abundance, and it can be used to determine stock status and overfishing limits. As mentioned, an ABC, or an index of abundance, is needed for this model, and the index that was included ended in 2017. This resulted in -- The index of abundance during this time period, from 1997 to 2007, had an increasing trend, along with a fairly stable time series.

This resulted in a predicted doubling of catch per unit effort from the time period of 2007 to 2023, and the SSC raised a lot of concern about that doubling of overall catch, or overall CPUE, in the area, with very little other information to support that change in overall CPUE.

Given that, the council requested that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center conduct a DLM Tool, which is that catch model that is -- Or is similar to the methods that were used up north, and, also, if possible, conduct an additional run of the ASPIC model with additional years of index of abundance, whether it's a new index of abundance or potential other sources. The center indicated that they would do the DLM Tool, and, once again, this was a quick timeframe, from the April SSC meeting to the May SSC meeting, and so less than a month in order to get this done.

The Science Center indicated they would only be able to do the DLM Tool, and so, once again, this is going to be average catch, and this results in an ABC for the South Atlantic region south of Cape Hatteras at 133,000 pounds.

Combining these two different areas, we have 326,800 pounds whole weight for the ABC of blueline tilefish, and, with that, I'll send it over to Marcel. He's going to get into a lot of the more details of the SSC's discussion of the SEDAR 92, and then I'll come back and go into a bit of the overview for blueline tilefish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Can we take a five-minute break? We're having some technical difficulties up here. I apologize.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, come on back to the table. We're ready to get going again. All right. I'm going to turn it over to Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you. Chip stole some of my thunder. I may be providing a little more detail on some of the SSC deliberations. I'll go through the north of Cape Hatteras blueline tilefish review first, then to the south, and you'll notice that since, ultimately, the same method was used for the assessment, or to determine the ABC for the southern part, there's a lot of the same comments, and so perhaps we can go through that relatively quickly, but you'll see some duplication, but that's why.

Nikolai Klibansky was the assessment lead, and he presented both assessments to the SSC. As Chip indicated, as we've done in the past, there was a subcommittee from the Mid-Atlantic SSC and the South Atlantic SSC that reviewed the northern part of this assessment on April 1, and, again, as Chip indicated, that joint subcommittee review was an approach that was very similar to SEDAR 50 back in 2017 and 2018.

SEDAR 92 addressed some of the data concerns from SEDAR 50, but we discussed that significant data issues remained. The MRIP catch estimates were used to inform total catch time series, instead of the Delphi method that was used in SEDAR 50, and we noticed that the MRIP catch estimates were much higher than those derived from the Delphi method, and the uncertainty associated with that MRIP estimate was very high.

We also realized that sampling from commercial longline fleet declined since 2014, and there were very few trips in recent years, less than ten, and then we extensively discussed the SADL survey, including the recent expansion, and I think there was two years available for that northern expansion to cover the area of Cape Hatteras north. It definitely holds promise, but, as I reported to you previously, the current time series of the data were too short to include in SEDAR 92, and, also, there were no age comps available. However, ages were used to determine the growth curves in this assessment, in the initial assessment.

The overall approach using the DLM methods, or data-limited methods, again, were similar to SEDAR 50. There were two length methods that were presented. They were used in SEDAR 50. However, they were rejected in SEDAR 92, because, as the analyst indicated, and Nikolai did a lot of work trying to explore why that was, but the total allowable catch was ten to twenty-times the current catch, and, what was even more important, if you subtract the natural mortality from the total mortality, in a lot of instances, that resulted in negative F, and so we felt that that was unrealistic -- That was unrealistic.

That meant that we ended up with three catch-based methods. The catch were both landings and discards. There was an average catch of the entire time series, an average catch over the most recent five years, and then 70 percent of the average catch over the most recent five years, a, b, or c.

The catch-based methods were rejected in SEDAR 50, but, because of the fact that we couldn't use the length, or we didn't feel we could use length-based methods, we recommended the catch-based methods for this assessment, and then, furthermore, we recommended b, the average catch over the most recent five years, for ABC. We felt that that best reflected the current fishery conditions, and, also, it included some measure of uncertainty, given the variability in the catch estimates.

To talk a little bit more about it, and something that Chip already mentioned, the DLM does not produce any quantitative estimates of the population trends, stock status, stock projections, et cetera. The subgroup noted increasing trends in catch, some recent higher proportions of larger fish, and optimistic population and fishery signs from the industry, and this could represent a positive sign for the population, but there were a variety of caveats and uncertainties.

The catch-based method was considered, as I mentioned, for an ABC, and, again, as Chip mentioned, this is not an OFL, because the OFL is unknown, and the SSC has done that in the past, where we went through a series of unassessed stocks, where we noted that the OFL is unknown, and the ABC is then provided to the council. That ABC resulted in 646,000 pounds whole weight, and that represents the 50 percent quantile of the average catch over the most recent five years of the catch series.

This was a combined group, and the Mid-Atlantic SSC functions and provides recommendations to their council a little bit different than we do, but the subgroup mentioned that, given the high degree of uncertainty, we suggested that the council can consider applying a management uncertainty buffer when setting an ACL or an ACT, and we also felt that it was probably good to have a new assessment within five years, and we highly recommend to, if appropriate, to include the SADL survey and also see if age data could be reliably included in a new assessment.

The next thing that subgroup did was coming up with an apportioning of the Cape Hatteras to North Carolina-Virginia border and north of the North Carolina-Virginia border. We consider two approaches. One was based on the landings. However, we didn't recommend that, because it would heavily depend on effort estimates, and the other one was based on the fishery-independent SADL survey information, and that was consistent with what was done in SEDAR 50. However, in SEDAR 50, we only had one year of a pilot study. That was data from 2017.

In the meantime, since then, we now have two years of data of the northern extension, 2023 and 2024. In the end, the number of blueline tilefish that were caught was much higher than the pilot study. Therefore, we felt that it was most appropriate to use those two years from the SADL survey, the 2023 and 2024, to come up with the apportioning. However, we discussed several methods and uncertainties relative to that choice, and there's details in our report.

The subgroup recommended use of the combined 2023 and 2024 SADL survey CPUEs, scaled by the sampling area, or the stratum, and that resulted in 30 percent, as Chip mentioned, Cape Hatteras

to the North Carolina-Virginia border, or 193,800 pounds, and 70 percent for the area north of the North Carolina-Virginia border, which is 452,200 pounds of whole wet weight.

The full SSC reviewed the recommendation in their May webinar and agreed with the subgroup recommendations. We reiterated that choice of an average catch, given what I presented earlier. We also realized, or discussed, that the data-limited methods are sensitive to length composition data. Longline length comps from the data inputs may not be representative of the population, or the whole fishery, and, as I mentioned earlier, there were very few trips sampled to come up with length comps.

The mean length-based methods assume that the population is in equilibrium. Also, that's why we agree with the subgroup, and the sensitivity runs -- These are -- The L_C and L_{bar} are some of the parameters in that length-based assessment.

If they were used in the 2015 run, and that's the SEDAR 50, that yielded some similar results to the average catch, and that gave us some confidence in the choice of an average catch output, and so that all helped us determine that the average catch was more appropriate than the mean length method, and then the K parameters in the growth curves were higher than SEDAR 50, but that may have been due to the fact that, in SEDAR 50, the growth parameters were based on a meta-analysis, and, in SEDAR 92, as I mentioned earlier, it was based on growth curves that included length and age data.

Having made the recommendation to use average catch, we also realized that the outcome is highly uncertain. There's a lot of data limitations, including the lack of CPUE information and index, and unreliable size or age compositions, et cetera. As I mentioned earlier, there's no estimate of stock status or OFL, and the SSC also extensively discussed that average catch, of course, may be affected by management, and that's an uncertainty that, as I said, was discussed by the SSC.

