

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

Webinar

August 12, 2026

Transcript

Scientific and Statistical Committee

Dr. Walter Bubley, Chair
Dr. James Gartland, Vice Chair
Dr. Matt Damiano
Dr. Genny Nesslage
Jason Walsh
Dr. CJ Schlick

Dr. Steve Turner
Dr. Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes
Dr. Marcel Reichert
Dr. Jeffrey Buckel
Dr. Kelsey Roberts

Council

Dr. Carolyn Belcher

Trish Murphey, Chair

Council Staff

Dr. Judd Curtis
Myra Brouwer
Julia Byrd
John Carmichael
Nick Smillie

John Hadley
Allie Iberle
Emily Ott
Dr. Mike Schmidtke
Dr. Chip Collier

Attendees and Invited Participants

Dr. Erik Williams
Shep Grimes

Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on August 12, 2026, and was called to order by Dr. Walter Bubley.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

DR. BUBLEY: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the August 12th webinar of the South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical Committee. I'm Wally Bubley, the SSC Chair, and I'll be leading the meeting with Vice Chair Jim Gartland. This is our first meeting in these roles, and so show a little mercy when we go through. We'll figure it out eventually.

I would also like to acknowledge Judd and the other members of the SSC ExCom, Marcel, Jim, Jennifer, and Carolyn for assisting with preparation for this meeting. I also wanted to recognize the non-SSC members on the call today, and so Carolyn Belcher is the council liaison, Erik Williams from the Science Center, and Shep Grimes is the General Counsel.

It's going to be a relatively short meeting. We've got about three hours budgeted, but we're trying to get through everything in the allotted time, and so we're going to have to be a little expedient with this. We didn't assign any tasks for the webinar, because we don't have an extensive amount of action items to go forward, but I'm asking that everyone take notes for the report.

I think Judd is going to touch on this a little bit, but we're going to be using a shared document again this time, and hopefully we can get everybody onboard with it. It definitely makes our lives easier when it does go through, and so, since this is a public meeting, the broadcast is being recorded, and so I guess I'll confer with Judd on this one.

We're going to need to get a roll call, and get our voices on the record for the transcript. We're going to be short a few people today, and so a little smaller group than usual, and so Judd has the checklist up here for the folks that are around. The plan is we'll just start from the top, and work our way to the bottom, and so, when it's your turn, just hop on, say your name, and your affiliation, and we'll go from there. I'll start. Wally Bubley, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the SSC chair.

DR. GARTLAND: Good morning, everybody. This is Jim Gartland. I'm with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and I'm the SSC vice chair.

DR. BUCKEL: Good morning. Jeff Buckel, North Carolina State University.

DR. DAMIANO: Good morning. This is Matt Damiano, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries.

DR. CURTIS: Chris Dumas, have you joined the webinar? I didn't see him earlier, Chair, and so I don't think he's with us yet.

DR. BUBLEY: He's not on right now, according to this list, and so just go down to Genny.

DR. NESSLAGE: Good morning. Genny Nesslerage, University of Maryland, Center for Environmental Science.

DR. REICHERT: Marcel Reichert, SSC.

DR. ROBERTS: Good morning, everyone. Kelsey Roberts, University of Massachusetts, the Dartmouth Campus.

DR. SCHLICK: Good morning, everyone. This is C.J. Schlick from the South Carolina and Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

DR. BUBLEY: I don't see Alexei on at the moment. We'll move down to Jennifer.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes, Georgia Southern University and chair of the Social and Economic Panel.

DR. TURNER: Good morning, everyone. Steve Turner, SSC.

MR. WALSH: Good morning. Jason Walsh, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries and vice chair of the Social and Economic Panel.

DR. BELCHER: Carolyn Belcher, SSC liaison for the council.

DR. WILLIAMS: Erik Williams, Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

DR. BUBLEY: Shep, if you'd like to introduce yourself.

MR. GRIMES: Okay. Shepherd Grimes, NOAA Office of General Counsel, Southeast Section.

DR. BUBLEY: All right, and so I guess, at this point, we'll hope a couple other people pop in, and we'll get them onboard when they are there. Judd, did you want to get into anything before we start going through things like the approval of the agenda or the minutes?

DR. CURTIS: Thanks, Wally. Just some housekeeping. As Wally mentioned, we've got another shared document for keeping track of notes. I'll be jotting down bullets to capture our discussions, but then, committee members, please add your text as, you know, recommended edits to the document, and then we'll use that for generating the final report on the backend.

We're trying it through the SharePoint platform, which is a shared Word document through our Teams app. You should have received a link in your email that allows you to access the documents. I've heard from one committee member already that's having some trouble, and so I'll help troubleshoot that with you, Genny, and, if anyone else has any trouble accessing the document, please just shoot me an email, and I can make sure that the permissions are granted appropriately, and that's all, Mr. Chair, before we continue on with our agenda.

DR. BUBLEY: Great. Thanks, Judd. All right, and so we can get into the Approval of the Minutes from the April in-person meeting in Charleston now. I've had an opportunity to look over them. Any comments or editorial corrections to the minutes that were provided in Attachment 1b from the previous meeting? I've received an email from Marcel with a couple minor ones. Does anyone else have anything? Either raise your hand now, or send them along to us, so we can adjust. All

right. No hands at the moment? Judd, you'll have to help me with that one, and Jim, too. All right, and so, if that's the case, nothing major, than the meeting minutes are approved, with the minor editorial corrections that we've been sent so far.

Next, we'll move on to the public comment portion. We'll have several opportunities for public comment during the meeting, and so this is just the first chance. Judd, has there been any written public comment prior to this?

DR. CURTIS: I checked yesterday, and there was not any that I saw. I'll check again during our meeting and then report at the end of our meeting.

DR. BUBLEY: Great. Thanks. All right, and so now we'll open up the floor to any public comment at this time, and so any members of the public that are on the call, and wish to voice a public comment, do so now, but just raise your hand, and then we can unmute you, but also be aware that there are going to be sections for public comment within the different agenda items as well, if you wanted to comment on a specific one, and so, if you have public comment now, please raise your hand.

All right. Seeing none, we'll move on then to the start to get into the meat of the agenda, and so, moving on into Agenda Item 3, which is the Special Spawning Management Zones, and in particular, the SSMZ evaluation tool component to start with, and we have Dr. Chip Collier here to provide a brief presentation about the tool and the results from the responses.

I know I've received some feedback about the survey, where it caught a couple people off-guard, and so I think we just need to get our lines of communication open a little bit more when we move forward with things like this, but, Chip, are you good to go with whatever you've got?

SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES: EVALUATION

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and let me talk about how I plan on giving this presentation, because it is a ton of material that has been put together for this. A lot of work has gone into it. We do have a group called the System Management Plan Workgroup that's been working behind the scenes in order to do an evaluation of this.

What we've found is, because it is complicated, and there's a lot of information, it is beneficial to get a strawman out there with that evaluation tool, and so we're going to be going through some background information first, which will cover probably the first ten pages of Attachment 10a, and then I'll go into Attachment 10a and look at some of the figures and tables -- Well, more of the tables, in order to give some more background information, and then we'll go into the results from the completed surveys.

Now, what's going to be presented is not a finalized view of what the SSC. This is intended just to start the conversation for different pieces of the survey. We want to make sure that the comments here represent the feeling of the overall SSC, and not just some of the individuals, and so take that -- Take the information as just the start, to really figure out what we need to hone-in on, or what the SSC needs to hone-in on, in order to develop some of the recommendations for the evaluation of this area.

This is separate from what Allie is going to be presenting, and so mine is going to be looking backwards, as far as the evaluation. Hers is going to be -- She's going to be looking forward into what should management do next, and so keep that in mind as well. My presentation is just focused on the evaluation, and I already see one hand raised, Wally.

DR. BUBLEY: Right, and I'm trying to find this. Marcel. I's going to take a little getting used to to try to keep track of this stuff. All right. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: No worries. No worries. Chip, just before we start, a brief clarification. You were mentioning Attachment 10, and I assume you mean, in our briefing book, Attachment 3a?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and I meant to say 3. If I said 10, I apologize.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. No worries. I just wanted to make sure I was looking at the right attachments. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. I think -- Jim has got a hand up as well. Jim.

DR. GARTLAND: This is just a brief housekeeping, Wally, and so I think I've got this screen configured now where I can see where people raise hands, and so I can keep an eye on that for you. Sorry, and, again, this is probably easier if we're sitting next to each other, but, for this one, I'll do my best to keep on this for you.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I appreciate it. I've got three screens up, and each one is split up into multiple things, and so there's a lot of stuff going on right now, and I appreciate it. All right, Chip. I think you can proceed.

DR. COLLIER: All right. Thank you. All right, and so the Spawning Special Management Zones, or SSMZs, as you're going to be seeing in the presentations today, they were developed in Amendment 36. The purpose and need for these areas was to protect important spawning habitat to enhance the overall spawning of some of these snapper grouper species, recognizing that some of them go to specific areas to spawn over multiple times, and the real idea for this was trying to find areas where multiple species were spawning, and not necessarily the best location for spawning.

Another component of the purpose and need was to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality. They specifically mentioned speckled hind and warsaw grouper. Remember that these were being developed around 2015 and 2016, and there was a lot of concern for these two species, which still remains. Another -- Some of the need that was identified for this amendment was to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield, but they also wanted to make sure that they minimized the negative social and economic effects, while trying to achieve these conservation goals.

Now, I realize that, on this slide here, you cannot really see the spawning SMZs. They are extremely small, and that was done on purpose, just to give you an idea of the relative size of these areas. They are tiny. Most of them are less than five square miles. There were five that were created from North Carolina all the way through the Florida Keys. Three of them were natural reefs. This is -- Three natural reefs were South Cape Lookout, Devil's Hole, Georgetown Hole,

which is off of -- Basically off of Charleston here. We have two artificial reefs that were created by South Carolina DNR over sand bottom, and, when they created these areas, there was an intent to have these as closed areas.

They were not put on maps or anything like that, and so the intent for these was really to study the impact of artificial reefs and their potential for using as a management tool, and you can see both of those areas here off South Carolina, and then our last one here is down here, almost at the tip of where the South Atlantic Council manages. It's an area called the Warsaw Hole. It's basically west of Key West.

The regulations for the spawning special management zones, it prohibits fishing for, harvest of, and possession of snapper grouper species. It does allow transit across these areas if gear is stowed properly. There is no anchoring by fishing vessels in these.

One of the big pushes of why we're here today is to talk about the sunset, or because of the sunset clause for the natural reefs, and so those natural reefs, once again, were South Cape Lookout, Devil's Hole, and Warsaw Hole. The sunset for these areas is, I think, July or August 2027.

The focal species for Amendment 36 was not all species in the complex. It focused on some of the species that were thought to come back to certain areas for spawning, and so it includes all the groupers. It includes some of the snappers. It does not include all the snappers. Probably one of the most notable ones that is not included is vermilion snapper, where some of the fishermen just kind of indicated they spawned in a variety of places. It includes two tilefish, the golden tilefish and blueline tilefish, and then it also includes greater amberjack.

Some habitat information for this. When the council was creating these areas, they didn't necessarily have all the information that they needed. One of the things that has been written up in papers is potentially, if you don't know where the best spawning habitats are, some areas that are potential locations for spawning for multiple species are some promontories, and, in the graphic on the top-right of the slide, you can see what a promontory looks like, where it's kind of a shelf area with a steep incline and depth, and some of the fish will use those areas to spawn fish. The eddies off the currents will potentially either retain eggs in the local area or transport them to a nearby area.

These areas are thought to hold -- Or thought to be spawning areas for multiple species, and, when you look at the natural areas, two of them are in some promontories. Warsaw Hole is a deep hole that it drops about a hundred feet pretty sharply, and then Devil's Hole is a promontory that comes out and around the Gulf Stream. South Cape Lookout is a little bit different from these areas, where it is designed to look at habitats, or protect habitats, potentially for red grouper, which don't necessarily spawn in those promontory habitats. They tend to burrow in the sand and create some pits.

It also protects artificial reefs. As I had mentioned before, these artificial reefs were placed over sand bottom that was mapped before, and they were created before the SSMZs were regulated. They were created probably fifteen years, at a minimum, before the SSMZs were created, with the intent of being protected. An important part of this is all these areas have been mapped. We do have high-resolution mapping in the area. Not all areas have been characterized fully.

Some of the recent research, and we've had some seminar series on these, is connectivity through larval dispersal models. Brothers et al. presented this, but there's also another paper by Karnauskas et al. where they talk about larval connectivity for several snapper grouper species, and they looked at either -- Red snapper, scamp, red grouper, and gag grouper are the species that have been looked at.

There's also been some biological samples that were collected by the Nature Conservancy and LGL Ecological Associates, and South Carolina DNR was a partner with that, where they sampled -- Or they conducted the histology and ageing of the fish that were collected.

Artificial reef monitoring in the more recent time period has been done by the South Carolina Aquarium, and you'll see some of that information presented later, and then, as you know very well, the Southeast Reef Fish Survey is also conducting research. Sometimes they are able to go into these areas and collect information. Other times, we might have some information that is lacking from there.

One of the reasons that I'm presenting today is to help with the evaluation of the spawning special management zones. The council was very concerned about creating several black holes that were out there, and no more information was being gathered, and so they created this group called a System Management Plan Workgroup, and what they're trying to do -- It's designed to gather input from a diverse group. It includes fishermen, biologists, communication specialists, law enforcement officers, and so it's a variety of people, a variety of interests that are in there, and we also want to gather input from other advisory panels.

As we're thinking about evaluating this area for management, some of the key things that I want to point out is what the council has considered for management of these areas. One is keep as-is, and so no changes in management. Another one is modify areas, move or change these areas, and then the third one is should some of the regulations change.

The evaluation is going to be an iterative process. You know, this isn't going to be the only time that it's done. It should be done on a more regular basis, as information comes in. However, it's been a little bit challenging trying to do an evaluation of this area, due to the limited information that was available in the past. Due to some of the new research that has come through in 2024 and 2025, that definitely helped the evaluation. I wanted to make sure that we would have something to discuss for the system management plan workgroup, respecting that they're volunteering their time, and I didn't want to basically give a presentation of we have no new information.

This is describing a little bit of the process. We put together that evaluation tool to gather just some quick input from you. Once again, if you went through it, you didn't have to complete all of the sections. You could just do the sections that you were most familiar with. This is intended to provide your feedback, and it's going to be incorporated into a council document. Once again, your comments will be aggregated with comments at the meeting to get the overall group's recommendation. It's not going to be just the recommendation coming from that tool that was put together.

In the planning tool, or the evaluation tool, there's several components to it. The first one looked at planning for developing the spawning special management zones. Then it goes into each of the areas independently. When thinking about these areas, you know, you don't have to do a broad-

sweeping management, saying we've got to remove management for everything. You can select each individual area to provide comments on, and how it should change, and then there were some cross-area comparisons, some successes, and areas where improvement is needed.