In terms of the proportion estimation, there were some concerns that the method only used two years of data. However, it's definitely an improvement over the one-year pilot study, but we also realized that that resulted in a large change in the proportion estimate, and so we had some discussion on that, and, also the changing of the regional proportion could have a negative result of increasing discards for one region, possibly over the other.

In terms of the ABC procedure, there was no OFL, and so we used Category 4, which is a category that's largely based on expertise within the SSC, to recommend a direct ABC. We realized, and we discussed that before, that the procedure for setting ABCs in the new ABC control rule, in the Categories 2 and 4, are really not fully developed, and we felt, as an SSC, that there is a need for discussing standardizing the approach, to avoid inconsistent and ad hoc decisions, and so we are really looking forward to discussing that and see what approaches we can use for assessments that are not a full-blown statistical catch-at-age, or similar models, where we have a clear indication of uncertainty in the stock assessment.

In terms of monitoring, it would be good to monitor regional trends in the commercial trips and the SADL surveys, abundance data, for the proportion of catch in the areas north of Cape Hatteras and north of the North Carolina-Virginia border, and it may be possible to reevaluate that apportionment, or the methods that we use based, on some additional years of SADL survey data, and we felt that that could potentially be done before a full next assessment, or on an annual basis,

and, obviously, that would require some coordination with the Mid-Atlantic, because it just doesn't affect that sliver.

The Mid-Atlantic SSC has recommended setting an ABC for one year and considering additional sources of data before setting future year catch levels. The SSC recommends coordinating any of these changes with the Mid-Atlantic, as I mentioned earlier, but we typically, as I mentioned earlier, set recommendations for five years, and, as you will see in my later slides, that's a little different in this assessment, or in the SSC recommendations for this assessment.

In terms of the next assessment, SADL has -- As I mentioned earlier, we feel that has a lot of promise to significantly improve the next assessment, and so we recommend maybe 2028, or as soon as the SADL data survey can be reliably incorporated, in particular the extension north of Cape Hatteras, and, again, here's the L_C and L_{bar}.

There's some explanation of that in our report, and, although those two parameters are typically based on length compositions, perhaps the SADL survey can provide some length, additional length, data, and serve as a source of that, and help providing some length compositions, especially since the gear is similar to the commercial longline gear characteristics. Then, as I mentioned earlier, investigate if age can be used reliably in the next assessment.

The ABC for the Cape Hatteras to the North Carolina-Virginia border, as I mentioned earlier, is 193,800 pounds wet weight in 2026 onward, until a subsequent ABC recommendation is made, and so that's the same number for the following years than what we provided for 2026, and that's a little bit different than our typical ABC recommendations, because this is based on that average catch, and that's the northern part. Perhaps we can move to the southern part, because there are a lot of similar issues, before I answer any questions, if that's okay with you.

South of Cape Hatteras, we had a review in April, as Chip mentioned. We felt that the ASPIC model was not consistent with BSIA, and not suitable for management, and, therefore, the SSC rejected that stock assessment. We recommended, and requested, the DLM analysis, and that was reviewed on May 28, and the SSC expressed some appreciation for the analysts to have that done for our May 28 webinar.

The justification was that between the end of the time series, the index time series, and the assessment, there were more than ten years of the time series that was not available. The hand and longline indices that were used in SEDAR 50 were only available from 1993 to 2007, and so there was a long period where we had no information relative to an index.

The landings data are not sufficient for surplus production models to provide a robust result, and then there were no other data sources supporting an increase in the model biomass, as Chip mentioned earlier, in the most recent years.

Two models fit to either the longline index or the handline index, indicating different levels of productivity, and so there was a little bit of an internal conflict there, and, for seventeen years after the termination of the index, the model predictions were driven solely by removals, and so there were a lot of uncertainties, and, ultimately, the SSC decided -- There were some other -- I forgot I had this slide in here, but the model cannot discriminate between increasing biomass attributed to

lower F rates or increase in recruitment. Also, the longline and handline models had different CVs, but these were not weighted in the assessment projections.

We discussed, at length, the South Carolina short bottom longline survey, and that was considered, but ultimately rejected for use in SEDAR 50, and the SSC discussed whether or not it could have been used, or considered for use, because there were some additional years available with an extended geographic area and an increase in sample size.

Based on the trends report, or the data that were provided during the review, the survey showed a slightly positive trend in the relative abundance since 2000, which is not as steep as the model index predictions. However, we also discussed that the SEDAR 50 recommendations not to use the index was followed for SEDAR 92, and so that was at least consistent with the decisions that were made in SEDAR 50, and so, ultimately, we understood that that recommendation was continued in SEDAR 92.

The SSC recommended an average catch method for ABC, for the ABC basis, that's similar to the northern region. Mean length methods for the southern region resulted in large variance estimates, but so there were the same issues as with the northern region. However, they were somewhat more realistic than in the northern region, but there were still significant enough concerns that we rejected that.

The distribution of average catch management plan, or the average catch method, showed similar shape to the handline index from the ASPIC, and so that provided a little bit of additional support for the validity of the output. We also discussed that the fishery in the southern region was established for a longer period than in the northern period, and so using a longer time series was considered to be more appropriate, and I'll come back to that in a little bit.

Then, as with the northern, with the choice of the northern -- With the methods for the northern series, this average catch includes some measure of uncertainty, given the variability in the catch estimates, and so that's why we felt it was an ABC, that ABC already included some scientific uncertainty.

In addition, given that the data type from recent years are similar for both regions, and the blueline tilefish comprises one stock, again, we felt that the similar assessment approach for the two regions was probably justifiable, and so we had the same, ultimately the same, three options for the northern region, average catch of the entire time series, average catch over the most recent five years, and 70 percent.

The SSC ultimately recommended using an ABC based on the average catch over the full time series. That's a little bit different than in the northern area. We felt that the distribution of average catch shows a similar shape to the handline index from ASPIC, as I mentioned earlier, and sorry, and that's a duplication from what I mentioned earlier.

I also wanted to remind the council that the DLM Tool does not provide quantitative estimates of biomass, F, or stock status, and so, as with the northern part, in the southern part, the OFL is unknown, and so, given the concerns, the bottom line was that the average catch method, based on historical removals, represents the best scientific information currently available for developing ABC recommendations for the southern region.

As with the northern region, the same comments that the average catch is highly uncertain. The input data can be constrained by ACLs and management. However, we felt that there was a fairly consistent catch, over a long period of time, that provided some support for continuing that average catch will not have a negative consequence for the stock, and, also, that was the reason why we chose that longer time series relative to the most recent five years in the northern part.

I mentioned earlier that we used -- No OFL, and same thing. We used Category 4. We had some difficulties because those procedures aren't well developed, and monitoring, again, the same recommendation to monitor trends in commercial trips and SADL survey abundance, to see if there's any concerns.

The next assessment, similar to the northern part, 2028 or as soon as SADL data can be included. The same comments relative to the L_C and L_{bar} parameters, and then, also, I think it would be extremely helpful if reliable age data can be used in the next assessment, and so the bottom line is ABC, for 2026, onward until subsequent ABC recommendations are made, for the area south of Hatteras, 133,000. The area Cape Hatteras north, 193,800, and, if I did my math correct, the ABC for the entire region is 326,800 pounds whole wet weight, and I believe that concludes my presentation. I'm happy to answer any questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Marcel. Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thank you, Marcel. Yes, and this is tough. Do you have the numbers that would compare that long-term average from 1987 to 2023 against the five-year? What would it have been if you did go with that five-year average for the south?

DR. REICHERT: There's a table. I don't have it here. There's a table in the SSC report, or the -- I'm not sure if it's in the SSC. There is a table in the assessment report that shows it. I think the abbreviations are CC1. Help me out, or CC2 and ABC average catch. CC1 is, I believe, the catch over the most recent five years, and we did not at all consider the 70 percent of the recent five years. I think the most relevant may be to compare the average catch, ABC, and CC1. I'm not sure if anyone has that, and so that's where you can find that, and Chip is trying to pull that up. There is two similar tables, one for the northern part, obviously, and one for the southern part, and so which one would you like to see, Tim?

MR. GRINER: I want to see the southern. So, overall, this represents a decrease in the combined blueline ABC?

DR. REICHERT: Relative to the current?

MR. GRINER: Yes.

DR. REICHERT: Mike, can you answer that question? I don't remember looking at it.

DR. COLLIER: So, Tim, as you know, it's complicated, and so one of the things that is complicating this is we're changing from FES, or from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey to FES, and so that's -- A direct comparison can't be done, but, in my looking at these two numbers, it appears that they're going up with FES, and so average catch is likely going -- And you also have

the change in apportionment between the sliver and the northern area, and Virginia north, and so that's going to lead to, overall, likely a decrease in your ABC for this population.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Rick has the most recent amendment that we set ABC and ACL, and so it's 233,000 pounds for the South Atlantic ABC, but that's in CHTS MRIP units, and not the FES units, and so it's not apples to oranges.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Tim.

MR. GRINER: So, using these average landings, or using this the five-year north and in the long-term for the south, does this mean that, after this assessment, or after the after 2026, then we no longer have this issue with the two currencies, or how do we get rid of that problem?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Well, Tim, we might. I don't know that it's necessarily getting rid of the difference in the currencies, because, yes, there's the transition right now from CHTS to FES, but remember, within a couple of years from now, there's going to be another update to FES that would potentially change -- That will change the cash metrics again, and so it's not something that's necessarily going to go away and the council isn't going to have to address the issue again moving forward at some point.

MR. GRINER: Yes, and, well, that's what makes the whole thing seem unfair to me, I mean, because, you know, we -- The SSC has said that the best they can do is use some type of catch average, right, and that they're confident, by using that catch average, that they're not going to negatively impact the stock, and so, on the surface of that, I just can't see -- Aside from the currencies, I can't see any reason why you would go backwards, why the ABC would go down. I can't see why I wouldn't at least stay the same, if not increase some, but, for the life of me, if you're confident that, using that, you're not going to negatively impact the stock, why would you drop the catch?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, so there's differences in the recreational survey units, but the ABC is about 100,000 pounds higher under this new assessment, right, and the question then remains, once you take into consideration the new survey and look at allocations, how much is going to go to the commercial versus the recreational, based on any sort of allocation formula we develop, and so the ABC is higher. The question will be, once you take into account that new survey, how much gets allocated to each sector.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Well, I don't think we can even begin to look at -- How could you look at allocations between sectors when you don't even know what the currency is? We've got this new currency coming, you know, and, I mean, it's like -- I really don't know how you could even begin

to address a shift in allocation, because until -- At least till that pilot study is done, and we know exactly what you're dealing with, as far as some type of currency.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So, granted, I'm not a stock assessment scientist, but so, when you guys did the ASPIC, you decided, because of the ten-year gap in the indices, that was just too big of a deal, and so you rejected it, and is that basically the main thing there, is that ten-year gap in the indices that that ASPIC was --

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and that was an important consideration by the SSC to consider that not BSIA.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay, but I saw that, or I think you presented, that you matched up -- I forget which slide you had, but I think you said you compared some things to the ASPIC, and they were matching, and so does that -- Does that help with the ASPIC, because it just -- I mean you dropped -- You decided to reject it, but you can -- You looked at trends, and they were matching, and so I guess, in other words, that gave you more comfort in the DLM, but I know I just thought that was interesting, that you rejected it, but you were using it to kind of compare with the DLM results.

DR. REICHERT: If I remember correctly, that was one of the aspects that we looked at, but, overall, the SSC felt that that was -- That period was too long, and it relied too much on landings, and that created a situation that the SSC could not consider BSIA. I hope that answers your question.

MS. MURPHEY: Okay. Yes, and I just thought that was interesting, and so the other thing -- Since you used average catch, and, if I am remembering things right, because this was like my very first council meeting, and so I think the recreational guys were going way over, and I think the commercial guys were like maybe getting cut off right there at their ACL, and so it made me think that that average catch might have been too constrained, because it went so much over the ACL so that -- In other words -- What am I trying to say?

You had to cut them off. You had to cut the commercial guys off at -- Once they reach their ACL, and then, on top of that, the rec guys did go way over, and so I just kind of -- You do talk about it being a little constrained and so I just wondered if that wasn't a -- I guess it kind of concerns me, but I didn't -- If that concerns you guys enough, but it -- It just seemed that, since the commercial guys are having to shut down early, that that's playing a role, and the rec guys had so much more, that I guess I would have expected an increase as well, just based off the recreational data, if that makes sense.

DR. REICHERT: What the SSC discussed was in more general terms, that any method you base on an average catch, if there is management, and, if the catches bump to the ACL, then that restricts the catch, and so that's -- That's an uncertainty, and we discussed that at length, in terms of what to recommend.

That is somewhat mitigated, and I forgot where that cutoff was, and I believe there was a period in that long-term catch that there were was not this ACL, but I may be mistaken, and so someone

maybe correct me if I'm wrong, that it -- That they didn't bump into that ACL, but that's definitely -- That's a concern that the SSC discussed.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and that just kind of makes me wonder if that may have constrained it more than it needed to be, but I don't know.

DR. REICHERT: Unfortunately, looking at the available data, that's what the -- Ultimately, the SSC had to go by.

MS. MURPHEY: Then I guess one last thing. The change in the -- From 66-44, from 70-30, and what -- I know we're dealing with CHTS and FES, but is that going to amount to an increase, or do we know? Is that going to amount to an increase in the sliver, or not, or is that --

DR. REICHERT: Again, because of the different currencies, I may have -- I may need some assistance from Mike on that, but you're not talking about the 30-70 relative to the previous, but you're talking about the amount of --

MS. MURPHEY: What is this -- Yes, and I guess you probably can't answer that question, and it's just -- You know, I just wonder what the change is in the sliver from the first go-round to this go-round.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and it's a -- It is a numerical increase, but it's one of those, because of the different currencies of the recreational catch estimates, it's hard to be able to tell whether it's an effective increase relative to what the catch has been under FES units.

MS. MURPHEY: Yes, and like Spanish. All right. Well, anyway, there was just some things that kind of jumped out at me.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Other questions? Tom.

MR. ROLLER: Yes, and stop me if this is the wrong time to ask this, but what is the continued rationale for the Hatteras boundary between the -- Between the breakdown.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, coming -- I guess in SEDAR 50, and then coming into this assessment, as this -- Remember this assessment was an operational assessment, and so it was going to use pretty much the same modeling as SEDAR 50, with updated data, and the reason why was because that index that was used in the South Atlantic for the ASPIC model during SEDAR 50 -- That only went up to Cape Hatteras, and it was noticed that the fishery north of Cape Hatteras was operating in a fashion that was different than the fishery south of Cape Hatteras, and so that's why the two different models were used.

Coming into this model, obviously, the SSC decided that the ASPIC model, because of the length of time that that index was no longer active, they decided that that was no longer an applicable model for the South Atlantic region, which is why now we have DLM Tool models for both north of Hatteras and south of Hatteras, but it was originally because of where that survey ended at that Cape Hatteras line.

MR. ROLLER: But that boundary, in terms of the breakdown and stuff, is still considered appropriate being where the boundary line -- I'm just trying to understand it.