I also wanted to make sure I provided you the additional resources, looking at the Attachment 3 that I'm going to jump over to in just a second, but Amendment 36 was very important. The system management plan for Amendment 36 is also important. I also provided links for the connectivity work as well as some of the biological sampling that has occurred, and, with that, I am going to jump into --

All right, and so that brief background went into a lot of what is on pages 1 through 10 of this document. I've highlighted a few of these. I was hoping I was going to be able to bounce around to them. I'm not going to go over everything that's in there. I just want to highlight a few pieces.

You know, one of the things that's probably most important, when you're thinking about spawning special management zones, is are you observing spawning fish in these areas, and a couple different ways that this could be considered, and it's difficult to evaluate these areas, because we're learning as we go, and so we're going to get better at figuring out when we need to go out -- When sampling is needed to detect spawning for certain fish.

Not all fish spawn at the same time, and so sampling might have to go at different time periods, and so we're looking at two different pieces of information, and I have that here. Predicted maximum length for each of these fish generally comes out of either a SEDAR, if that's available, or some other published literature source, and I have that under the source documents.

I also have a 75 percent of max total length, and the reason for that is, reading some literature, a general rule of thumb, in order to figure out if a fish is of spawning size, 75 percent is about the size -- Is the rule of thumb for thinking about age of maturity, or size of maturity.

We also have some max age information that's included, the size of maturity if it's available, and then the age of maturity, if it's available, and, over to the right, I have the results of the recent work that was conducted by LGL and TNC, and you can see the number of fish that were greater than the maximum size, or the maximum total length, or 75 percent of the maximum total length, the number of fish and percent of fish that are greater than the size of maturity, and then also the number of fish greater than the age of maturity.

Some of these fish we don't have all the information for, and so, if you scroll down, or if you look down at something like a graysby, we don't have age of maturity, and so that one remains blank, but we do have age of maturity for many of the species. I updated this with some of the more recent information, doing a quick literature search.

A couple things I do want to highlight, that I found interesting, is something like, for graysby, and also for rock hind, these are ages that are higher than has been in the published literature for maximum age for these species, and so, in the spawning special management zones, you are seeing an advanced age for some of these, and then I also wanted to highlight these ages that were observed for red grouper, which is ages-nineteen to twenty-three.

Going into some other information, I had mentioned these areas had been mapped. The total area has been completed, but, once again, we do need to do habitat characterization in these areas as we figure out what's important for spawning of these fish.

Unfortunately, when you look at some of the social and economic metrics, we really have no information that has been developed for these spawning special management zones. I think this is a big gap that we're lacking. We have gathered a little bit of information from stakeholders in the development of this report. We have reached out to the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, the Habitat Advisory Panel, and the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel, and gotten feedback from there, but the two things that you do see noticed on this are the initiation of a citizen science program, and I know you've heard Julia speak about this program a couple of different times, and you've also seen some of the projects, but we also have a citizen science program assist in monitoring of the spawning special management zones.

I have that as a hashtag. You know, it's not necessarily our citizen science program that was assisting with the development of this, but there was cooperative research funded through NOAA to gather information in these areas.

Scrolling down a little bit more, thinking about some more of the evaluation, the first piece here, on Table 3.6, we're looking at the SMP Workgroup was formed, and it has been doing an evaluation, and it has met a few different times.

Some of the outreach metrics, there has been quite a bit that's been completed on this. There is some short-term action items that were created, and completed, and some of the outreach information has been developed, and I'll pop over to some of our webpage that has some of this information.

If you go into the habitat webpage that we have, and you go under managed areas, you will see a marine protected areas, and this is where you start to get information for the spawning special management zones. They are down at the bottom. We had a seminar that presented information on some of the more recent data that was collected. We also have some short little snippets on why it's important to protect important spawning habitats, what it looks like when sampling is going on, and those are neat little snippets that The Nature Conservancy put together.

Then we also have this tool that was developed a while ago looking at the spawning special management zones, and so if you want to go through that. That's getting a little bit dated now, but it does have some information, and it was a request of some of the outreach.

We do have a point of contact in the Southeast Regional Office, as well as the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and we are developing a list of important contacts. Some of the information that hasn't been completed is trying to get up with the contacts twice per year. We just haven't had that much information to share, and so, once again, reaching out to folks without any new information is challenging. We haven't done the collaboration for teacher workshops, just because of the difficulty with starting something new like that. We do have a boundary file that could be downloadable, but it would be a challenge. I've done it myself once, but it was not fun to do, and so I just put that as not started, and I need to work on that more.

Polls developed to track stakeholders' knowledge. We're not able to necessarily do polls without going through a pretty extensive process, and so we haven't started that, and then, the questions regarding SSMZs during fishermen interviews, those have not been established either.

We were hoping to get some metrics from law enforcement. You know, enforcing these areas, and compliance in these areas, is key for these areas to be successful. However, it's hard to estimate when a patrol occurs in the area, and the reason for that is just imagine if you were out sampling, and you looked on your radar, and you knew where the spawning special management zone was, and you didn't see anybody in the area based on your radar.

It's hard for a law enforcement officer to justify going out to that area, just because it's looking like there's nobody in it to begin with, and so they might look at it, and not make a trip out there, but does that count as a patrol in the area?

We also don't have information on vessels in the states, the number of vessels in the states either increased or maintained. You know, vessels, different vessels, can make it out there. It's not necessarily -- I don't know if it's necessarily a useful metric to be incorporated. The council is getting regular updates on enforcement and adjudication in the area. However, it is not just a report dedicated to the area. It's a report overall on enforcement in the Southeast Region.

Going on down into the number of patrols, I had also indicate, in addition to not knowing how many patrols are going out there, quite often it is difficult to get any information on an ongoing case until it has been completed, and there's different ways cases can get completed, and so communication of the results of these can be extremely challenging.

There has been a report on remote monitoring methods for a similar area. Gray's Reef has a remote monitoring methods paper that was put out by Kendall et al. in 2020, and so, although we did not complete that, I view that as being completed. It's a pretty thorough document, and, although we don't -- We haven't completed remote monitoring methods, or recommendations for those, that can be done at a future meeting, and then, finally, we do have the citizen science program information.

Now, probably getting into the meat of the discussion today is the information that is available for these different areas, and so I'm going to go through it looking at -- Starting with South Cape Lookout, going to Area 51, 53, Devil's Hole, and then Warsaw Hole. We have fairly similar tables for the three natural sites, and then the artificial reefs are a little bit different.

Looking at the information that's available prior to the 2017 establishment of these areas and then in the more recent study, trying to look at the number of fish in spawning condition first, and so you can see greater amberjack has been observed in spawning condition in South Cape Lookout.

One of the areas that the council was really interested in for this spot, or one of the species that was interested for this spot, was red grouper, trying to make sure red grouper was spawning, or finding an area that red grouper were spawning. They were noticing a decline in the population of red grouper and wanted to make sure that some of these fish were protected.

Now, you'll see that the information is showing that maybe a slight shift in the spawning, the number or percent of spawning, fish in the area. This could be either a sampling factor -- If there was a design, an intentional sampling timing of the trips to get red grouper in spawning condition,

and so, if the previous studies were not done at optimal spawning time, then you might not get this 100 percent that was seen in the 2023 to 2025 study.

Gag grouper, which is another focal species, was observed in spawning condition in the more recent time period, and then you're also seeing scamp, blackfin snapper, red snapper, silk snapper, and blueline tilefish all in spawning condition in this area.

As I had mentioned before, you know, sampling can be important to figure out whether or not a fish is in spawning condition. Another way you could look at this, if you're not in the optimal time for those spawning fish, is looking at the size of the individual. Would it be likely that that individual could become a spawning adult, and so I have size of maturity on this table, and you can look at the size of the fish that were collected either in spawning condition or average total length overall.

You'll see, once again, for several of these species, you're going to see them over that size of maturity for many of them, and then the one fish that you're seeing that has been observed quite frequently, or there's two fish that have been observed frequently, where the average size is smaller than the size of maturity, is speckled hind, and you also see that for snowy grouper, or not on this one. That's going to be coming up later. It is encouraging to see that most of the fish that are being observed in the area are greater than the size of maturity.

All right. Now we're going to switch areas. We're going to go into Area 51. As I had mentioned before, the data is a little bit different here. We don't necessarily have spawning condition for these fish. Right now, what we do have is a list of focal species that have been observed in the area as well as -- That's going to be on the left side of Table 4.3, as well as other snapper grouper species that have been observed in the area.

Going down into the Table 4.4, we do have sighting frequency based on the reef methodology that the aquarium is using when sampling in the area, and the species that are bolded here are focal species for the spawning special management zones.

Area 53, very similar. On the left side, you're going to see some of the focal species that have been observed in the area. This includes greater amberjack, scamp, gag grouper, warsaw grouper, and red snapper, and then, on the right side of the table, you're going to see other snapper grouper species that have been observed in the area. Going down, very similar to before, but you're going to be looking at the sighting frequency and the density for Area 53.

Devil's Hole, getting back to the natural areas, and this is probably one of the areas that we have more information on, or at least a lot more -- It seems like a lot more observations. In this habitat, probably what has been observed the most is the spawning of scamp grouper. There was a pretty big, or a pretty large, group of fish that were observed in one sampling event, and that video is included on that habitat page for the managed areas. You can see the number of scamp grouper that were observed there.

Another piece that is -- Another fish that was observed in spawning condition, in pretty high densities, or high catch rates, and not densities, was gag grouper. In the more recent sampling events, they observed eight gag grouper in spawning condition. In addition to that, they observed one male gag grouper in the area. The reason I point out that one male gag grouper in the area is

male gag groupers are pretty low in abundance. If you look at the recent stock assessments, it's usually less than 5 percent of the overall population, and so observing that one individual is a pretty significant event.

Other species in spawning condition in the area are blackfin snapper, silk snapper, red snapper, and then, once again, if you look at some of the species out there, speckled hind, you're seeing no fish in spawning condition, unfortunately.

Average lengths of some of these individuals, similar to the table before, you're seeing many of them above the size of maturity, with the exception of a species like speckled hind, where it is smaller than the size of maturity. Snowy grouper, this one also had some small individuals that were observed. There was ROV work that was done in Devil's Hole, looking at some of those species that were observed there. They observed greater amberjack, speckled hind, snowy grouper, and scamp, and then some other snapper grouper species were observed.

Now going to the furthest south spawning special management zone that we have, looking at those species that are in spawning condition, I want to highlight here greater amberjack. One of the reasons that this area was put in place was to really protect spawning greater amberjack. In a recent review of the greater amberjack study that has been conducted, there is some observations of greater amberjack from North Carolina and South Carolina migrating down to the Florida Keys area, potentially for spawning.

We don't necessarily know that, but the other reason that this area was protected was because of warsaw grouper. If you look here, about 50 percent of the warsaw grouper that have been captured in this area were in spawning condition, which is pretty significant. Other species that have been observed in spawning condition were red snapper and silk snapper.

The average size of some of these individuals, you can see that most of the species were greater than the average size of maturity. Once again, the one that stands out is speckled hind, where it is much smaller than the size of maturity. Silk snapper is another one where it was smaller than the size maturity.

If you really want to dive into the details, and I didn't necessarily put this in the meat of the document, but there's also Appendix 2 that really covers all the action items that were recommended in the original system management plan, and it gives an indication of the completion status, as well as deliverables that have been provided. Before we go into the evaluation tool, are there any questions from the SSC in regards to the information that's been presented? Go ahead, Wally. You don't need to raise your hand.

DR. BUBLEY: I'm still polite. With the instances of finding spawning condition individuals, is this females, males, both? Do you know the details with that?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and it's mostly females.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay, but they didn't specify, and so, if they had a male that --

DR. COLLIER: No, and they did specify, and I believe I filtered it to just females. There's usually differences between males and females.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I would agree. Males are in spawning condition a lot longer than females, typically. I'm just trying to get some clarity on this. Thank you. All right. We have a couple hands that I saw pop up. Marcel, and then Steve.

DR. REICHERT: Can you guys hear me?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, Marcel. We can hear you.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Good. Yes, and a lot of information, Chip. A really comprehensive summary, and so please correct me if there's any misinterpretation on my end. A couple of clarifying questions. The frequency in the tables, that was the frequency, the observations, the frequency of fish per dive, and so 100 percent means that fish was seen in every single dive or sampling event? Yes, in these, the sighting frequency.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and I believe that is how it is done. I would have to look at that reef methodology a little bit more, but, yes.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. All right. Spawning of fish, did you guys look at the pre-2017 data in the same sampling season, or the same sampling dates as the 2023 to 2025, to make it fair? I know that the numbers are low, but to make a more fair comparison?

DR. COLLIER: Not necessarily, because, you know, it -- This is where it gets complicated on this, because the important part is are spawning fish being observed in the area, and not necessarily how many are being observed in the area, although that can be important, and so I didn't necessarily filter it. I wanted to -- Because I was looking at not only fish in spawning condition, but also size of those fish, and I'm going to use that as two different ways to look at some of the same data.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, but, I mean, in terms of effectiveness, at some point you want to look at comparison, what happened before and after, and so that -- I realize the numbers are relatively low, but okay. Thanks for that clarification. My last question was, again, just to verify, spawning condition in these areas, that was all based on histology, correct, and that's not just visual observations?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and these are all histology with a classification of spawning likely within the last twenty-four hours.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, and that may be relevant for some discussion we may have later, but thanks for that clarification, Chip. I appreciate it.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Steve, you're up.

DR. TURNER: Thank you. I'm trying to understand these zones with respect to the total area and biology of these animals, and so are there other spawning areas known?

DR. COLLIER: I don't know if we necessarily have other known spawning areas. I think there are areas where we know fish in the similar condition of likely to spawn within twenty-four hours. There's a lot of that information out there. Wally is going to be much more -- Wally and Marcel

can speak about that much more fluently than I can, but the council was trying to protect certain areas for some fish, and some of these areas were created thinking about different species.

When the council was creating the areas like South Cape Lookout, as I had mentioned, they had talked about red grouper, but they also talked about silk snapper that they had historically caught in the area, and it might be important to start protecting that. For Devil's Hole, there was concern back in 2016 on the population of scamp grouper.

This was prior to the stock assessment being completed, and so there was some information that was collected where there were pretty high densities of scamp grouper, or high catch rates of scamp grouper, in the area, and also observations of spawning fish, or thought to be spawning fish, with the tiger paw pattern, as well as fish in spawning condition.