DR. REICHERT: Mike maybe, or someone else, can chime-in, but I think it was a result of the approach in SEDAR 50, that was carried forward in SEDAR 92, and that's why we still have that Cape Hatteras break. Now, there is -- From a biological point of view, there is also a well-known biological geographic break, but I don't think that was a major consideration. It was more the data availability of that index south and the carrying through of that in the current assessments.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Mike.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Just adding on, I think it also was a time consideration of when this came to light that the ASPIC model was not going to be applicable for the South Atlantic region. The assessment had already been completed. This was in the step of SSC review at this point, and so the option was -- We've already run the DLM Tool for the north of Hatteras portion, and we've run the ASPIC for the south of Hatteras portion, and the option is either do a whole new thing of running a DLM Tool for the entire coastline or run the DLM Tool for the portion in south of Hatteras that it hasn't been done for.

The SSC elected to ask for a run of the DLM Tool in the south of Hatteras portion, since north of Hatteras, that has already -- That, at that point, had already had considerations, and communication, between us and the Mid-Atlantic Council, and the Mid-Atlantic SSC, and so there had been a lot of work put into the north of Hatteras alone model that the SSC decided the south of Hatteras would go through its own process with the DLM Tool.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: But, regardless of how that line got established in the past, via whatever was available, data available, we're still very, very confident, and very sure, that the majority of the landings are in that sliver, correct? I mean, that's where it's all coming from, right?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So --

MR. GRINER: It just seems we've got -- We're not taking that into consideration when we're setting this ABC. I mean, I'm not sure how we address it, but we know where the landings are coming from, but we're taking a cut -- We're cutting where -- We're taking a cut where the landings are coming from.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any other questions? Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm hesitant, because I'm really struggling to wrap my brain around this, and so this could sound very uninformed. Bear with me. I'm going through the comment Dewey sent us and trying to make sense of it, and so, the way I understand it is the SSC subcommittee decided, and not randomly, obviously, but made an informed decision that there is some available habitat north of the line that probably holds blueline tilefish.

Therefore, there's probably a bigger portion of the population than we previously thought north of the line, and so they changed the formula of Mid-Atlantic sliver and south Atlantic from the

previous 70-30 to 56-44, for sorry. From 56-44, and I assume 56 north and 44 sliver and south to 70 north and 30 south. I told you I wasn't going to sound smart. My brain is working around this.

Okay, and so, when that happened, based on this sort of anticipated population, but not necessarily -- We don't necessarily have the data that the population exists in this habitat area that's been discovered, that -- Because the sector allocations are different between the north area and the south area, and the allocation of the entire population de facto -- The reallocation of the entire population, based on that information de facto changed the sector allocations, because their sector allocations are different than ours.

Thus, that sliver, where the vast majority of the landings are coming from, that's why those numbers are going down for everyone, but also the sector allocation. I'm not articulating myself well, and I need someone --

DR. REICHERT: In terms of the sector allocation, I cannot answer the question.

MS. MARHEFKA: Obviously, yes.

DR. REICHERT: The only thing I can say, is in terms of the proportioning -- As I mentioned earlier, that proportioning, in the previous assessment, was done based on one year of a pilot study with a very low sample size.

MS. MARHEFKA: The SADL.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and now we have two years, and so the SSC felt that that was much more appropriate data to do the apportioning. Now, to the -- Does that help, or does my answer help?

MS. MARHEFKA: I know Judd is going to -- Well, after Judd, then maybe I might want to -- At that point.

DR. CURTIS: Just to clarify, and so the initial split of 56 to 44 was based on a single-year pilot tilefish survey that's different than the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline surveys that they used recently. There was very few tilefish caught, blueline tilefish caught, in that survey from 2017. There was like maybe seventy-three individuals or something, if I recall.

The SADL survey from the past two years that they used for the new proportional calculations had much more blueline tilefish caught, both south and north of that North Carolina-Virginia line, which that's why the subgroup recommended it was a better representation for the blueline tilefish split.

Now, one consideration is that they multiply that over the sampling area for each of those regions, and that's why you see that little bit of a shift towards the northern region and the Mid-Atlantic, because there's such a much larger area in the Mid-Atlantic region than there is in that sliver. However, the habitat valley, and that's what Dewey is pointing out, is not necessarily equal across that entire region in both the north and south of that line.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, it is a drastic change, right, going from 70-30 to 56-44, based on an extrapolation method that you just described. I understand why the -- I totally understand why the 56-44 is not appropriate. I'm just wondering -- I don't know what to do with the feelings I have that that's a drastic change, based on only two years, based on the fact that, you know, maybe potentially that's not as equal distribution as has to be assumed. I would argue then, and, again, this is an SSC thing, but this is something for us to consider, that it could have -- That drastic change could have unintended large economic effects that we need to consider.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are there more questions for Marcel? It looks like we're going over the fishery overview next. I'm sorry. Clay.

DR. PORCH: Yes, and I just wanted to respond to a couple things, and confirm some things that Marcel said, but one of them is certainly there's genetic studies that indicate there's a divide between black sea bass at Hatteras, north and south of Hatteras, and so --

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

DR. PORCH: What did I say? I think there's some -- Okay, and I might have mixed things up. Sorry. I apologize, but what I was really responding to is the SADL survey is arguably the most objective way to partition landings in proportion to the actual abundance of the stock, and I do want to comment that this result about the stock assessment, the production model not being appropriate, was actually anticipated on our part.

You'll remember that we advised the council that we really shouldn't go forward with the assessment until -- At least a production-model-style assessment until we had five full years of data from the SADL survey, and so, for assessment purposes, you need a longer time series, especially if you're going to plug it into a production model, and so we actually agree with the SSC's conclusion.

In fact, we anticipated it. We did the assessment anyway, at the request of the council, and so we support that. We also support the idea of using the SADL survey for the data that we have for doing that split. It is a logical way to say you have this amount of fish in each area, and so you're evenly partitioning the allowable catch. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy, and then Tim.

MR. STRELCHECK: I'm a numbers guy, and so I'm hoping this may help. With the last assessment, the ABC north of Cape Hatteras, in that sliver, was 56,000 pounds. That's based on the 44 percent that was allocated to that sliver, right? Under the new assessment, which is allocating only 30 percent to that sliver, the ABC is 193,000 pounds, or 190,000 pounds, and so, once again, there's some conversion issues with MRIP, but the ABC is going up considerably in that small sliver of an area, despite the fact that it's being allocated a smaller portion.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Tim.

MR. GRINER: Thanks, Andy, but that really doesn't matter, because that's just another way to look at the numbers, but that’s not going to help you catch more fish, right? I question whether it

is appropriate to use two years of SADL data as an allocation basis, basically, but it's not -- But two years of SADL survey is not good enough to come up with catch advice.

So, to me, it seems like if it's not good enough for -- If you're not confident that that can give you catch advice, that you need to go to some type of average, whether it be long-term, last five years, whatever you choose, then that seems, to me, that should be the basis for any change in allocation from, you know, above the sliver to the Mid-Atlantic, or not, or keep it like it is, and then run your -- Do your averages, whether it be long-term north of Hatteras, or long-term south of Hatteras, and five years above, but it seems like we're fine using two years of data for one thing, and not fine using two years of data for another, and, to me, they're kind of linked together.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: I may be able to answer some of your questions, and the SSC has commented on that, and maybe others can chime-in here, too. For an index, you need some -- Ideally, you need some contrast, and that's for the development -- Why the SSC recommended, for the development of an index, we feel you need at least five years of data, because you don't know where your data points fall in the larger scale.

However, the SSC has also said that other data from the SADL survey could be used, and, at that time, the SSC was not thinking directly about using that for the proportioning, but, for instance, life history information, age information, geographic information, and there's a lot of information that can be used from the survey, but, in terms of not using that data -- Specifically, it refers to not using the data to develop an index of relative abundance. I hope that answers some of your questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more questions for Marcel, because we've got a couple more things here on blueline. We've got the fishery overview and those types of things. Are we ready to move on? Sorry, and I'm just trying to keep us on track. All right. Thank you, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you.

DR. COLLIER: So the fishery overview should be a link in the agenda and overview, if you want to click on that, or you can just follow along on the screens here, and on the webinar, and what we do is we try to develop these as the stock assessments come to you all, in order to give you some background information on what is available.

The first thing that we provide in the fishery, or in the overview, is the fishery performance report, and this was done by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel in October 2023, and I'm not the best at sentiment analysis, but, if you read the comments through here, some of the fishermen, particularly the fishermen north of Cape Hatteras, or that fish around Cape Hatteras, tend to say that things are pretty positive, and then people south of Cape Hatteras, Morehead City, or folks down in Florida, they indicate that things are fairly flat, that there's not much change over time.

There is some indication of blueline tilefish moving into areas where snowy grouper were in the past, and so there might be some changes along the process, but I would leave it up to you all to read the fishery performance report. I think it does a very good job of capturing what the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel said.

Next, going into the graphs, and so I have this as assessment outputs, and we have the north stock and the south stock assessment, and you can look at where the average catch line lands for these. One of the big things that has happened for this stock, and you guys had brought it up, was this big jump in landings beginning in 2006, and it's -- Most of the landings were occurring in that Cape Hatteras area, where you were indicating, but there was also a jump north of the Virginia line as well, where considerable portions of that -- If you want to see it broken out by a state, or area, I guess, in the stock assessment, Nikolai did a very good job describing it in SEDAR 92.

This line here represents the average catch over the past five years, and so you can see, in some years, you would have to go down. In some years, the average catch is below, and some years it is above, or the catch is below the average catch, and that's to be expected. That's what happens when you do an average. Half the time, you're going to be below and half the time you're going to be above.

For the line south of Cape Hatteras, this is that 133,000 pounds coming from the DLM Tool south, and you can see it's fairly flat, and not much jumping around south of Cape Hatteras. As Marcel had indicated, there are no projections for this, and so I'm just going to jump into some of the combined data and some of the reasons why we had requested a stock assessment for this species.

Remember, the data went through 2015 in SEDAR 50, and that is represented here by this one, where you're seeing some of the catch levels being 400 percent over the annual catch limits, and then, if you move up here in 2020, you can see it's 300 percent of the annual catch limit.

The commercial, which is allocated around 50 percent of the ACL, they have been right around 100 percent of their ACL every year, and so there's been very high levels of recreational catch, and that is also why the council had to put forward the recent blueline tilefish amendment, where you shorten the season for blueline tilefish.

The landing stream, below this, just indicates what portion in this South Atlantic region is coming from the commercial sector versus the recreational sector, and then you can continue down and look at it based on the season, and, as the seasons get changed into the May through August wave, you can see a lot of the recreational landings contract into that time, and then you can also see a lot of the landings, in orange here, that is coming from the North Carolina, South Carolina region for this. I'm just trying to break it up. I did not break it up into state, because it starts to get into some issues of confidentiality.

Diving into the details on the commercial sector, you can see they've been fairly flat, right around their ACL, for almost ten years now. Seasonality, basically, in the early time series, they were catching snowy grouper primarily during the -- From March all the way through August, but, in the more recent time period, you can see that almost all the seasons are closing. That's because they're achieving their ACL. Once again, most of the landings in the commercial sector are coming from the North Carolina-South Carolina region, and now we'll jump over to recreational data.

If you remember -- I don't know what I was going to say there, but tracking landings of the landings of blueline tilefish in the recreational sector, what you're going to see here is a much higher landings estimate, and I just went back and looked at the 2020 estimate for south of Cape Hatteras for the recreational side of things. That was around 390,000 in CHTS units. In FES units, it's over

800,000, and so it's a huge change. It's a lot more than I thought it was going to be for this species. Some of the deepwater species, there's very little change. but, for this one, it is a big change.

The seasonality of the recreational, I've already talked about that. Looking at the distribution, or the area where these landings are coming from, once again, it's mostly from North Carolina, and, as you do a deeper dive into this, most of it is coming from that area north of Cape Hatteras.

By mode, it's mostly private, and then you can also see the size distribution here, and so, with that, I think this is an important thing to point out. If you were to take an average, I think, of these last five years, you're probably going to be over 300,000 pounds of fish being captured in the recreational fishery alone, and remember the ACL is going to be 326,000, I think is what Marcel said, and so it's -- The commercial has been about 100,000, and so, in the South Atlantic region, there's been over 400,000 pounds of blueline tilefish, on average over the last five years, where we're looking at an ACL of just over 300,000 pounds. With that, I think that's all I had for the fishery overview. If you want to look into the life history, I do provide that, but that's just because I'm a geek.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Chip. Any questions? All right. I don't see any questions. All right. What we're doing now is we've done a review of the assessment results. We need to consider initiating an amendment to respond to the results, and the SSC recommendations, and I can tell we're excited about it. Would someone like to make a motion? No one wants to make a motion. I got it. Mike is going to write a draft motion for us. Go ahead, Kerry, if you would like to start.

MS. MARHEFKA: I'm not making a motion. I'm thinking out loud, because I am thinking in terms of sort of where we're planning on going in the bigger picture, where this falls into the bigger picture. You know, do we get innovative here? Do we get innovative now, but, you know, as Tim keeps reminding me, you know, there's a lot of fish being left on the table right now, and so I -- Those are the those are the things that are making me not make a motion right now, and I'm letting you know.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: We had some discussion in the past about aligning some of the seasons. Deepwater -- You know, golden tilefish is open when blueline tile and snowy grouper closed. I think we get a lot of discards out of that. I don't know if that's something we should consider here.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: Yes, and that was something that got brought up, I think, coming out of the AP meeting before last, and it was in consideration last meeting, to either be considered along with the golden tilefish amendment, or possibly the black sea bass amendment, and you all did direct that, when blueline tilefish kind of has its amendment, in response to its assessment, that that would be one of the actions that would potentially be in that, to align the recreational seasons for the deepwater snapper grouper species.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Was there any discussion on how that would work? Would that be pulling back months of open fishing for golden tile, or would that be extending months of fishing for some of the others? Any feedback on direction of that?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think the -- So, blueline tilefish and snowy grouper, I believe their opening is May 1. Yes? So it's May 1, and so I think one train of thought was to move the opening of golden tilefish recreational to May 1, but I will note that there has been some difference of opinion on that within the advisory panel, and there's some difference of opinion on that potentially at the council table, and so there may be other alternatives that would be considered there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and my recommendation, or my recollection, is that we supported aligning it, but North Carolina didn't necessarily want to align it that way. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Is there any way to get some feedback on what kind of impact that would have quickly? I don't know if we have that information we can pull, or if that's something we've got to do, but, you know, if golden tilefish is open, and people are out either sword fishing or mahi fishing, and they're running over bottom, they're probably going to make a drop, because they want to try and catch a golden tile, but, at least where I'm at, nine out of ten times, it's not golden tile. It's blueline tile, or snowy grouper, and I'm just wondering what -- You know, have we gotten any level of analysis of what adjusting these seasons would do?