Other species in Devil's Hole that were thought to be important was warsaw grouper. A couple of those have been observed in the area, in some of the sampling events, as well as speckled hind, and then, going all the way south, that area was really developed with the idea of trying to protect an important fishing location in the past for warsaw grouper, but it was not known whether or not warsaw grouper had used that area for spawning, and, since the creation of that, of the spawning special management zone, fish in spawning condition have been observed in that habitat during times that are likely for warsaw grouper to be spawning. Does that make sense, Steve? It's not necessarily trying to get the --

DR. TURNER: I'm trying to get a feel for, you know -- For say one species, you know, are there 100 spawning sites, and we're protecting one of them, or are there just a few spawning sites, and we're protecting one of them?

You know, I certainly understand the need to protect a stock when they're highly concentrated, and you can really hit them hard, but I'm trying to -- I don't have any feel for the population level protection that these sites are trying to provide, and I think that information may not be -- I think what I'm hearing is that information that may not be there. My guess is commercial fishermen, avid fishermen, may have some feeling for that, at least within a region, within an area, but I certainly don't have that understanding, and so I'm trying to fit this into a population level protection, and I don't have a feel for it. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: Chip, let me jump in, real quick, and so a lot of this information -- So, right now, let's ask some clarifying questions with Chip, and let him move on. Steve, I think that's a really good discussion point to have in this second -- Once we get through the presentation, because I think I can add some to that too, with some of the SERFS sampling that's been -- That's gone on, but let's stick to clarifying questions right now, and let Chip get through this presentation, go to public comment, and then we'll have our more thorough discussion moving forward. Also, if you've raised your hand, and you don't want it up anymore, please lower it, because I don't have the capabilities of doing that either. Thanks.

DR. TURNER: Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: Go ahead, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Sorry, and that was a residual hand.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Chip, I think -- Any other questions about what Chip has presented so far, mostly just clarifying questions, because we'll get a chance to have some discussion about this in a little bit, but I just want to make sure everybody is clear on what he was presenting here, and, if we're okay, and I don't see any more hands, and so I'll say, Chip, keep moving forward and get to that evaluation tool.

DR. COLLIER: All right, and, once again, I do want to reiterate that these are just the responses that were gathered from a few folks at the SSC, but one of the things I think it does very well is it highlights some areas that really need probably discussion by the group, and so it potentially provides some more information on, you know, where you all could really dive in, and really talk about some things, and so these are -- It's basically a filtering of the information that was collected.

For many of these questions, we had five responses, at least for the first few questions that were provided, or that were asked, and so, for the most part, the folks that had responded kind of felt that the decision-making was transparent and based on available data. There was definitely an individual that disagreed with that, and so it would probably be good for the SSC to talk about, you know, how the council came up with their method for selecting the areas.

Folks felt like the stakeholder engagement were adequate, thinking about the fishermen input. There was pretty good coordination among the agencies. Folks felt like the responsibilities were pretty well defined. There was definitely some thought that it could be improved upon.

There was sufficient documentation on the management plan, or guidance for the areas. Some of the other information here, probably that needs a bit more discussion, was the selection of the boundaries based on spawning habitat or aggregation sites. Even the idea of aggregation sites has been controversial for the area. The objectives seem to be fairly well agreed with, as well as the management purposes for the spawning special management zones, and so that was a lot of the input that went into it.

If you all would like to discuss some of these, and, you know, probably the areas where there's some of those disagreements, it would probably be good to hear from the SSC on how they felt about how these areas were developed, thinking about the planning, the engagement that was used to gather information from fishermen, as well as advisory panels, coordination, and so, if you all want to talk about that, I think it would be beneficial.

DR. BUBLEY: Chip, with these responses, do we have a way to have these available to us to look at, instead of -- Because, I mean, since there's a few different things that are going through, it sounds like -- It seems like we're going through one-by-one, and then having discussions at that point, and is that what you envision?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and I think that would be good. It helps to make sure we're not going to miss anything as the discussion is going along, and so it was added as Attachment 3d this morning, and so this spreadsheet should be available to everyone.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. Great. Thank you. I didn't realize that was the case. Appreciate it. All right. I guess the way we're going to move forward with this then is kind of take this piecemeal, and so do we want to start having these conversations now, based on the responses that we've had,

and so, right now, we've just gone over this response -- Just the initial responses by the questions that Chip went over, and so does anyone have any thoughts on this?

Obviously, there weren't a ton of people that filled out these responses, and I understand why for some of these, but now is an opportunity that we can actually have to discuss this, and get some insight into it, and share with Chip and with whoever else is going to be wanting this type of information. Jennifer.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Sorry, and just a clarifying question. I'm looking for a sample size, or an N, on these charts, and I'm not seeing anything anywhere. Chip, can you help me?

DR. COLLIER: Yes. For this one, and actually I think for all of them, you're looking at the sample sizes, and it's going to be at the bottom. We had five responses, and so, if you go to the right for the dimensions, there were three responses, and so, although it's low responses, to me this is just the strawman to start the conversation, and not necessarily the final output, and so I would leave it up to the group to discuss. You know, there's some areas that have been highlighted as there is differences opinion of the SSC, and so it would be good to make sure that we're covering all those opinions.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you. I think it would be good, although that's kind of a different question, to see why there are only five responses, because I think that may help, if you guys want to continue that, and you said this is part of a strawman, and so I assume there will be a follow-up.

DR. COLLIER: No, Marcel, and there's not going to be a follow-up. The follow-up is here at the public meeting, where you all can provide comment.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. All right. I appreciate that. Still, anyway -- Relative to the boundaries, because it seems like there was a difference of opinion there within the respondents, I personally think that that may very well have to do -- Or, the I was looking at this, it has to do with the size of the special management zones, and I would like to hear from other members whether they agree or not, and then, again, we can pick that up in our discussion later, just to start the conversation here.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Jim, and then we can -- Are you good there, Marcel? I agree that I think we should have discussion with that, and see what Jim has, and jump back to these sort of things. We're going to be -- I have a feeling we're going to be bouncing around a bit with this topic. I was just going to say, Jim, let's hold off unless it relates to what Marcel was saying. Do we want to have a discussion on the boundaries with this?

DR. GARTLAND: What I was going to say, Wally, is it almost seems like we're moving into the action items now. Do we want to -- Since we've reviewed everything, and as long as everybody has got their clarifying questions done, do you want to do public comment, and then we can get to the action items?

DR. BUBLEY: That's where I wasn't sure how to --

DR. GARTLAND: We might all be saying the same thing.

DR. BUBLEY: We haven't gone through everything yet from the evaluation tool. That's where I was kind getting hung up, is how we wanted to handle this moving forward, and what would be the smoothest way to do it.

DR. GARTLAND: It seems to me like we're leaking into the action items, and maybe if we just do like you've been doing, where we kind of go through it all, get clarifying, and then we can discuss it all. Does that seem reasonable?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and that's fine with me. We are 100 percent leaking into the action items. That's where I was trying to square this with as we were going, because this is just the first step along the way of what Chip was presenting for the evaluation tool, and so I'm fine with that. Is everybody else good? Chip, is that going to work for you, or are you worried that we're going to kind of lose momentum with trying to get what you're trying to get out of this?

DR. COLLIER: No. I think we're good. I think you're doing a much better job keeping me on task, and so I'll go into a couple of the other responses. Just real quickly, like I had mentioned, this is Attachment 3d, and so it should be available to everyone, but some of the areas where -- Or some of the dimensions, trying to think about progress, and thinking about trends for some of the indicators, you know, it's not surprising that it's a variety of responses that were there.

You know, we don't necessarily have good information on trends. You know, sampling programs haven't been established for these areas, and so it's difficult to have outcomes related to trends, and, once again, there's also some differences of opinion on the biological, social, and economic research. I didn't look to see who had responded, but, given that we have very little social and economic research, I would not be surprised with a bunch of these reds from some of those folks that focus on that type of research.

The inputs and availability of resources, you know, it's -- Little progress has been made, or no progress. Enforcement, little progress has been made. Some of the outreach, and that also incorporates outreach, and then, the development, design, and adoption of these areas, you know, progress had been made.

Another way to look at this similar piece is trying to think about what needs to improve the most, and I think the availability of resources, funding, and capacity is highlighted, based on the responses that we've had so far, as well as trying to do some of the research, the biological, social, and economic, but pretty much everything needs improving based on some of the comments, and that's not a surprise as well.

Some of the biological, or some of the indicators by area, and so I broke these out looking at stakeholder support. For the most part, it wasn't completed. We only had two surveys for many of these, and you can see that there is some stakeholder support in some of the areas, and then, in other areas, it's insufficient information. The other piece that has been looked at was the compliance in some of the areas, and then, for all the rest of them, what you're seeing is grayed out, which means there is insufficient information.

Probably the most important part of this whole evaluation is thinking about how management should move forward over the long run, and so we have some of these things to consider, which is -- Or we had several options for each of the areas, which was to retain the area as-is, to modify the area, to remove it, or there was not sufficient information, and so, for the most part, it was retain as-is, with the exception of one response in Devil's Hole of insufficient information or unsure.

Many of these are pretty low sample sizes. You'll see the sample size here. Two individuals had provided responses, and so it's not like the majority of the SSC has provided these comments, but retain as-is seems like it would be the starting point for the discussion, or the strawman for the SSC's discussion, and, with that, that's all I have for the SSC, and now I will sit back and let you all discuss it.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Chip. Yes, and that's -- I'm glad we have this available to us, because it's going to make it a lot easier to go through, and not have to have this discussion as kind of jump through this thing, and so do we have any, again, questions that deal with just clarifying of Chip's presentation right now, or the results that he showed us? Please raise your hand now. If we don't have any of those, we're going to go into public comment, and then have our discussion, and so please raise your hand if you've got any questions right now. It looks like none.

If we have questions, Chip, we may be bugging you as we're having our discussion, but right now I want to open it up to public comment for this agenda item, and so does anyone have a public comment that is online? Please raise your hand. I don't see anybody, and so we're going to start getting into our discussions and action items with this section.

The action item itself is to review the information summarized in the SSMZ system management plan update, we've completed the SMZ evaluation tool, and then we have to discuss the strengths, limitations, and uncertainties associated with the available information, and so this goes along with things in the report, as well as the data that Chip showed us too, and so I think we can open up the floor to start having these discussions, and start talking about things like what Steve was bringing up, in terms of the size of these and how is it relative to the area as a whole. I will start off with that aspect of it. We've got a hand from South Atlantic Council. Not sure who that is.

DR. CURTIS: Thanks, Wally. Just logistics, Chip, and I think if you just keep control of it, and you've got the action items on the screen, and then, for the committee members, you should have the action items in the shared document, if you can access that, and hopefully others haven't had as much trouble as some people, but if you keep control, Chip, then you can move back to the survey results and things, if necessary, and I'll keep notes on the shared document.

DR. COLLIER: No problem.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Judd. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Judd, do you want us to add text while we go, or do you want us to do that after we completed our discussions?

DR. CURTIS: You've got permission to add text to the action items as we go. That's fine, and then I can help. I can synthesize those together after the fact, and so please add as you feel fit.

DR. REICHERT: All right.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel, did you have any points you wanted to start bringing up right now?

DR. REICHERT: Sure. Just as a placeholder, I think it would be good for us to have a little bit of discussion, later or now, depending on when you want to do that, Chair, about the evaluation tool at our ExCom. We had a brief discussion about that, and I think it would be good to add that, but we can do that at any time.

Otherwise, I have a comment, and, you know, I seem to remember that the SSC made this comment a while back, when this was all discussed initially, and I also know that this is not a world-scattering comment, but here's the but. We -- Given the available information, the limited or small size of these SMZs, I think, makes gathering information, and especially assess the effectiveness, very challenging, if not difficult or impossible, and so, when I was looking at the evaluation tool, that's where I had a lot of problems with how do we assess this in its current state.

In addition to that, the dilemma is that more information, or the more fish you collect, for instance for life fishery, and that's why I was asking if spawning condition was based on histology, because you basically remove those fish from those areas. The smaller the area, the more significant the impact is on the area, and I'm not sure how significant that area is, or the impact is, or whether there is a significant impact at all, but I think, just as a start of the discussion, I think that's important for us to keep in the back of our minds when we make recommendations to the council. Anyway, just to start it off. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Marcel, and I do kind of -- I think I want to get into the evaluation tool, and kind of the intent, and what was going on with it, because I have been approached by multiple people concerned about what was actually happening with it, and so I think that will form the basis of some of our later discussions, when we can see what the summary results were from those that did submit.

Chip, I guess some of the concerns that I had received with this is, number one, that -- Sorry, Jim, to jump you, and I don't know if you had a question about this, but I just saw Jennifer's hand raised, and she was the first one that brought this up to my attention, and so, if you're okay with that, I'm going to jump over to her to give her concerns. I'm assuming that's what it is, and is that correct, Jennifer?

DR. CURTIS: Jennifer, try your mic now. I've got you unmuted.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Are you able to hear me now?

DR. BUBLEY: We got you. We can hear you now.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Hooray. Sorry, and I've been using a variety of different devices trying to be able to be heard here. We're good?

DR. BUBLEY: We can hear you. Yes. Continue.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Sorry, and I've been talking to myself for a minute here. Thank you. I appreciate you tossing it to me, because, yes, that was my first thought, and that's sort of why I asked about the sample size earlier. You know, I've been on the SSC for about five years now, and it's the first time I've seen us have a survey like this, and so of course I was interested, and I'm one of your social scientists, and so surveys sent to people are of great interest to me, and, also, I'm tasked with sort of, I think, flagging things, and so, I appreciate, Chip, your desire to make a strawman.

I think that's a great idea, and I think, had that been maybe sort of the lead of the survey, I would not have had any reactions. That would have sort of headed off our discussion, but I've seen a lot of really problematic surveys cross my desk at my institution, where someone decides they want to know some information, and they just send out a survey, right, and then it comes back as data, and it often isn't, and I am not saying that that is the case here, but it makes me have a little heartburn, as Genny says.

When we see -- If we're thinking about sending out surveys like this, I mean, whose feedback do we want, and for what purpose? Those are the first things that come to mind, and one of the first things I asked the ExCom the other day was who was sampled, right, and who got this survey, and then, how do we know who is actually responding, because I believe it went in the briefing book, and it came directly to the SSC.

Yes, theoretically, it should be SSC, but, also, it could be anyone, unless there are identifiers linked to the emails, and you're able to see who actually responded, in which case, that's kind of problematic, and we probably should flag that as well. We're not really sure whose feedback we're getting, except from a self-identifying question, was my understanding, and please correct me if I'm wrong, Chip.

Then the second thing, and this is where I get a lot of heartburn on this, is what are we doing with this information? Like you said, if it's just a conversation starter, I think it's awesome. I think we should run with that. I totally understand, you know, why we would do such a thing, but if I -- I may have misheard you at the beginning, but I thought that I heard you say something about this information going into a report to the council, and that makes me really nervous, because, anytime we have information that we put into a chart, and a graph, and we share with other people, it sort of bestows this air of validity that it may or may not actually hold, and it may or may not be even what the creator intends, but it conveys that, and those were just some of the concerns that came to my mind.

DR. BUBLEY: Chip, did you want to respond to that?