DR. COLLER: This is one of the things where it's interesting between the different stocks, because, north of Cape Hatteras, they can go out and set longlines, and have a very clean fishery, and avoid pretty much everything else. They can only catch blueline tilefish, but, in the southern region, like you said, it appears to be different, and I don't know how to explain that difference, but these are all very data-limited species for the recreational fishery, with the exception of blueline tilefish around Cape Hatteras. There tends to be a lot more intercepts in that area. If you get south of Cape Hatteras, there's very few intercepts, and so aligning the seasons -- It is going to be a very -- It's going to be an analysis with a lot of uncertainty associated with it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: So, again, I'm thinking out loud, and kind of thinking off of what Kerry was saying, and is there a way we can make this motion -- Something like initiate an amendment when -- As appropriate, considering priorities, and I guess what I'm saying is we can initiate it, but not necessarily start it right away, and see where it fits in the innovation plan and priorities. That's kind of what -- I don't know how to make that, how to write that motion up, but I would just see if other people think that's a way to go or not.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I saw other hands, but, Mike, did you want to respond to that?

DR. SCHMIDTKE: So, if you initiate this amendment now, yes, you would have that conversation of where it fits, the timing of it. You do have a certain level of flexibility, because there is no overfished or overfishing status associated with this assessment, and the at least numerical ABC is an increase, and so, even if the fishery continued at status quo right now, it would not be above the ABC recommendation of the SSC. That would -- That, obviously, wouldn't change to the new metric of recreational data, but that's something that's there.

As far as the timing of where it fits into everything else, that is the discussion that you normally have on Friday, and you do have other-- I'm thinking a little selfishly at this point, but you do have

other things within your plan, and the workload of your staff, that may get higher priority than this amendment, and so that is a conversation you'll have to have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. That's fair. I had other hands. Tom.

MR. ROLLER: I just -- I wanted to kind of address Robert's concerns there, right, because I think they're very valid, because I'm hearing from stakeholders routinely on this fishery. Obviously, north of Hatteras, they don't have as many interactions with other species, right? I don't know where that boundary line is.

I will say I'm pretty close to Hatteras. I have more interactions with other species while blueline fishing, but not that many, but, in general, the fishermen in my state are just over -- They're just worried about them having an early season closure based off of intercepts in Florida, because, just like golden tilefish, we haven't had an opportunity to fish for them for a few years now, and so I just -- I wanted to just state that for the record. Thank you for bringing that up, Robert.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Do you mean intercepts in state waters, because we've been closing state waters for blueline as soon as federal waters close.

MR. ROLLER: I mean just any intercept with a rare-event species, right, and so yes. I mean, we don't have them in state waters, like you guys do, to be clear.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: So, again, big picture, this is back to what I was trying to avoid with the innovation plan, right? We know we're going to be talking about recreational aggregate bag limits, right? We know we're going to need to do this high-level stuff, and to take up staff's time to do this just doesn't sit right. I know there's more fish out there. The whole point is, when everyone can have more fish, I want the guys to have more fish. The other thing we also know is coming down the line are this -- You know, this MRIP study, and so, you know, I just don't know that this -- We put this up high in the workplan, and we figure out how to do this in the context of the other things we're doing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: So, Kerry, are you okay with the draft motion as proposed?

MS. MARHEFKA: I mean, I just don't -- Like this is, again, a conversation I want to have, because what we're saying is initiate a single amendment to only deal with blueline tilefish, and the whole purpose of this new era is to not have assessment reaction, assessment reaction, and this is exactly that method. Maybe something is happening next to me by smarter people than me though.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Maybe we revisit this in Full Council, after we've thought about prioritization, but Kerry is saying exactly what I'm thinking. Robert, then Andy.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and another wrinkle, or complication, for us down south in aligning the seasons is blackbelly rosefish is open year-round, no closure, and so it's another reason people are going to stop when they run into these species, and so I just want to think through that, and so

are we -- Where do we go from here, Madam Chair? Do we -- Are we looking for a motion to table this, or are we just pulling this back and waiting until Full Council?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, we haven't actually made the motion, and so we could just leave it like this for Full Council, to try to move along with this committee, but we'll see what Andy says.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think we should take a break. No, and I'm just kidding. No, and I appreciate the comments, and I agree, right? We don't want to just get into this cycle, like we've always been in, and react to the assessment, react to the assessment, you know, a single species at a time. You know, we've talked some about speeding some things along, right, and so simplifying actions.

We just approved moving forward with yellowtail and mutton snapper, which does involve catch limit changes, and some allocation changes, and this could fit right into it. It's a snapper grouper amendment, but it's, you know, not necessarily well aligned, but just hear me out, right? It's a simple catch limit changes and allocation amendment, and not expanding out on some of the other innovative practices and things that we can maybe focus on with more of an innovation amendment, right, that's looking at some other ways, like is being suggested about aligning seasons to maybe reduce discards and reduce bycatch.

One of the concerns I have is, when we have an assessment, we don't want it to go too long, where it becomes stale, and I also recognize we're in this kind of strange time period where we're waiting on the MRIP pilot results, which could then affect the outcome of the catch limit advice that comes from this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and I'm going to stop this discussion. We can talk about it more in Full Council, and we're going to move on. We're not going to make this motion right now. We're about to be behind again. All right. Thanks for that discussion. We're now going to move into another item that we had under Other Business, and it was state management, and I'm going to pass it over to Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Jessica. I just wanted to take a few minutes and talk through the governors' letters that have been shared, that everyone has probably seen, requesting state management a red snapper. They've even indicated other snapper grouper species. State management can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people, and I just wanted to make sure that we were kind of all on the same page with regard to at least the Fisheries Service and kind of moving this forward for conversation.

You know, state management isn't the state having authority under their mandates and statutory requirements and the federal government operating separate and independent of that. State management has been essentially, under authority of Magnuson, either a delegation to the states to manage red snapper, or other species, or what's considered conservation equivalency, which Bob Beal isn't here, but he could talk to extensively, obviously, for what they do in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

With the Gulf of Mexico, it was a process that took quite some time, and I know there seems to be an urgency by some states to go ahead and move this forward, and so wanted to at least get the ball rolling, in terms of a conversation.

Back in probably about 2014, or 2013, Louisiana was beginning to develop a state survey, and there was an interest, at that time, for, obviously, them to collect their own data, and then that momentum built behind it to want to manage red snapper for the private recreational sector, and, beginning in 2018, the Fisheries Service worked with the states to issue exempted fishing permits for two years in the Gulf of America, and what that took was an agreement from the states to agree on an allocation, amongst all five states, for them to have state surveys that could monitor their landings.

Then, as part of the delegation, we delegated them not only the quotas that came along for the private sector, but authority to then manage out into federal waters. They monitor the quotas using their state surveys, and then they were given some constraints with regard to changes in bag limits, size limits, and seasons that they could specify, and so that was a success.

We ultimately implemented, in 2020, state management more permanently, and that's been going in the Gulf now for the last five years, and so I say all that because there's a lot of, obviously, steps in the process, from survey development to allocation decisions. Are you going to include the for-hire sector? Where does the commercial sector fall out in this, but, because of the interest by the states, we thought it would be beneficial to bring back to the council, in September, a discussion, a presentation, that the Fisheries Service could work on.

We could probably work with Bob Beal, and Atlantic States, on the conservation equivalency conversation, and just further kind of provide information for consideration by the council, and so we wanted to just lay that out as a proposal, to see if there was interest in doing that, and also happy to kind of answer any other just general questions about how state management works in the Gulf.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Andy. Questions, or comments? Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Yes, and maybe I would like to know a little bit more about kind of how that process went, because, just going back in time, we kind of had that discussion when the EFP -- When Florida started the EFP for red snapper, and we talked about, you know, do other states want to kind of, in parallel, run this program, and do we want to do it, and it seems to me like, at least in the Gulf, there was more of a cohesive, you know, plan, and push, for red snapper, which is probably a lot more consistent amongst the Gulf states than it is for the South Atlantic states, but, you know, I'm curious --

Whether it's Andy, or someone else from the Gulf Council, that can maybe, you know, give us a little more detail on how that worked. Was the council -- I mean, they worked with the states, and coordinated with the states. I'm assuming they weren't a co-applicant to that process, but maybe Charlie knows a little more about it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: We issued five separate exempted fishing permits, at the start of 2018, to each of the states, but, in order to do that, the states, you know, kind of came together and agreed upon some initial allocations to divvy-up the private recreational quota. In terms of turning that into a more permanent management structure, like we do here at the South Atlantic Council, we

developed actually six amendments, one for each state plus kind of an omnibus amendment, to delegate state management, and so there's a lot of, obviously, similarities in terms of kind of how the process could work.