DR. COLLIER: No, and I appreciate the comments there, the constructive criticism. I take those to heart, and, yes, the -- If you look at the reports that have been developed from the other advisory panels, as well as the report that's being developed overall, you know, we're not including any of these figures, or tables, in the document. What we always view is the conversation that is on the record, and so, quite often, you know, we want to make sure that, what you all are discussing, that is the record that's being developed, and how you feel about these spawning special management zones.

Overall, over the preliminary information that's being collected through this tool -- You know, as you had mentioned, this tool is really just trying to develop a strawman. It's a big topic. There's a lot of information to discuss, and I wanted to make sure we had small little -- Or there were small little snippets available for the SSC to really hone-in and discuss.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Can I respond, Chair?

DR. BUBLEY: Go for it.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: Thank you. Thank you for explaining that, Chip. I appreciate that, and hearing you say, you know, it is the strawman, I just want to applaud your desire to use a social science method to get the conversation going, but, as long as what I'm understanding is that these charts will not in fact be shared outside of this particular context, then great. I'm glad to hear that, Chip. Thank you.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and the other point of we don't know who necessarily responded, that was my intent, is to allow people to respond however they felt comfortable, and that could result in other folks providing comments on the survey. Given that we only had five, you know, I think it's unlikely that others -- That multiple people had tried to do this.

I don't know, and maybe you could do it from multiple devices, but I'm not seeing that as a big concern, and, once again, the most important part about this is the record that's being developed at this meeting by the SSC, and so, if there's pieces that you all disagree with that are potentially included in some of the figures, or some of the discussion, then point that out. You know, it's up to the SSC on how they feel about these issues, and not necessarily what was coming out of that tool.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Chip. I think that helped ease some concerns with some folks around here as we're going through this process. Marcel had made that comment prior. Did you want to have some discussion, Marcel, about the size of these, and how much of an issue it is, if some are removed, basically?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and, before we do that, I, you know, I agree with Jennifer. I think, you know, and, again, this may be something for the future, but I think, if that purpose was clearly stated, who was it intended for, and, for instance, was this SSC only, or part of a broader survey, and, also, what, if any, personal information was collected, and how this would be used, I think perhaps more people would feel comfortable responding. Anyway, just as some additional comments that I jotted down.

In terms of the size, yes, and, as I said earlier, do we as an SSC want to perhaps make a statement, or a recommendation, to -- You know, the difficulties in potentially evaluating and gathering information relative to the small size? If the council wants to continue, does the SSC, based on scientific discussion, or arguments, want to recommend potentially increasing the size?

I responded, to be honest, with keeping the size the same, but that was more based on the difficulties. If the council wants to increase, I think that probably is a lot more difficult process than continuing the current size, but perhaps based on, you know, scientific arguments, do we want

to recommend that increasing the size would make evaluation and sampling a little easier in the future? I would like to hear from other members.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel, I'll hop in with some of this. I think it's going to be really species specific with some of these things. If you have a species that is more prone to aggregation, I think the size isn't as big of -- The size will kind of answer the question that you were asking for there. If it's something that's spread across the long areas, then, yes, you might have some questions about it, because it's only a handful of individuals potentially that are moving forward with it, and so just that keep in mind with these discussions for now, is we want to talk about -- Kind of essentially get to some recommendations at some point to be used.

We've got a second component where we're going to talk about what's actually in the amendment, but right now they want to get our input on how things -- What's going well, and what could be done to improve this, and so I'll shut up now and let the rest of you talk. Jim had his hand up.

DR. GARTLAND: Yes, and I just wanted to make some comments regarding the first action item, and I'll keep it brief. From the positive side, I think the idea of trying to implement these SSMZs was a really good idea, and I think, even more than that, the work that has been done since to try to evaluate the effectiveness of them has been fantastic, right?

You see, a lot of times, a management regulation gets put into place, and then it just kind of sits there, and no one follows up of whether or not it's effective, and so the effort to assess whether it's effective I think it's fantastic.

That said, I totally agree that it's difficult, probably, if not near impossible, to actually get to whether it's effective. The sampling that's been done so far has been really good, but it's limited information, and, in my opinion, huge uncertainty, and so I have a question and then an idea. The first question is do you have any idea of just the scale of the amount of funding that has gone into monitoring? Like are we talking, you know, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or a couple of million over time? Does anybody have that rough number?

DR. COLLIER: Jim, I could potentially respond for a small part of it.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Chip. That's who I was just about to bug, and so I'm glad you jumped in.

DR. COLLIER: Well, and so it's complicated, right? SERFS sampling is -- They might go into some of these areas and do some sampling, and so I'm not incorporating any of those estimates. There are sampling areas outside of the spawning special management zones, and so that is a -- It's a big program that goes on, and so what I'm going to be talking about is just that cooperative research that has occurred in the area.

Generally, it's less than \$100,000 per year, at least for that biological monitoring. When you think about law enforcement monitoring, you know, in talking with some law enforcement officers in the past, you know, each of those trips cost a couple thousand dollars to go out there with the law enforcement officers. You know, they're not going out there by themselves on a single trip, and so you're taking multiple law enforcement officers, you know, thirty to forty to fifty miles offshore in order to sample some of these areas, and so that's a big time commitment in that aspect as well,

and so I don't have an estimate on the cost of law enforcement, or how much they're spending on it, but it is not a high priority for law enforcement.

Then, if you think about overall law enforcement, you know, it's usually part of a JEA, which North Carolina does not have, and so, with that, I would probably say a lot of the monitoring that's going into this is probably less than a hundred thousand per year.

DR. GARTLAND: No, and that's great. That's exactly what I was looking for, and so, I mean, a hundred thousand is a pretty low number, right? It's a big number for a person, but it's a smaller number for an institution, and so, thinking about what Marcel said about the, you know, if you're sampling for histology, removing the fish, and, if you have a small area, your sampling could be having an impact, and I totally agree on that.

I wonder if it would be worth some sort of longer-term passive monitoring effort that -- You know, instead of looking at the spawners themselves, if there was a way to quantify, you know, either larvae, or eggs, through some sort of plankton recorders. I know those things -- I don't know a ton about them. I know they're around, but that might be a way to get a lot more information, for maybe not a whole lot more cost and effort, in terms of transit, and so just a thought for the future. I think, overall, what's been done so far, given the limited resources, has actually been really good.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Jim.

DR. COLLIER: I forgot to mention that that funding in the most recent time period, where I was talking about a hundred grand, that was just for that period where TNC and LGL and South Carolina got together and submitted a collaborative -- Or the cooperative research proposal, and so, yes, there has not been -- For the years from like 2017 to 2023, there wasn't a dedicated research program for it.

DR. GARTLAND: Yes, and I got you. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: I would jump in that definitely consistent monitoring would be something that would be useful, and, as Jim said, trying to find a cost-effective way to do this isn't always easy. It would definitely be great if we had a way to do some acoustic stuff, where we could identify spawning individuals, since a lot of these fish are making sounds, and maybe sound specific to spawning, but I don't think we have that information available to us, and so we're still trying to figure out the best way. All right. Jason Walsh, you had your hand up.

MR. WALSH: Yes. Thanks, Chair. I think a lot of us probably are in a similar boat to me, but I didn't really understand the enforcement level that was going on in these areas, and so I looked at the AP meeting, Law Enforcement AP meeting, back in January, and that informed a lot of my responses to this, but it sounded like it's like a manpower issue, and not just, you know, money, and they were saying that they have two folks in North Carolina, and one person in South Carolina, that can monitor these areas, and so it doesn't sound like -- There's hardly any enforcement going on in some of these areas, which isn't great.

Then, when we start seeing more spawning fish, I think that, despite not having good enforcement, that might be a good sign, but I just wanted to alert people of that report. It might be helpful when we're thinking about that side of the conversation.

DR. BUBLEY: Chip.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and the workgroup brought this point up to me, and I thought it was a really good point, is, the number of fish that you're seeing, the increased number of fish in spawning condition, just could be because we've learned more about the areas, and learned more about the fish, as opposed to an actual increase in the abundance of spawning fish.

Some of the sampling times have changed, and so folks, or the researchers, have gotten better at potentially knowing when spawning might be occurring in that area for X species, and so I think we need to -- As far as in the report, we need to communicate better that, you know, there is potential of biasing the opinion, at least for some of the indicators, if there's trends, and that sampling, because it is so infrequent, every time you go out there, you learn something new, and you're going to be better the following time you go out there, and so a change in density, or a change in numbers of fish, might just reflect of you are learning more as you go.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Chip. Do we have any more discussion? Unfortunately, we'll probably have a little bit of time to start to talk about this still, but we're almost halfway through the three hours at this point, and so we'll have to try to be as succinct as we can with these discussions, and move forward to the next agenda items, but, Jeff, I saw your hand up.

DR. BUCKEL: Thanks, Wally, and I similar thoughts that Jim already covered and so I just wanted to support his earlier comments. Then a question for you, Chip. On the enforcement side of things, there was the discussion of looking on the radar, and so, if that can be like a logbook type of thing, that, you know, when the Coast Guard is out, they don't have to go to those sites, but they could just log that, you know, we were close enough to see that there were no vessels in the area, or we did see vessels that didn't move, right, because a boat could be in the area that could be trolling legally, but it's really if there's a stationary vessel, and so they may not have the time, or the resources, to go and get a visual, but if they could just have some log. If there was some -- You know, just like there's logbooks for the for-hire fleet, and, if there could be an enforcement logbook to say yes or no for stationary vessels, I think that could be future information if these are maintained. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Jim Gartland.

DR. GARTLAND: Just to add on to that briefly, I know, you know, a lot of commercial vessels, and some for-hire, at least up here, do have AIS, and so that might be another way to -- You know, I think those data are recorded, and available historically, and so you can maybe use those to get some idea of at least the activity in the area, knowing it would be an underestimate, but that might be another source of info.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Do we as an SSC, from a scientific point of view, recommend that the special management spawning management zones should remain in place, or, at minimum, at the current size, preferably establishing a larger size? I'm not sure, Chip, or Carolyn, and is that a question that would be pertinent to staff and council? Is that a question that's asked of us?

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and, I mean, that was definitely included in the evaluation tool, to retain as-is, modify, or remove. Those were questions for each of the areas.

DR. REICHERT: All right. Thanks, and so I made a note, and I'll post that now to add to our report, unless anyone in the SSC disagrees, that they should remain in place, preferably enlarged.

DR. BUBLEY: So, Chip, with all of this right now, obviously we were having these discussions to look at some of the evaluation tool, and touch on some of those topics, and are we going to get an opportunity to discuss this more, or does this have to be done now? I know the amendment aspect has to be done today, so they can move forward with it, but, about this aspect of it, is that something that needs to be done and finished today?

DR. COLLIER: So, in that slide, you know, there was the circle for the evaluation, and so I think, as we gather more information, we're definitely going to bring it back to the SSC to get additional input, but the evaluation report for this is going to be wrapping up fairly soon, and so it would not be coming back to the SSC to get additional comments. With that being said, it is going to come back to the SSC in the future to gather more input. Does that make sense?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and my concern is there's just a lot of information here, and we haven't really gotten a chance to touch on it, and we're going to have to jump off, in the near future, to cover the other topics as well, and so I just -- I worry that we're going to get into something and then don't get a chance to really thoroughly talk about it. All right. Steve Turner.

DR. COLLIER: Wally, if that's the concern, I think what Marcel had brought up, the retain, modify, or remove, I think that would be the most pressing question to ask of the SSC.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay, and so we'll get Steve, and then Matt, and then, after that, let's focus on that aspect of it, and, if we get into these other topics, that's fine, but, again, we've got a relatively short period of time here. Thank you. All right. Steve.

DR. TURNER: I'll try to be quick. In terms of modifying. I think we might recommend that for areas which include concentrated spawners, and I think the other question we might want to pay attention to is the duration of the recommendation, and I would suggest go for twenty years. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. We'll get a chance to talk about that in a little bit, because that is a separate action item, and so we've got that squared away, in terms of the duration of the extra time period. All right. The next person is Matt Damiano.

DR. DAMIANO: Thanks. My thoughts are, I think, on topic for the discussion ahead of us. I mean, just based on the information in the report collected in 2017, and then later, as Marcel pointed out, I think we're working with extremely limited information, and, if we're to base our recommendations solely on the monitoring effort that's been done to-date, I think there's some indication that these are having the effect, the intended effect, but they're pretty weak, and it would be difficult, from my perspective, to justify, you know, changing the size or moving them.

I think the most robust conclusion we can draw at this point is, yes, maybe probably they're doing what they're supposed to do, and I would suggest that, you know, the scientific considerations for

future evaluation should really center on designing and monitoring in a cost-effective way that's going to, you know, really help us evaluate whether or not these are, you know, producing more spawners, and maintaining that pool of spawners. Otherwise, I suspect we will be having this same conversation, you know, whenever the sunset provisions come up again. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Matt, and I agree. I think that's one of the key things that we're going to have with this, is to identify the fact that there needs -- We need more data to make some of these decisions that move forward, and so maybe that will be kind of the focus of what we put in the report as we move forward. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: To that point, real quick, it's kind of a question for Matt, or for others, but do we as an SSC believe that we ultimately will get enough information, given the size of the spawning, -- The SMZs, and, as you said, we may have the same conversation, but it -- You know, irrespective of what sampling programs you design, you will continue to run into the fact that likely the Ns, for a lot of these, will remain low, but maybe not, but I'm asking you, and others, if we feel that, even if we design those more carefully, whether you will still collect sufficient information to evaluate this effect.

DR. DAMIANO: It sounds like a great master's project and a simulation study.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Matt. All right. Next one is Genny.

DR. NESSLAGE: Thank you. I would just plus-one to everything that Matt and Marcel just said. I don't think there's adequate resources to address the question of whether there's -- Good enough scientific information to answer -- Or to see whether they're meeting their objectives. I don't think they can hurt biologically the stocks at all to have these areas in place, and to have no sunset, but I don't really -- I'm not really sure what the socio -- I'm not qualified to judge whether the socioeconomic impacts outweigh the potential biological impacts.

I think that's a question that council needs to wrestle with, and maybe our SEP folks might be able to speak to that, because, you know, if they're having very little impact, or likely very little impact, I don't know if it just might -- Whether the -- But they're having a big impact socioeconomically, then that's something to discuss, but maybe I'm taking you in a different direction than you wanted to go, Chair. Sorry.

DR. BUBLEY: No, and that's a great point to bring up, because a lot of us -- Obviously, we have some social scientists here, but a lot of us aren't, and so that's a point that gets kind of left on the wayside a lot in our discussions, and so thank you for bringing it up. Jim Gartland.

DR. GARTLAND: Just in response to what Marcel was saying about the size of them, you know, I think one of the recommendations we could make for future work is to evaluate the size of these SSMZs, and you could probably design your sampling, and/or simulations, to evaluate that question. You know, they might -- If you have -- You know, if your structure is pretty compact, maybe they're big enough as they are, but you can evaluate that, you know, scientifically, and then we could make recommendations from there.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Jim. Jeff.

DR. BUCKEL: Thanks, Wally. Yes, and the one thing about -- You know, it's like management that does no harm, and question, and on face value, right, you're closing some areas that should be helping, or maybe keeping things neutral, but I guess there is the chance, right, that, if you don't have enforcement, and fishers know that, and then you put boxes around something and say, hey, this is where fish spawn, it could have a negative impact, because you're telling folks where there's aggregations of fish, and, if there's no enforcement, then they can go in and fish those.

I guess that would be a question for stakeholders to -- You know, is there -- How much evidence, or is there any evidence for that, that these could be doing harm, because it's putting a target on where there's aggregations of fish, and, again, just to reiterate that, moving forward, that enforcement of some kind will be necessary. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: Genny, is that a follow-up question?

DR. NESSLAGE: No. Sorry.

DR. BUBLEY: It's okay. I'm just making sure. I'm trying to keep track of stuff. It gets a little hectic at times. All right. Okay, and so does anyone else have anything that they want to mention with this? We've raised quite a few points here to kind of get, I guess, maybe some information to Chip for putting this report together. We've got Jason Walsh.

MR. WALSH: Thank you, Chair. I think, just in response to Genny's point, I don't -- I don't think we have the information on, at that spatial level, on effort at this point to really have any kind of real -- Have any kind of confidence in answering that question right now, unfortunately, and so that could be something that we suggest, as an SSC, moving forward.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Jason. All right. I'm going to wrap this up then, at least in terms of this discussion. I think the take-home point that we've seen with all of this is we need more data. That's part of what we're -- Going forward here, we gave some ideas of potentially how we could obtain that, or at least some thoughts, and so I say, with our report, we're basically going to focus on that aspect of it, is that we're really not -- We don't have a lot of information to be able to make some of these decisions, and so, by having some more sort of standardized data collection over the next time period, potentially that would help with the process, and so anyone else have any last sense before we get into the next item? All right.

DR. CURTIS: Wally, just real quick, and sorry. This is Judd. To the committee members, just check the shared document. People have been adding some things, and I've been jotting down a lot of bullets, and so please supplement that information with things that you can recall that from our discussions. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Judd, I just put mine in comments, and so you can drop them wherever they are most relevant, or appropriate.

DR. CURTIS: I see that. That's perfect. Thanks, Marcel.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Can we move on to the next item at this point? Are we good? Allie, are you ready?

DR. CURTIS: Before we move on, Chair, Jack Cox, a member of the public, has his hand raised.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. Jack.

DR. CURTIS: Hang on a second, Jack. Let me unmute you. Okay. Jack, if you unmute yourself, we should be able to hear you.

MR. COX: Okay. Can you hear me?

DR. CURTIS: Yes. We've got you.

MR. COX: Okay. I'm sorry I didn't get to make any public comment. I was traveling, but my area of expertise is I'm a commercial fisherman, and I was involved in the process during my time on the council, but, that south of Cape Lookout SMZ site, if you were going to modify that box to encompass let's say red grouper, you would want to go a little shallower. That area is -- The shallowest part that we worked was probably about 130 feet, or 140 feet, and I would think about moving that into about 120 for the red grouper. That's all I've got.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Jack.

MR. COX: I'm enjoying listening to the conversation. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: Appreciate it. All right, and so the next step is we're going to -- This agenda item is done, and we're going to move on to Agenda Item 4, Special Spawning Management Zones, but the amendment review. Allie is going to give us a brief presentation, and I think I had mentioned this before, but we're basically -- For this action item, it's just commenting on the range of alternatives that the council is considering for the sunset provision, and so that's basically about all we're going to be touching on with this aspect. It's not going to be any of these other discussion points that we've had right now, and so Allie.

MS. IBERLE: Can you guys hear me okay?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes. We've got you.

SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES: AMENDMENT REVIEW

MS. IBERLE: Perfect. For anybody I haven't met, I'm Allie Iberle. I am a council staff member here with the South Atlantic Council, and I dabble in snapper grouper, and so nice to meet anybody I haven't met virtually.

I'm here to talk to you guys about Regulatory Amendment 39, which is an action that the council is developing currently to address the sunset provisions for some of these SSMZs. This slide has a lot of background information on the SSMZs that Chip has already gone over in great detail. He did a great job kind of outlining these areas, and so I'm not going to go over each one of these

bullets, but one of the things I did want to note was this action pertains only to the sunset provisions for the non-artificial reef SSMZs, and so that's South Cape Lookout, Georgetown, or Devil's Hole, and then Warsaw Hole.

When these were established back in 2017, through Amendment 36, there was a sunset provision put in place that was ten years, and so all of these will expire on August 2nd of 2027, and so, if the council were to do nothing, these areas would no longer -- They would cease to exist, and so they would not be closed areas, and they would go back to what they were prior to 2017. Area 51 and Area 53, those artificial reefs that were constructed by SC DNR, those are permanent fixtures, and so they are not being considered in this amendment.

One of the main discussion points with the sunset SSMZ at the June meeting, and so this is the most recent meeting that the council discussed this action, was essentially having a deadline, and so the sunset provision provides that kind of deadline to evaluate these areas, monitor them, gather information on their effectiveness, and so that's one of the main considerations that the council is thinking about when adjusting the sunset provision and/or removing it altogether.

Then the one thing I did want to note, before I move off of this slide, is the timing of this action. This amendment is going to move relatively quickly, since it's just adjusting the sunset provision. At the September meeting, here in a couple of weeks, they will be hopefully selecting preferreds, and will be given the opportunity to approve this amendment for public hearings, and so that's kind of where we are in the timeline of this amendment, and then I believe it will -- It will have one or two more meetings before final approval, and then, from there, we will submit it to NMFS.

Here is the kind of a brief outline of the actions and alternatives, and so there's three actions, one for each SSMZ that currently has a sunset provision, and Action 1 is South Cape Lookout, and then so on. Then the range of alternatives that the council is currently considering, and so Alternative 1 would essentially let those SSMZs expire, and so, come August 2nd, 2027, they would cease to exist.

Alternatives 2 through 4 would extend the sunset provision by either seven, ten, or twenty years, and, again, we're thinking about this, you know, based on discussion so far, as kind of a deadline to gather more information on these areas, and so one of the public comments that the council received in June was actually a recommendation for seven years, because that would kind of put a little bit more onus on gathering more information and providing that to the council on the effectiveness of these areas.

Then Alternative 5 would remove the sunset provision for the SSMZs. This is different than Alternative 1, because it would essentially establish them as permanent fixtures until the council made further action to establish a new sunset provision, and so that would remove them and make them permanent.

That was really brief, but I feel like you guys have had some really great discussion on these areas already, and so, based on that, kind of our, you know, call to action for you for this amendment is that, if the council retains a sunset provision, what duration does the SSC think is the most appropriate, seven, ten, or -- My apologies, and I've got a typo. We had fifteen years in there, and so seven, ten, or twenty, and not fifteen. Would this provide a realistic opportunity for new scientific information to become available that could really meaningfully inform future review?

My last slide is just questions, but I will kind of pause here, so we can have this question up on the screen, but, Wally, I will hand it back over to you.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Allie. All right, and so, obviously, this one we have a little more focused discussion on these sunset provisions, and so I will open up the floor here to any discussion that we want to have with this. I know some of the factors that we're looking at is is there enough time, with some of these sunset provisions, to obtain funding, have adequate resources, or adequate sampling, to get this done, and then disseminate the results to the point where actually it's useful by the time the seven years are up, so we're not running into another similar situation in seven years. I see Chip has his hand up.

DR. COLLIER: Yes, and just a reminder to take public comment if you're going to be talking -- If you're going to be going into your -- Before you go into your action items.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you very much. That is exactly what I should be doing, and so I will now open it up for public comment. Anyone online, if you have something to say, please raise your hand. All right. I am not seeing any, and so now we will go into the action items with this discussion that we're going to have on this. Anyone have any thoughts as to sunset provision and the duration? Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Since I saw no other hands, from a pure biological point of view, I would say the longer the better, and so twenty years, and I propose that as a recommendation from the SSC, but, again, this is from a pure biological point of view, and there may be social and economic factors that may affect that recommendation.

DR. BUBLEY: I will add to that, and I would agree with you in terms of biological aspect, and getting work done. I also -- There's a somewhat sociological aspect to this though, and I think this got brought up in the council discussions, is that typically people work better with deadlines, and so having a deadline twenty years out might not make it top of mind for a lot of things, and so it might be more difficult to get funding, because there's not that urgency going along with it, and so I just wanted to throw that out there. It's not necessarily a stopping point there, but that was a discussion point that was had. C.J.

DR. SCHLICK: Two of the research recommendations that we had listed in our previous conversation was looking at the sampling simulation to evaluate the appropriateness of the size, as well as the socioeconomic impacts. I think those, both of those -- Since we don't necessarily have anything funded, planned, anything driving that direction for those, but they would be very crucial to every aspect of this, and I would lean toward probably fifteen years, but definitely no less than ten, and I do think we should stress kind of looking at kind of a simulation analysis and getting more socioeconomic information.

DR. BUBLEY: Jennifer.

DR. SWEENEY-TOOKES: I would second and third the numbers that are being mentioned here, just because we don't have any social or economic information for that area.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and you made an excellent point, and I forgot part of that conversation, and so I withdraw the twenty years, and I would support ten or fifteen years. I personally now, thinking about that, would say ten is probably -- Ten years is probably a good time period.

Also, from a management point of view, you know, if something is in place, people kind of know it's in place, and so, the less you change it, the easier it is for people to anticipate that, but I'm thinking about it, and, thinking what you just said, twenty years may be too long.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Marcel. Jim.

DR. GARTLAND: I'm in favor of ten. You were talking about setting deadlines that create urgency. If there's going to be any kind of long-term monitoring, ten years is really short. Funding will probably need to be found, and something be put together within the next year or two to get a long enough time series to be able to make any inference by year-ten, and so I think ten is a good way to go.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Jim. Jason.

MR. WALSH: Yes, and I agree. I was leaning towards ten when we were having this conversation, both for the points that were made, but to reiterate concerns about lack of social and economic data, and that tradeoff, and then also lack of understanding of resources for enforcement, and what enforcement levels will be, going back to Jeff's point of how angler behavior might change in terms of targeting in these areas.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Jason. It sounds like everybody is kind of on the same page at this point, where they feel like seven years might be a little too short to collect the data and get the funding available to it. Twenty years potentially is too long, with the caveats that we had mentioned, and so it's sort of settling on ten years, is what I've been hearing from most people. Is that correct? Anybody think otherwise?

I'm not seeing any more hands, and so I think we can kind of move forward with this. As long as we are okay with this, this will kind of be the recommendation that we have, and we can spell it out a little bit in the report, as to why we think ten years is probably the most appropriate timeframe for an increase in the sunset and so this is, I think, where we stand with this point. I think everybody seems to be okay with it.

At this point, we've been at it for two hours. I think some people might need a biological break, and so can we have a break for about five minutes? I don't want it too long, because we're really going to be pushing up against it. We might run over a little bit today, and so a five-minute break, and then we'll be back here at 11:08, is what we have, and let's say 11:10. We'll give it seven minutes, and go with nice round numbers, and so, at 11:10, we'll come back here and get into the next agenda item. Thank you.

MS. IBERLE: Thanks for all the discussion, guys.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

DR. BUBLEY: Judd. This is a lot more difficult webinar style. Are we good to move forward? I'm not sure exactly who is back, but we definitely have to get a move on, to get the rest of these things covered.

DR. GARTLAND: You could ask people to raise hands, Wally, or we could just move on.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and let's just go ahead. I think people are trickling back in, in the interest of time.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. Yes, and I would agree, and so let's move forward. We've got the next Agenda Item 5. It's the terms of reference for the different assessments. We've got three attachments, 5 a, b, and c, that go along with it, and, Judd, you are presenting, and so I'll hand it over to you.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR UPCOMING ASSESSMENTS

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, as part of your briefing book, we've got terms of reference for three different upcoming assessments, and you've seen an iteration of each of these different terms of reference in a meeting past, and, in the case of snowy and red grouper, there was some information provided by the SSC, and then some other things changed behind the scenes as well, and so we had to redraft, notably, the red grouper terms of reference to include a few more aspects for the entire assessment, and minor changes for the snowy grouper terms of reference as well.

Then, for vermilion snapper, we saw -- Or I think we had to skip over it. It was part of our briefing materials in a previous meeting, but we did not have the time to address those terms of reference, and so we'll talk about those today, and so I'm going to start with the red grouper terms of reference.

One thing, and so, if you recall, and kind of in the interest of time, I wanted to provide just a -- Instead of going through some of the presentation materials that were provided during a September 2023 SSC meeting, just summarize the outcomes of that meeting, which, if members on the committee at the time recall, SEDAR 86 was the most recent South Atlantic red grouper assessment.

That was originally scheduled to be the operational assessment that addressed South Atlantic red grouper. During the kind of data scoping process, the Fisheries Science Center determined that red grouper needed to be modeled as two stocks, and the SSC felt that these modifications were outside the scope of this operational assessment, and that it should be put back on the SEDAR schedule as a benchmark assessment, or what we called a benchmark assessment at the time.

The new terms of reference that have been drafted reflect this more encompassing assessment framework, akin to a benchmark or a research track assessment, and so you'll see, in the terms of reference for the red grouper, I've broken it up into a stock identification terms of reference, a data workshop terms of reference, assessment workshop, and a review workshop terms of reference.

Because of this notion that the red grouper should be modeled as two stocks, I thought it prudent to then conduct a stock identification workshop, in order to identify that red grouper stock structure and unit stock definitions, or recommend like a two-area model, if that's more suitable for the assessment, and, you know, I don't want to read everything, in the interest of time, but I'll kind of just summarize each of these points, these terms of reference as we go through.

Chair, if people just want to raise their hands for interruption, then I'll take those comments, but please review these, if you haven't had a chance to already, and make some comments to send after the meeting, if we don't have a chance to get through them all thoroughly today.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Judd. I would say with these, because there's components like a stock ID component, the data workshop component, and the assessment component, let's touch on those as he's going over those ones, and just kind of move through the process that way. Judd, did you want to summarize, or do you just want any feedback on the stock identification terms of reference?

DR. CURTIS: I'll just kind of summarize some of the -- Maybe some of the differences from the standard language that have been put forth, and so I know this is a little bit different than most of the terms of reference. Most committee members have seen it. It's been a while since we've done a stock identification as part of the assessment process, but, basically, the idea is to get information. Oops, and am I still there, Wally?

DR. BUBLEY: You're still on, yes.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. I got a weird chime in my earbud. All right, but the idea is to get some information that could inform that area stock structure, and so, in the past, that has included things like genetic studies, growth patterns and movement, to identify those stock definitions, and anything else.