You know, I think the big difference is all of the Gulf states, by about 2015, and I'll look to Jessica or C.J., were at least starting to develop their surveys, and, by 2016, or 2017, were operationalizing surveys, right, and so that's, you know, one primary difference. I think the other primary difference is the catch limit, obviously, in the Gulf is considerably larger, and so there's, obviously, a much bigger pie in which they were dividing up, and so any sort of allocation decisions in the South Atlantic would be contingent on a smaller catch limit at this point.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and there's a lot of things to unpack here. I would say that the discussion was also had, at the Gulf, about sector separation, and so that came up as part of this Gulf red snapper discussion, and I believe that omnibus amendment established sector separation, with a sunset, and so there's a lot of things that would have to be discussed by the council to figure that out. I see hands going up. I have Charlie, Gary, Carolyn, Carrie, Amy.

MR. PHILLIPS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Andy, the states are collecting their landings information. Are they also collecting the discard information that's going to go into how the fish are split up?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, with the exception of Texas, correct? I'm looking at Clay.

DR. PORCH: They weren't, but, you know, recently, Alabama and Mississippi are moving towards a creel approach, like Louisiana had, where they would also be getting discards, but that was a big issue, is how do you incorporate this information in a stock assessment when, one, the methods between the states were different, and, two, only -- Some of them were only done during the open season, and, three, didn't get discards. Now, with Alabama and Mississippi coming online with the creel-type approaches, then, yes, I think we'll have a more consistent currency that gets discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Gary.

MR. BORLAND: I second what Robert said. I think it's worthy of a consultation, or somebody that was around when the Gulf went through that process, to help us avoid some of the pitfalls that I'm sure they fell into if we go this route, right, if this ends up being in our court.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: My one question is was it a bottom-up or a top-down in the Gulf? Were you getting pressures from the governors, the same way that we're kind of getting it? That's the first question I have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: It came from higher than that. Congressional folks were involved. Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, that's true. That was part of it, but, you know, similar frustrations about the short seasons, and wanting to figure out ways to increase access. We also were getting into the states setting recreational seasons, because keep in mind that they have out to nine miles

in the Gulf, and so they were setting much longer seasons, which then was having -- It was forcing the federal seasons to be shortened, or shrink, but, yes, it was a combination of pressure from Congress, but, also, I would say pressure from the states, right, that ultimately came together. That was initially led by Louisiana, and it kind of built momentum behind thereafter.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead, Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: So, to that, I think where I know I feel I'm going to need help in Georgia is managing expectations, because the letter -- I read it at the same time that everybody else did. I don't know -- By telling me that we're going to do this through management through an EFP, it doesn't help me, at Coastal Resources level, figure out what the tool is, and how we're going to get there, and I don't know what the expectation of a time clock is. That's the thing that scares me, is that somehow we're going to get compressed on something, and we're not going to develop an appropriate tool, and we're going to find ourselves in a worse situation.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Carolyn, I think you're leading on my point. I absolutely think this is a valuable conversation, and I support bringing that information, especially for those of us who weren't around, and I think we should all approach the concept with an open mind and make -- You know, get all the information, and make an informed decision, and so I'm not worried about how that plays out in this process, but I'm wondering, Andy, if the agency, even higher up than you, has a plan on how to ensure that the people that are at the top --

You know, how do you get a governor's office, or how do you get, you know, the congresspeople who are interested in this to understand the nuance that we then have to sit here and understand, and does the Secretary have a plan for that, and so that's my -- My concern is not us having that conversation. My concern is letting those people understand what is really the deal.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and that's a great point. I've had some conversations this week around that very topic, and, you know, you're exactly right. There's multiple layers of communication flow that have to be happening here, and it's not just letters that are being shared, right, and it's, you know, what are the states interested in doing, the state marine resource agency directors coordinating with NMFS on, you know, anything they want to pursue, the council talking about this, and next steps, all the way up to governors and political appointees, you know, having conversations and setting expectations with one another.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will say that, moving forward, I think the more we can learn, the better. Knowledge is power, and I too need to ensure that we are managing expectations, managing time for when things like this could actually be implemented, the funds, the personnel. I think a lot of conversation needs to be had, but perhaps your presentation that you were suggesting for September, and some additional information that perhaps we can learn from state directors in the Gulf, and Florida's experience will really be helpful to guide.

This question is well beyond where I live within the walls of the Department of Natural Resources, and within the actual state of South Carolina, and so our delegation is going to need to get behind this as well, and the letter coming from the governor was -- As Carolyn, I read it when everybody else read it, and so the agency needs to gain a little bit more information. We're open to learn, and we're open to hear about those past experiences, what worked and what didn't work, so that, if this were to be moving forward, we can have a conceptual plan that is paved well for success. Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I would also suggest the state agency folks get together and start meeting and talking about this a little bit more. Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: We have National Marine Fisheries Service and this council will provide information in September. but I think what I was asking, and Gary was asking for, is, you know, is the executive director of the Gulf Council, or somebody that was there, you know, through this process available to help with some of the information here and fill in some of the gaps?

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Others? Other thoughts, or other comments? All right. Are we good on this topic? All right. It sounds like we're going to be talking about it more future meetings. All right. One of the items I forgot on our agenda was I think folks had a copy of the Snapper Grouper AP report. Did you have any questions about anything that was in there, maybe that we haven't covered, where we need to ask Chris questions? Anything on that. All right. I don't see any hands. All right. Is there any other Other Business to come before the Snapper Grouper Committee? All right. I don't see any hands. We'll adjourn this committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 12, 2025.)

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Amanda Thomas
July 25, 2025

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Kerns	Toni
Kersting	Anne
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Nikolai

Klibansky	Lara
Knowlton	Kathy
Larkin	Michael
Lavine	Craig
Lazarre	Dominique
Lee	Jennifer
Levy	Mara
Lloyd	Victor
Locke	Charles
Lorenzen	Kai
Lowther	Alan
MCCLAIR	GENINE
Mackesey	Brendan
Marhefka	Kerry
Markwith	Anne
Masi	Michelle
McCoy	Sherylanne
McPherson	Matthew
McWaters	Mark
Mehta	Nikhil
Merck	Nicole
Merrifield	Jeanna
Moore	Jeff
Muehlstein	Emily
Muffley	Brandon
Murphey	Trish
Neer	Julie
Nejjari	Amber
Newman	Thomas
Newman	Kelley
Oliver	Ashley
Olsen	Butch
Ostroff	Jenny
Ott	Emily
Owens	Marina
Package-Ward	Christina
Peterson	Cassidy
Phillips	Charlie
Poholek	ariel
Potter	Caroline
Potter	Caroline
ROLLER	tom
Ramsay	Chloe
Rapp	Greg

Records	David
Richardson	Eric
Riley	Richard
Runde	Brendan
SCHLICK	CJ
Salmon	Brandi
Sedberry	George
Seward	McLean
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Smit-Brunello	00Monica
Spottswood	Robert
Spurgin	Kali
Sridhar	Samy
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Stone	Pat
Sweetman	CJ
Turano	Joseph
Turley	Brendan
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walsh	Mick
Walter	John
Webb	Greyson
West	W
Westcott	Lauren
White	Geoff
Wiegand	Christina
Williams	Erik
Williams	Travis
Wilms	Olivia
Wilms	Sean
Withers	Meg
Wolfe	Wes
Woodstock	Matt
Zapf	Daniel
banks	kesley
collier	chip
ealahan	maranda
griner	tim
gwin	sonny
laks	Ira
marinko	Jeff

moss	david
reynolds	kris
sandorf	Scott
tarpley	sean
thomas	suz
vara	mary
vincent	matthew
zales	bob