One thing pertinent to the red grouper that was identified during the kind of data -- I'll call it the data scoping, even though I think that's the wrong nomenclature for it, but Lew Coggins was the analyst at the time, and he looked at the various trends in catch per unit effort from various fishery-dependent sectors, and saw differing trends, and so that was one thing that I added as Term of Reference Number 2, is to look at any regional differences, considering the spatially separated fishery-dependent or independent catches, and to compare those trends spatially and determine if these patterns are evident.

I will state that a lot of this legwork had already been done by Lew, and that is part of the briefing materials in the September 2023 SSC meeting report, and so it would be worthwhile to review those, in addition to comments on the stock definition terms of reference here, but the rest of the language is pretty standard for a stock identification term of reference, and so I'll pause there, Chair, if there's any comment.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Judd. Marcel, you had a hand up?

DR. REICHERT: Yes. Judd, I saw that, in Terms of Reference 2, at the end, that last sentence of to inform data acquisition and assessment model and model configuration, isn't it a task for the assessment phase, and so shouldn't that "assessment model and model configuration" be deleted?

DR. CURTIS: Well, so this came directly from a previous SSC recommendation in the report, I believe, and I think the idea here is, in order to, you know, collate the data for this next assessment, it would be helpful to already know what the stock ID may look like, or if a two-area model is recommended, and so that's why this statement was included in there.

That information would then -- I mean, it's all -- It affects everything downstream, right, and so it affects the data acquisition and the potential model configurations. If it's two stocks, that's a certain type of model, or two distinct models, or, if it's a two-area model, then that might be conducted in a different model configuration, and so that's why that is there. It's not -- This is not for the stock identification workshop to determine, but, you know, collecting this data to inform those processes, that is ultimately an assessment decision, and you're correct.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. That's a good clarification. I was just wondering whether that moved into decisions that are made in the assessment phase, but, yes, and thanks for that clarification, Judd. I appreciate that.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel, I think it's that "finer geographic scales" part is the key of that sentence. We're just trying to collect these data that could potentially be used, but we're not dealing with that here.

DR. REICHERT: No, and I agree, but it reads as if that working group is already kind of making decisions, or recommendations, on the model and model configuration, but thanks. That clarifies.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Anyone else, in terms of the stock ID terms of reference? As Judd pointed out, there's really only one that's kind of different from most of the boilerplate that's done. All right. I don't see any hands, Judd, and so if you want to move on to the data workshop.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Moving on to the data workshop terms of reference, again, this is -- I guess a little bit of background also here, and so, when we have all these different components, and this is going to be somewhat new to a few of the committee members, but we're trying to break up terms of reference into each of these different assessment components, and so, for instance, the stock identification would have its own term of reference, data workshop, assessment, and review workshop.

If it's -- As you'll see with the snowy grouper, if it's -- If there's just a single terms of reference, when there's not a data or review workshop recommended as part of the assessment process, there's the standard language that you'll see, and that's just mostly related to the assessment portion, but, in this case, the red grouper were -- Because of the stock ID nature of this assessment, then a data workshop was recommended to follow, based on the recommendations of that stock identification, and so these are a little bit more lengthy.

I don't want to read these all individually, but, again, these are pretty similar boilerplate terms of reference that reflect, you know, tabulating life history information, indices of abundance, and Number 2 is catch statistics, including landings and discards from the commercial sector, in Term of Reference Number 3, and the same for the recreational sector in Number 4.

Recommending discard mortality rates is typically another session that happens at these data workshops, where all the different workgroups participate in the general room there, and then a few other additional ones that were pulled from the red snapper data workshop terms of reference were to consider social and economic information, where it's available for that inclusion, and then any known evidence of ecosystem, climate, species interactions, et cetera, and especially larval movement between these stock boundaries and various episodic events.

If you recall, Mandy Karnauskas gave a presentation, a few years back, on some of the transport modeling, larval transport modeling, that was performed that looked at a few species, including red grouper, red snapper, that look at that transport of larvae through the Straits of Florida, and any sort of seeding from the Gulf to the South Atlantic regions, and so that is part of Terms of Reference Number 7. I'll pause there for any comments.

DR. BUBLEY: Judd, I've got one quick comment, just in addition. On 2d, you mentioned the indices of abundance, but in no point, with the fishery-independent stuff, does it say anything about age or length composition, and so I would suggest adding that in there. It's caught in the commercial aspects with the landings, where it talks about that, the recreational and the commercial catches, but it doesn't say anything about fishery-independent, and so I would recommend adding that language in.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel.

DR. CURTIS: Oh, jeez. I messed everything up.

DR. BUBLEY: I'll keep you up to date, Judd. Don't worry about it. You're okay. All right. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I will add these to the comments, but, for 1a, don't we always ask for the age error matrix too, and so we can add that, if people agree, and then, for 1c, the parameters, the models and the model parameters, and I know that's always happening, but I thought it may be good to be specific there. If people disagree, then I'll delete that to my notes, the 1c model and model parameters, but that may be obvious.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and, Marcel, I believe under 1d is capturing the age error matrix as sources of uncertainty, and error, and I can add "spatial coverage and age error".

DR. REICHERT: All right. I'll delete that.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Anybody else for the data workshop component? All right. If no one else is jumping in, Judd, move on to the next one.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Next, we have the assessment terms of reference, and these should look a little more familiar to the more recent terms of reference that we've reviewed, except for some of the elements that were more geared towards the data side of that process, and so here we have kind of our standard language for the assessment terms of reference, any updated information, and a lot of this will be generated from the data workshop, and those recommendations will then be carried forward into the assessment phase.

DR. BUBLEY: Any comments on the assessment terms of reference?

DR. CURTIS: Just to add there's a few additional bullets in here. I think, like 3b here, I talked about in the stock ID, and then in the data, and that will be invested in the data workshop as well, but looking at these additional sources of recruitment through those larval transport models, et cetera, from the Gulf or the areas to the south, and identifying factors contributing to the recent low recruitment was a specific request coming from the previous review by the SSC, as this has been another one of our South Atlantic species that is experiencing this recent low recruitment trend.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel, did you have to add to this?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and, relative to that, I made a note to delete “recent low recruitment”, because this information will come from the data workshop, I assume, and will need to be evaluated irrespective of what that recruitment is, whether it's low, high, or what. Also, above, under 3a, it says “in the south Florida region”, and isn't that true for all regions, and so I had a problem with specifying a particular region.

DR. CURTIS: Yes and that is -- So this was part of the discussion at the SSC, right, is, you know, because SERFS only extends so far south into Florida, and it doesn't encompass all the red grouper range, and so the idea was to look at additional potential indices of abundance to capture that south Florida region, but you're right, and I think we can specify --

DR. REICHERT: You know what I mean? That should incorporate recommended indices for the entire region, and not just for the south Florida region. I would say then “including in the south Florida region where SERFS doesn't sample”.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I understand where you're coming from with that, Marcel. I guess the only reason why it says deviates from previous assessment models, and so -- Or deviations from previous assessment models, which has already included the SERFS index, and so I can see that.

DR. REICHERT: No, and I agree, but the language matters. At times we've asked, after the fact, why certain things were or were not done, and then they were referred to the terms of reference, and so that's why I'm mentioning that.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Anybody else have comments on the assessment terms of reference for red grouper?

DR. REICHERT: Under 3c --

DR. BUBLEY: Sorry. Marcel is still going.

DR. REICHERT: Update reproductive parameters and evaluate total egg production versus spawning stock biomass, and isn't that a decision that will be made by the data workshop? That was done in red grouper, or is that a task for the assessment team, was my question?

DR. CURTIS: I imagine that will be discussed during the data workshop phase. It's written here in the assessment language so that the analysts can conduct the appropriate like sensitivity analyses, to see the differences in using the new reproductive parameters.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, and the last question I have, and I'll add that for all the terms of reference, is should we add -- But I'm not sure where that proxy working group stands, but would it be useful to add "incorporate recommendations from the South Atlantic and Gulf SSC proxy working group. or justify deviation from these recommendations"? I'm not sure what the timing is of all of this.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and I would say eventually that would be something good to incorporate, similarly to how we've done the actual projections, but that workgroup has yet to even meet, much less is close to generating a report, and so I think we should hold off on that until we actually have a tangible report available to include in the terms of reference, but, yes, and that's a good thought for future assessment terms of reference, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: Steve.

DR. TURNER: In 4a, "instead of model-derived recruitment from the stock-recruitment relationship" implies we don't -- Do not want them to use the stock-recruitment relationship in their modeling, and is that really what we intend? Do we mean in addition to, or do we just drop the from "instead" onward, and just say "explore the use of recent recruitment"?

DR. CURTIS: So this is part of the analyst's charge, right, is to determine what the most appropriate -- Either MSY, direct estimates of MSY, or a proxy are most appropriate for then setting those benchmarks for use in projections, and so this language gives them the flexibility to explore all those different mechanisms for that, right, and so it's either recent recruitment using those deviates, instead of the stock-recruit relationship, and what an appropriate MSY proxy may be if they're not to use a direct estimate of MSY.

DR. TURNER: Okay. If it -- I read that differently. I read that as a prohibition of using MSY, but perhaps I'm reading it too narrowly, the "instead".

DR. CURTIS: It states explore the use of it, and it does not say -- It's not a directive to use it, right?

DR. TURNER: Okay. Whatever. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: No, and I realize where Steve is coming from. If we want to -- If we want to change that to "if a stock relationship cannot reliably be determined", or whatever, and look at that.

DR. TURNER: I have a suggestion. I suggest we take the second sentence and put it -- Make it the first and say, "including explore use of recent recruitment", blah, blah, blah, blah. Take

“determine an appropriate MSY proxy” and make that the first sentence in 3a, and then, for the second, what is now the second sentence, say, “including exploration of”.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Let's keep moving forward. I get where you're coming from, Steve and Marcel, and I think everybody is in agreement that it's not -- That the language maybe isn't exactly ideal. That's something I think we can work with on that shared document, and try to move forward, and let's keep away from too much wordsmithing here with the limited time that we've got, but, yes, put those suggestions in, and let's get some language, so we can move forward with that. Matt Damiano.

DR. DAMIANO: This is probably a really naive suggestion, but, you know, as somebody who does stock assessments, I think that some of these are a bit too specific, and I would make a general recommendation to consider here, and in other terms of reference, whether what's been written down is sort of implicitly part of an analyst's duty, and then, you know, remove any language that is just going to be part and parcel of the exercise, in the interest of giving the analyst enough freedom to, you know, make the necessary judgment calls. I'm certain somebody has probably said this in a meeting previously, and so, again, I apologize for my naive perspective, but I just wanted to put my two-cents out there for the next sets of TORs we go through.

DR. BUBLEY: Do you have a specific example with that, Matt, just because -- I'm just trying to parse out potentially why that language was included.

DR. DAMIANO: Yes, and, I mean, I would say everything under Number 4 here is kind of going to get addressed as part of, you know, determining what your data are going to allow you to do with the model, and I would assume that an analyst would document pretty thoroughly like, you know, whether they went with a mean recruitment model versus a functional form of a stock-recruitment relationship, and that's going to, of course, dictate what reference points you're going to be able to use, and on what you're going to base your probability of overfishing, and so that would be the nearest neighbor for an example here, is I just -- I think a lot of what's written here is just kind of part of the job under TOR Number 4.

DR. BUBLEY: Judd, how much does this differ from some of the other ones?

DR. CURTIS: This language is pretty standard across all the assessment terms of reference, including the snowy grouper and vermilion snapper. It's something -- It's a section that we wordsmith every single time, it feels like and so I would recommend, if people have substantive changes, just add them to the report, and/or email them to me, and I can include them in as a recommendation for the council then to evaluate.

DR. BUBLEY: Matt, I don't know if maybe this is just the -- Almost used as a checklist more than anything, in terms of the report writing work, and just make sure this is where I'm putting this, and this is where I'm putting this, and so I don't know the background of where this language came, but what Judd suggested is put some language suggestions in, potentially, and then we can see where we go from there.

DR. CURTIS: I agree both with Steve and Matt, too. If there's some more watertight language that we can use in this term of reference, and I feel like we review this, and go back and forth on

the language every single term of reference we review, and so, if we can land somewhere that everyone is in agreement with, that would be helpful for all the other TORs moving forward.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Let's get moving along then. I don't see anybody else. Let's go to the review workshop.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Just real quick, because these will be some standard language for the other terms of reference as well, and so I might as well cover them here, but, you know, your standard language here from the previous is looking at the short-term and long-term population projections, convening this assessment technical team, including representatives from the SSC and industry, as needed, to review assessment model development, and then the SSC recommended having this pre-decisional briefing, i.e., this check-in, to review this model development and uncertainties through the process, and then the last one is developing that stock assessment report.

One, I guess, consideration too, and so this is the first assessment that we've done where it has had the stock ID, data workshop, assessment, and review components. Previously, like in that benchmark framework, we had an assessment panel, right, that was comprised of SSC members to guide that. With this new process being proposed by the SEDAR Steering Committee and the center, we have this assessment technical team now that will serve, as needed, as a review and guidance, and providing guidance for the analysts as they're developing the models. Marcel, I see your hand. Go ahead.

DR. REICHERT: Two questions, and so there's still-- I remember, the last SSC meeting, or one of the previous ones, we were told that there's no longer an assessment technical team, but now there is, and so can you clarify that? There was, I think, some confusion at the council meeting, too. I had some conversations there, and so there still is an assessment technical team, because we deleted that from our working group lists, and so how does that work right now?

DR. CURTIS: I'm going to let Emily and Shep speak to that before I respond, and so go ahead. Emily, why don't you go ahead and provide some background? Emily, I've enabled your mic now. Go ahead.

MS. OTT: Can you hear me?

DR. CURTIS: Yes.

MS. OTT: Great. Thanks, Judd. Yes, Marcel, and so I think there's still a little bit of confusion, and so there is not an assessment technical team, as far as there's no appointed team. The SSC is welcome to still convene any sort of, you know, group, solicit feedback as needed on an assessment, but there is no appointment process for this team anymore, and so I'll defer to Shep for the legal language, but I would personally recommend removing the assessment technical team TOR from all three tours being reviewed today, and you're welcome to say, you know, SSC representatives will be asked by the team, as needed, for feedback, but there's no appointed team, and so sorry about the confusion there, but, Marcel, you are correct.

DR. REICHERT: Emily, if I can, real quick, and so you earlier said the SSC can still assemble the team. Do you mean the SSC or the Science Center?

MS. OTT: The Science Center. Thanks, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Okay. Thanks.

MS. OTT: Yes, and I can -- Shep can, you know, add in the legal terms with that, but, yes, there is no appointed technical team from the SSC standpoint.

DR. BUBLEY: Shep, do you want to hop in?

MR. GRIMES: Yes. Thanks, and so I think Emily covered it. I was just going to say that, you know, there's no team, and the outside representatives are a problem, and so, if we're not going to delete all of that technical team term of reference, then I would certainly edit it to indicate that it's just Science Center folks. and I think what she said is good, to just remove it, or maybe put in a reference that like -- Because at least the way I've envisioned it, and the way I thought it panned out, is that the center staff are available for technical consultation relative to the assessment, but there's no specific appointed team that serves that role, and so maybe you would want to include language that at least acknowledged for that potential. Thanks.

DR. REICHERT: Shep, can I -- Sorry to butt in here, but can I ask -- You said the agency or Science Center people are available, and does that include the SSC, and so, if the Science Center wants to reach out to SSC members for specific expertise, is that included, because that was my understanding, based on conversations at the council meeting.

MR. GRIMES: Well, yes, and I'm sure they could. I mean, yes, they could reach out to SSC members, and I think that would be fine, but my understanding is just that the sort of technical consultation process, or, you know, that technical guidance stuff, was coming from the center staff, and not some team specifically constituted and appointed by the council in advance. Thanks.

DR. CURTIS: So let me provide some clarification. It's incumbent then upon the analysts from the Fisheries Science Center to reach out to a technical body, whatever you want to call it, and I don't know if there's a trademark on "assessment technical team", or an embargo or something, but that would be -- Include various SSC members, industry representatives, and other experts, as needed, to review the model development and provide any guidance. These are not appointed people.

That was the distinction that we were legally told we could not have, but it still is a team of people that would be providing that guidance, and so nowhere in this language of this term of reference, in my interpretation, does it say anybody is appointed, which would be a no-go, but convening a technical team, including these representatives, is what the process currently is, but, if there's a legal concern with that, then we can change this terminology.

MR. GRIMES: Well, if I could just jump in, and so there are two issues that we've talked about repeatedly. It's that it's the council, the council requirements, Magnuson stuff, that applies, and then we have the Federal Advisory Committee Act, and, if it's a council-covered thing and it's a council-appointed thing, then we get the FACA exemption, and it all needs to be done by the council formally in the open meeting, with all of the procedural requirements.

If it's not going to be done within the council process, which this team wasn't, then it's something that's occurring, you know, by the agency, and it doesn't have to worry about complying with the procedural requirements of Magnuson, but it's subject to FACA, because it doesn't have the FACA exemption under Magnuson, and that means it can't -- You know, we have this advisory body of industry representatives, and everybody else that are outside the agency, is potentially problematic.

Where I thought it was left is not only is it not, you know, an appointed team by the council, but it's not a team. It's a group of individuals that could provide individual recommendations regarding the assessment, based on their individual knowledge and expertise, and I don't see much room for industry representatives in that, and that has been a point of some concern for me. Thank you.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and I'll work with you, Shep, and Emily to get the language there, to make sure we're reflecting the current process as it stands, and so let's move on. Mr. Chair, that's the end of assessment terms of reference, if there's any other comment.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel, is this a new one?

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and one more. This was a -- I'm not sure how we deal with that in previous terms of reference, but this was a fish that was overfished, and so there was a rebuilding plan, correct? Do we add terms of reference to evaluate rebuilding, or, because we are now having two stocks, that gets complicated? That's just -- I forgot how we dealt with that previously. There it is. Okay.

DR. CURTIS: It's in there, Marcel, but you bring up a good point, and so if this is -- If this new assessment is conducted via, you know, two stocks, or two areas, that's going to be a different model configuration than was previously done that made the determination of overfishing, and so that will have to be compared against the previous model, which is, you know, written into one of these terms of reference up here, I think this first one.

DR. REICHERT: Okay, and so it's difficult to figure out whether or not rebuilding is on track or not, because we are now splitting the stock. Okay. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Judd, move forward to review workshop.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Review workshop terms of reference, these -- I pulled these from the last review workshop TORs, which refer to South Atlantic red snapper, and then adapted them for red grouper. Most of these language here are pretty standard, and one thing that we'll have to discuss at the end, and just keep in the back your mind, is -- Maybe this might be premature to determine this, but if this is a review workshop that should be including CIE reviewers in addition to SSC reviewers, or if the SSC feels comfortable that an SSC-only review workshop would suffice for this assessment.

DR. BUBLEY: Any comments, or questions? Genny.

DR. NESSLAGE: Sorry. Hold on. I think I may have misunderstood. Was Judd asking us if we think CIE is required?

DR. CURTIS: Yes. That would be helpful to get some SSC input, if you all think CIE members should be part of the review process in addition to the SSC.

DR. NESSLAGE: I think any time you're going to have a completely new model, that might be spatial and/or multiple new stocks splitting a stock, that would require some outside eyes, but that's just my opinion. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Genny. C.J.

DR. SCHLICK: Yes, and I would second Genny's comment on that, that between the new stock split, as well as the fact that this is a stock under a rebuilding plan, where a comparison may not be able to be apples to apples, that a CIE would definitely be warranted.

DR. GARTLAND: Yes, and I'll just third that. That's about all.

DR. BUBLEY: Steve.

MR. TURNER: I concur.

DR. CURTIS: Excellent. Okay. Thank you. Okay. That brings us to the end of the red grouper terms of reference. One last chance. Well, not one last chance, but I guess, live during the meeting, any one last chance to make a comment, and, if not, you can always add those to the shared document report, or email me your concerns and comments.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and remember that, if there's some wordsmithing stuff, we have opportunities to work with that through the report.

DR. CURTIS: I see Genny's hand up though. Genny. That might've been a vestigial.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I think that was leftover. All right, and so we're good with this? Again, if you have some language that you would like to include with this, put this in the -- Send this along to Judd, let him know, and we can incorporate that. Next is the snowy grouper terms of reference, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Yes. Next up is snowy grouper, and so this assessment will be the more standard assessment type. It will not include the data workshop, but we do have a topical working group that will look at developing a fishery-independent index using the SADL surveys, and I think that's written down a little bit lower under the topical working group paragraph. The rest of the language is pretty standard, and any changes that, you know, you all recommended for the red grouper language that we decide on later, I can make those additions here, just in the interest of time.

One of the novel aspects for snowy grouper was highlighted here, is investigating the reported shore mode catches in the last assessment, which somehow made its way into the assessment, curiously, and so that was flagged by the SSC during its last review, to make sure that gets vetted for the next assessment iteration. The other novel language was -- I think this was a recommendation from the last terms that we included, just to address the research recommendations and uncertainties from the previous assessment and SSC review.

Up here, Number 7, is convening a topical working group to incorporate that index of abundance, as I mentioned before. Again, we'll change the language on that assessment technical team, and the SSC had also recommended this pre-decisional briefing, or a check-in at some point along the process, and I'll pause there, Mr. Chair, if there's any comment.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and we've got Marcel, and then Jim.

DR. REICHERT: Two quick comments. For all of these, I think it would be extremely helpful to, when we mention the previous assessments to, between brackets, put the terminal year. That would put some of these in perspective in terms of the length between terminal years of assessments, and that was it for snowy grouper.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Jim.

DR. GARTLAND: Just for Number 7, do we want to soften the language a little, just to prevent tying the analyst's hands from having to use the SADL index? I'm sure it's going to be great, but, if there's an issue with including it into the model, and it dorks everything up, then maybe something like convening a topical working group to consider incorporating, just something like that, to make some wiggle room.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Noted.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Jim. I have the same rough point that I had before for Number 4 with the SADL stuff. There's no indication of age or length compositions associated with them as well. All right. Anybody else? Okay. Judd, I think we're through that, and then onto vermilion snapper.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Vermilion snapper, recall we took a shot at this, or it was at least on our briefing book, but we never got around to reviewing it, and so this is pretty similar to the language that was used for the last briefing materials. It's standard language, as we just saw from snowy grouper, and, again, a few of the novel bullet points for vermilion snapper are highlighted here, and so considering potential changes in selectivity due to management actions and investigating and reconciling poor index model fits identified during the SEDAR 55 standard assessment and the SEDAR 83 interim analysis.

Some of you may recall the center tried to perform an interim analysis with vermilion snapper. That was SEDAR 83, but it resulted in these poor fits through the data, and so it was recommended not to be used, and so investigating why this might be the cause, or reconciling these, is one of the charges for this next assessment.

All right. Nothing else, and there's no recommended topical working groups or anything associated with this assessment. I forgot to mention, and it was in the overview though, that this is going to be a science-center-led assessment, meaning that SEDAR will not be involved in this process.

DR. BUBLEY: That leads me to the comment that I made last time we started to talk about this, too, is that, because it's science-center-led, I have a little heartburn over how broad some of the language is that allows this to move forward. My understanding with these science-center-led

assessments was that they were to speed up the process, and so we basically include the updated data, kind of turn the crank, and then make adjustments that are needed to go from there.

I get concerned when I see updated information on something as broad as life history, where that's included in there, but, if it's just the analysts looking at this, there's not those discussions that we typically have at a data workshop whenever a larger change is being made, and so I feel more comfortable with having it a little more restrained, just because of the point that these are supposed to be fast, and so, if there's big changes that need to be made, then those changes should probably be discussed, and we shouldn't rush it through and so I just wanted to put in my two-cents again with that aspect.

DR. CURTIS: Thanks, Wally, and this was part of our discussion at the meeting, right, is to generate a completely different set of terms of reference for those center-led-only assessments. After, you know, talking with staff, and the Science Center, we decided to land here, on just using the standard language that we had used for other SEDAR assessment types, and then, you know, it's up to the analysts to at least look at them.

If there's no new information, they can check that off, but meaning this to be like more -- Like a checklist of everything that should be considered, and not necessarily that it's everything they have to do, because likely there's not going to be any changes for a lot of those life history parameters, et cetera, but at least documenting them here, just to cover all our bases, was the intent, but if the committee -- You know, Wally brings up a good point, and like, for some of the data providers, it becomes a little more cumbersome when there's requests made of them to provide all this data that may not be necessary to be used in the assessment, and then maybe a streamlined version of these terms of reference would be more appropriate, and so that is a discussion that we can have.

DR. BUBLEY: Jim.

DR. GARTLAND: So I've done one assessment, and so I'm not speaking from a lot of experience here, but is there a way that we could kind of split the difference, to make it easier on the data providers, and provide some -- "Constraint" is probably the wrong word, but the one I'll use for the analyst, where, if we say consider new and updated peer-reviewed information on -- So like, if there's a new paper out that has the natural mortality way different, and it's already gone through peer review, and is published, maybe that can be considered, but not, you know, hey, I want to vacuum up all these data, from all these different providers, and see if I can't fit a different mortality curve, and like that's, in my mind, very different, and so is that something that we should, or could, consider? If so, then I would take out the commercial and recreational landings and discards from that sentence, because that's usually not peer reviewed.

DR. BUBLEY: Jim, I would I would say actually, the example that you gave was probably ideal to show the point that I was trying to make, is that, when the Then et al. manuscript came out with their changed estimates of natural mortality, that was thoroughly, thoroughly, thoroughly discussed in multiple assessments, and it ended up not using it, or at least using some sort of variation from it, and so, even though it was peer reviewed, and it was new, and it came out, that ended up not getting used, because of the discussions that were made, or at least not being completely used, because of those discussions.

DR. GARTLAND: That makes sense . Like I said, I'm working off an N of one here, and so I was just trying to think of something that would give the analyst enough freedom to get something, if it was entirely new and well vetted, to include, but not so much latitude that you can just, again, start, you know, pulling your data together and fitting new life history models to then feed into the assessment. That was all.

DR. BUBLEY: Any other comments from folks?

DR. CURTIS: Wally, I think maybe an avenue forward then, if it's okay with you and the rest of the committee, is review these terms here, and pass those along to the council and the center for approval, and then, for the next round of a center-led assessment, we can streamline those terms of reference, and be more explicit on what data sources need to be considered for either just updated, or any new information, if any at all.

DR. BUBLEY: I actually assumed that was how it was going to go, but I just wanted to make that point again. Thank you. All right. If no one has any other comments on this, we'll hop over to another agenda item, the ABC Control Rule Stock Risk Ratings. Judd, you're leading this one as well.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and sorry, Mr. Chair. Let me just get --

DR. BUBLEY: No, and I'm sorry. I'm not giving you enough time to catch up. My apologies.

ABC CONTROL RULE STOCK RISK RATINGS

DR. CURTIS: Agenda Topic Number 6 is looking at the ABC control rule stock risk ratings, and I put together just a quick presentation as a refresher for some of the committee members that have been involved with the control rule, and also for new members that may have not seen the nuts and bolts of the control rule and how the stock risk ratings are implemented into this entire process. After I give a quick presentation on that, I'll have the committee review the biological and environmental stock risk ratings for three species, and that's Florida hogfish, black grouper, and gag grouper.

Most of you all are very familiar with the ABC control rule and where that resides in the process of setting annual catch limits. As part of the assessment of scientific uncertainty and management risk in this P* approach, the current ABC control rule has broken this down into this biomass level and a stock risk rating that informs that ABC from the OFL.

The sources for this information is the biomass level comes from the most recent stock assessment, and then the stock risk ratings are derived from the council-approved recommendations from both the advisory panels and the SSC and the SEP. From there, you have a recommended P* that helps inform the ABC, and then management can pursue any differences to set their ACLs through management actions.

In the stock risk rating, there's three different categories of components, and those are broken up into a biological, a human dimensions, and an environmental. In biological, in the biological category, we have the estimated natural mortality and the age of maturity. Human dimensions, we

have ability to regulate the fishery, potential for discard losses, commercial value, recreational desirability, and social concerns, and then, under the environmental, we have ecosystem importance, climate change, and an other category to encompass anything else.

For the SSC's charge, you're charged with looking at the biological and environmental stock risk ratings, and this is a little bit different than previously, where we had the SSC involved in assessing a score for the human dimensions attributes as well, but we heard a lot of comments where that they did not necessarily have information for that, and so we've removed that from your charge, and it's just biological and environmental now.

How does the P* get derived from the stock risk ratings and the biomass levels? This is a table from the ABC control rule amendment, and, if you see on the leftmost column, the stock risk rating of either low, medium, or high, which is generated from the different categories that go into the stock risk rating, and then, on the upper columns, you have a high biomass, moderate biomass, and low biomass, and the definitions for those, and then, based on the biomass level from the most recent assessment, as well as the appropriate stock risk ratings, you can determine what that P* might be from the table in front of you.

The OFL will have a default P* of 50 percent. That's the MSA requirement, and then this value in the table here, and so, if it's a medium stock risk rating, and a moderate biomass, you would have a P* of 40 percent, and that would represent your ABC.