Attendee Report: SAFMC June 2025 Council Meeting

Report Generated:

06/18/2025 10:23 AM EDT

Webinar ID	Actual Start Date/Time	Duration
494-531-643	06/11/2025 07:51 AM EDT	9 hours 48 minutes

Staff Details

Attended	Interest Rating	Last Name
Yes	Not applicable for staff	Council

Last Name	First Name
Aflalo	David
Allen	Shanae
Aukeman	Trip
Bailey	Adam
Barbieri	Luiz
Barger	Jeff
Barile	peter
Barrows	Katline
Batsavage	Chris
Beal	Bob
Bell	Mel
Bianchi	Alan
Blough	Heather
Bogdan	Jennifer
Bonura	Vincent
Borland	Gary
Brantley	William
Brouwer	Myra
Brown	Hunter
Bruger	Catherine
Buntin	Jesse
Bunting	Matthew
Byrd	Julia
Cermak	Bridget
Christiansen	Heather
Coleman	Heather
Cox	Jack
Curtis	Judd
DARDEN	TANYA

Daniels	Micah
DeFilippi Simpson	Julie
DeVictor	Rick
Dobbs	Jeffrey
Dover	Miles
Downes	Athena
Dubniczki	Hayden
Dukes	Amy
Emory	Meaghan
Finch	Margaret
Flowers	Jared
Floyd	Brad
Foor	Brandon
Foss	Kristin
Fredrickson	Ivy
Fucigna	Isabella
Gentner	BRAD
Gore	Karla
Guyas	Martha
Hadley	John
Hale	Robert
Harrell	Ryan
Harrison	Alana
Helies	Frank
Helmey	Judy
Hemilright	Dewey
Hildreth	Delaine
Hill	Kaleigh
Horton	Chris
Howington	Kathleen
Hudson	Joseph
Hull	Jimmy
Iberle	Allie
Iverson	Kim
Kent	Russell
Keppler	Blaik
Kerns	Toni
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Nikolai
Klibansky	Lara
Knowlton	Kathy
Larkin	Michael
Lavine	Craig
Lazarre	Dominique

Leach	Scott
Lee	Jennifer
Levy	Mara
Lloyd	Victor
Locke	Charles
MCCLAIR	GENINE
Mackesey	Brendan
Malinowski	Richard
Mallory	Ryan
Marhefka	Kerry
Masi	Michelle
Matter	Vivian
McBreen	Sharon
McCoy	Sherylanne
McGirl	Maria
McLemore	Michael
Mehta	Nikhil
Merck	Nicole
Merrifield	Jeanna
Moore	Jeff
Muffley	Brandon
Muller	Robert
Murphey	Trish
Neer	Julie
Newman	Thomas
ODEN	JEFF
OFarrell	Halie
Oliver	Ashley
Ott	Emily
Package-Ward	Christina
Peterson	Cassidy
Phillips	Charlie
Poholek	ariel
Potter	Caroline
ROLLER	tom
Ramsay	Chloe
Records	David
Reding	Brandon
Reed	John
Riley	Richard
SCHLICK	CJ
Salmon	Brandi
Sedberry	George
Seward	McLean

Sinkus	Wiley
Smart	Tracey
Smit-Brunello	00Monica
Spurgin	Kali
Stam	Geoff
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Swanson	Chris
Sweetman	CJ
Switzer	Ted
Talton	Trista
Thompson	Laurilee
Topping	Tara
VENABLE	PARIS
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walter	John
Webb	Greyson
West	W
White	Geoff
Wiegand	Christina
Williams	Erik
Williams	Travis
Williams	Travis
Wilms	Sean
Wilms	Olivia
Withers	Meg
Woodstock	Matt
Wynn	Chris
Zapf	Daniel
banks	kesley
collier	chip
ealahan	maranda
gravitz	michael
griner	tim
gwin	sonny
laks	Ira
marinko	Jeff
moss	david
reynolds	kris
sandorf	Scott
tarpley	sean
thomas	suz
vara	mary

vincent matthew
zales bob

Attendee Report: SAFMC June 2025 Council Meeting

Report Generated:

06/18/2025 10:26 AM EDT

Webinar ID	Actual Start Date/Time	Duration
494-531-643	06/12/2025 07:32 AM EDT	9 hours 24 minutes

Staff Details

Attended	Interest Rating	Last Name
Yes	Not applicable for staff	Council

Last Name	First Name
AInes	Alex
Allen	Shanae
Barbieri	Luiz
Barger	Jeff
Barile	peter
Barrows	Katline
Bell	Mel
Bianchi	Alan
Blough	Heather
Bonura	Vincent
Borland	Gary
Brantley	William
Brouwer	Myra
Bruger	Catherine
Buntin	Jesse
Bunting	Matthew
Byrd	Julia
Cermak	Bridget
Christiansen	Heather
Coleman	Heather
Curtis	Judd
DARDEN	TANYA
DeVictor	Rick
Dobbs	Jeffrey
Downes	Athena
Dubniczki	Hayden
Dukes	Amy
Emory	Meaghan
Finch	Margaret

Flowers	Jared
Floyd	Brad
Foss	Kristin
Gentner	BRAD
Gore	Karla
Guyas	Martha
Hadley	John
Hale	Robert
Harrison	Alana
Hart	Hannah
Helies	Frank
Helmey	Judy
Hemilright	Dewey
Hildreth	Delaine
Horton	Chris
Hudson	Joseph
Hull	Jimmy
Iberle	Allie
Ingram	Jamal
Iverson	Kim
Johnson	Brad
Kennedy	Todd
Keppler	Blaik
Kerns	Toni
Kimrey	Chris
Klasnick	01Kelly
Klibansky	Nikolai
Klibansky	Lara
Knowlton	Kathy
Larkin	Michael
Lazarre	Dominique
Lee	Jennifer
Levy	Mara
Lizama	Dellene
MCCLAIR	GENINE
Mackesey	Brendan
Malinowski	Richard
Marhefka	Kerry
Markwith	Anne
Masi	Michelle
Matter	Vivian
McCoy	Sherylanne
Mehta	Nikhil
Merck	Nicole

Merrifield	Jeanna
Meyers	S
Muffley	Brandon
Muller	Robert
Murphey	Trish
Newman	Thomas
OFarrell	Halie
Oliver	Ashley
Ott	Emily
Package-Ward	Christina
Parsons	Kristene
Peterson	Cassidy
Phillips	Charlie
Poholek	ariel
ROLLER	tom
Ramsay	Chloe
Records	David
Reed	John
Reichert	Marcel
Riley	Richard
SCHLICK	CJ
Sedberry	George
Seward	McLean
Silvennoinen	Jasmine
Sinkus	Wiley
Smart	Tracey
Smillie	Nick
Smit-Brunello	00Monica
Spottswood	Robert
Stephen	Jessica
Stephens	Haley
Swanson	Chris
Sweetman	CJ
Turley	Brendan
Walia	Matt
Walsh	Jason
Walter	John
Webb	Greyson
West	W
White	Geoff
Wiegand	Christina
Wilke	Kate
Williams	Travis
Williams	Erik

Withers	Meg
Zapf	Daniel
alexander	calvin
banks	kesley
collier	chip
griner	tim
gwin	sonny
laks	Ira
marinko	Jeff
moss	david
reynolds	kris
sandorf	Scott
thomas	suz
vara	mary
vincent	matthew
zales	bob