The procedure for using the stock risk ratings is, before the assessment, the SSC and AP will recommend these risk values for the attributes to the council, and then the council will review these recommended values, and then determine the final stock risk rating, and then, during the assessment, that P* will be derived using that relative biomass and the council's stock risk rating, and that will also inform projection analyses at that 50 percent P* and whatever is derived from this process, and so this is the step that we're at right now. You know, if you -- I want to refrain from taking any questions on the process right now, because we're a little bit short on time, but feel free to email me any questions or concerns.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Before we start to get into this, I realized. the last session I believe, we didn't take public comment, and so I want to open it up for what has gone over with the ABC aspects, and then we'll have an opportunity afterwards to cover that too, and so does anyone have any public comment? All right. I don't see any, and so we'll move forward. Sorry, and I just realized that that had happened, and so I wanted to jump in and allow it for this. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I don't want to have an extensive discussion about procedures, but I do want to mention, and you had that on your slide about the timing, I think 8 and 9, and I would like to emphasize the intent, or recommend, whatever we feel is more appropriate, that the risk rating by the SSC, AP, and council, the intent was that that can be completed before the assessment begins, and, if there's no data workshop, and after the workshop, or before the assessment phase, this -- Now we are doing hogfish, and that just went through a review. I believe the review report is out.

In previous instances, we also did this after the review was completed, and so I recommend to at least make a note in our report that we emphasize the intent to have this done before the assessment, and I would like to hear if anyone has any comments, concerns, or agree with that statement.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel, I think it makes sense. I know, logistically, it can be complicated, and we've had some discussions with this, but, if there is a change in the data workshop, that you then have to convene the SSC, and have a change prior to the assessment workshops that are being held, and so, logistically, it could get a little tricky, if changes are made, but I completely am onboard with what you're talking about, in terms of the timing of it.

DR. REICHERT: I think the SSC should at least emphasize the original intent.

DR. BUBLEY: No, and I agree. I think it makes sense, and so, if you could provide some language for Judd, that would be great. Genny had her hand up. Genny, did you want to say anything, or no?

DR. NESSLAGE: Sorry. Yes, and I was going to -- I'm torn on that, because I agree with you that, if there are changes that might be informative, we don't really know until we've seen the stock assessment, right, but we also then see the answer, and that might be the outcome of the complete stock assessment, and so I guess, if there are major changes in the biological aspects, it would be nice if there could be a brief update at some point, we could re-evaluate, but otherwise I agree it should be done before the assessment. Do you know what I'm saying?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and I think that's exactly what Marcel is talking about as well.

DR. NESSLAGE: Okay. Sorry. I misunderstood.

DR. BUBLEY: No, and I think you're right. I think it's good. Shep.

MR. GRIMES: I just wanted to put a plug in for that. Marcel and I have discussed this in the past, and I know the original thinking is that the SSC would review it, and they would make those recommendations before the assessment, so you didn't see the answer, and your recommendations weren't biased by the outcome of the assessment, but, at the same time, there could be changes to the information that you use for making those recommendations that comes from the assessment, and so I think it's a good idea to take that when -- Certainly when new information has arisen, to at least take that second look at it, and, if you change your view on it, then you could explain why that is, and hopefully that won't be based on the answer from the assessment. Thank you.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you, Shep. Marcel, did you have your hand up for that? Go ahead.

DR. REICHERT: No, and, I mean, I wanted to mention that we always have the opportunity to revisit the risk rating if, for instance, it's necessary, but that was the point that Genny and Shep already made.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Any more comments, or discussion? Then we can get into the second component of this, where we're actually applying it to the species of interest here.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The first species we have is hogfish. It's the Florida Keys and east Florida stocks managed by the South Atlantic. That stock, not the Gulf stock, and so this information on the biological attributes has been taken from the most recent data workshop, SEDAR 94, and you have the default scores there.

I'm sorry. Let me rewind a little bit and introduce the table, and so you have, on the far-left column, the biological attributes of natural mortality and age and maturity. Then you have the range of values that will determine whether it's either a high, a medium, or a low risk rating.

The next column, you have the notes that are used to inform that default score, and then, as part of this process, the SSC should discuss, and then, if they agree with the score, then just say you agree with the score. If there is a discrepancy with the default score, then we'll type in some notes to justify why the SSC recommends changing from the default score.

For natural mortality, it was determined at 0.235 from the most recent SEDAR data workshop, which falls in that medium category, as it lies between 0.2 and 0.4, and, for the age of maturity, also from the data workshop, we're seeing the age of 50 percent maturity between 1.09 and 2.08 years, falling -- I guess the upper range of that would be just above the less than two years, but most of the range would fall under that low risk category, and so a default score of three has been assigned, and so, Chair, I'll just stop right there after each slide to see if there's any discrepancies with the default scores from SSC members.

DR. BUBLEY: Any issues? Please speak up. Okay. Not seeing any, we'll roll the default scores.

DR. CURTIS: Then the other category of environmental attributes, we have this broken down to the ecosystem importance, climate change, and any other environmental variables, and you see some of the notes there regarding hogfish. This environmental attribute category is a little bit different than the biological and the human dimensions, in that we don't have a low, medium, and high. It's basically all or nothing, and so, if there is evidence of an environmental attribute in any of those, ecosystem importance, climate change, et cetera, we can apply a default score of one. That would indicate it has a high level of risk to the stock.

Some of the notes pertaining to hogfish that we've heard, and led to assigning a default score of one, or high, for ecosystem importance was that they were potentially vulnerable, due to the ease of targeting. There's also habitat degradation in south Florida, a preference for live bottom, which has been part of that habitat degradation, and some other observations from AP members and from the public, but I'll stop there, if there's any discussion, or concern, with carrying on a high stock risk rating for hogfish, or if the SSC does not agree with that default score in ecosystem importance.

DR. BUBLEY: Anyone have any comments? All right, Judd. No hands again. We're going with the default score then at this point.

DR. CURTIS: If there's no dissent, then the default score will be carried forward into your SSC score, and that will be compiled then with APs and presented to the council. All right. Moving on to our next species of interest, black grouper, information for this species is derived from SEDAR 48, and natural mortality is estimated between 0.16 and 0.2, putting it in a high-risk category, and age of maturity is determined to be 6.5 years, putting it also in a high category, as it's less than -- Excuse me. Greater than or equal to four years.

DR. BUBLEY: Any comments from the committee? I think we're good.

DR. CURTIS: Moving on to environmental attributes. When presented to the AP, they had some comments pertaining to black grouper that we categorized under the other environmental variables. Again, they expressed there's habitat degradation concerns, specifically in south Florida, water quality issues, habitat reductions, and then the loss of seagrass habitat, which is an important nursery ground for black grouper, and may lead to recruitment issues, and so they -- Based on this information that was obtained, a default score of one was assigned. Is there any -- Is there agreement with the default score of one or a recommended change?

DR. BUBLEY: Nobody is arguing that at this point.

DR. CURTIS: All right, and our third species of interest, gag grouper, also exhibited a high stock risk rating for both estimated natural mortality and age at maturity. This information you can see is derived from both SEDAR 71 and from SEDAR 10. Any comments or concern here? Okay.

DR. BUBLEY: Moving forward, Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Moving on to the environmental attributes, there is also some similar concerns for gag grouper on the reliance of life histories, the life stages of gag grouper on inshore seagrass beds, and also the water quality and habitat degradation concerns as well, and so this was assigned a default score of one, meaning that there's a high risk of -- A higher stock risk rating for environmental attributes.

DR. BUBLEY: Any comments? All right. Default score of one it is.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so these recommendations will then be passed along to the council during their September meeting, and, once the assessments for these various species are completed, then they'll help inform that P*.

DR. BUBLEY: We've got a hand up. Jim Gartland.

DR. GARTLAND: Do we need a new public comment before we move on?

DR. BUBLEY: We got that already for this one. I jumped ahead and got here.

DR. GARTLAND: Sorry, man.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. I appreciate you typing, Jim, while I'm presenting these stock risk ratings. Okay. Are we good there, Chair, on stock risk ratings?

DR. BUBLEY: Yes. Good to move forward to the next agenda item.

SSC WORKGROUP AND SEDAR PANELS

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and then, quickly, we'll review the SSC SEDAR appointments and the workgroup appointments. Based on the terms of reference that we reviewed, we need to make some appointments to upcoming SEDAR panels, and one additional thing, that I haven't talked about yet, is this joint review of a black grouper management procedure.

The South Atlantic did see kind of a preview of what that black grouper management procedure would look like a few meetings back, and that product has been completed, and the next stage in the process will be the joint review comprised of five to six South Atlantic SSC members and five to six Gulf SSC members to review that product, and that's going to take place the Tuesday morning before our October SSC meeting.

That would require SSC members to come in early, travel in on that Monday, and be ready for a Tuesday morning joint review of that black grouper management procedure, and then we would -
- Following the morning session, the joint aspect would wrap up, and we would launch into our regularly scheduled programming of our South Atlantic SSC meeting on Tuesday afternoon through Thursday at noon, and so that's the timeline for that black grouper management procedure.

I will start there, I suppose, if there's anybody interested in serving on this body, and, again, we're moving quickly here, and so, as always, please email me, and/or the chair, after the meeting if you've had some time to think about it and would like to join, but we'll take recruitments right now, if there's people that are interested.

DR. BUBLEY: We've got a hand up from Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: A quick question. Is there a chair assigned? Is the South Atlantic going to provide a chair, or is that the Gulf, or hasn't that been decided?

DR. BUBLEY: That is a good question, Marcel. I do not believe that has been decided, or maybe even considered yet, but we'll -- I'm going to say maybe we'll take the -- We'll assign a chair, as we're the administrative lead for that, and we're hosting the meeting, and so it seems appropriate that we could be the chair, but I'll certainly run that by our Gulf counterparts as well, but I think that should be okay.

DR. BUBLEY: Jim Gartland.

DR. GARTLAND: Just to verify, you say come in Monday, and this is Tuesday morning?

DR. CURTIS: Correct.

DR. GARTLAND: Then I'm in.

DR. CURTIS: I apologize. I should have put the date up there, and so that's going to be October 20 a.m.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: I'll likely be driving up on Monday anyway, and so tentatively you can put my name on there.

DR. BUBLEY: Genny.

DR. NESSLAGE: I think I can do that, as long as I can get in Monday morning, because I have to teach in the afternoon, and I can't be in the air. Thanks.

DR. BUBLEY: Judd, how many are you looking for for this?

DR. CURTIS: Five to -- Probably five members and then one to chair.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. I mean, I'll be in town, and so I potentially could be a part of this, and we've got Matt Damiano has his hand raised as well.

DR. DAMIANO: Yes, and I can volunteer to participate as well.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Excellent. Okay. Thank you all. Anyone else? I see Jason's hand.

MR. WALSH: Yes, and I'll also likely be there, flying in one day, and so I can volunteer.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Great. Okay. That's six people there. Would anyone like to serve as a potential chair for that review? I'll give you guys a chance to think about it, and then you can self-nominate, or we can draw straws or something.

DR. BUBLEY: That sounds like a good idea.

DR. CURTIS: It should be a pretty minimal lift. I think it's only just that three hours in the morning, or three-and-a-half-hours in the morning, and, in all likelihood, staff will be capturing notes for that anyway, and so you would just be needing to kind of run the meeting and call on people.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. With that --

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Mr. Chair, let me go into -- I thought I heard somebody.

DR. BUBLEY: That was me. Yes, and we'll move on to the next SEDAR panel membership.

DR. CURTIS: Okay, and so Attachment 7a was the current SEDAR panel memberships. In yellow, we have members that -- Or we have slots that need filling, and then all the white ones are active appointments, and so just review, and, if you have an active appointment, and can no longer serve in that, you can either voice that now or email me and/or the chair, but, for now, if we could try to fill some of these appointments, that would be helpful.

Unfortunately, for some, we don't have exactly the full gamut of information, as is the case with black sea bass, and so scheduling I had presented on the potential review panel for black sea bass at our April meeting, and we don't have a schedule that's set in stone quite yet, but, in all likelihood, this would not be occurring until 2027, as we're still waiting on the MREP-FES numbers.

As an update, they were not able to expedite the release of the black sea bass calibrations, and so they'll be unveiled along with the rest of the new calibrations on August 31st. Given the other SEDAR events, and other business happening this fall, it's likely that this review panel would not

convene until 2027. Steve, you had already volunteered for this at the April meeting. Are you still okay serving on this black sea bass panel?

DR. TURNER: Yes, and I had forgotten that that was a review panel. I was involved earlier, but I guess this is a revised assessment, and so I'm willing to continue.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Thank you. Any other interest to serve as a second review panel member and/or potential chair?

DR. BUBLEY: We've got three hands up right now. More hands up. Go ahead, Marcel. You're first.

DR. REICHERT: I have a question, and so is it still -- Is the intention still to have this done prior to our April SSC meeting, or is that also in the air? I had a -- I mentioned it before, and I had just a question of an update on the black sea bass assessment, which you just gave, but --

DR. CURTIS: That is the intent, Marcel, is to convene this sometime early in 2027, and then be available for the SSC to review at the April meeting, the entire SSC, yes.

DR. REICHERT: Relative to -- Okay. All right. Thanks. Yes, and I'm potentially available, and so, unless others are jumping up and down to be part of this --

DR. BUBLEY: I can't see you right now, but Matt and Alexei both have their hands up, and so maybe they are jumping up and down.

DR. REICHERT: Good. Maybe I'll shut up right now.

DR. BUBLEY: Matt.

DR. DAMIANO: I'm not jumping, but I'm willing to be on that review panel.

DR. CURTIS: Alexei, your hand is up as well.

DR. SHAROV: Yes, and I was interested with this particular stock, you know, considering the past reviews, and so, I mean, if you need someone, I would be, you know, happy to do that.

DR. REICHERT: How many were you looking for?

DR. CURTIS: Both of those are in a review panel capacity, and then we would still need someone to serve as a chair.

DR. REICHERT: You can pencil me in as chair.

DR. CURTIS: Sorry, and go ahead, Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: You can pencil me in as chair.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Excellent.

DR. TURNER: If there's someone more qualified -- This is Steve. If there's someone more qualified than me who wants to be on it, I would be happy to have them do it, but I certainly am interested.

DR. CURTIS: You are absolutely qualified to serve on the review panel, Steve, and we would be happy to have you, and so I think this is good. We've got three. Actually, this is better. We have three review panel members, and then one chair, and that should be adequate.

All right. Moving along, the SEDER 106, gag grouper, we have a vacant position for the topical working group looking at reproductive dynamics. Fred Scharf was on this, but he is no longer on the SSC, and so we have space here for anybody that would be interested in serving in this role.

DR. BUBLEY: Alexei, I'm not sure if your hand was still up, but we also have Jim Gartland. Alexei's hand is not up anymore, and so Jim.

DR. GARTLAND: I would be interested.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Great. Thanks, Jim. Okay. Then red grouper, and so, for this assessment, this is something we could probably revisit, because that's still a year-and-a-half or two years off, but unless there is people burning -- With a burning desire to jump on, think about it. We do need to get members for each of the different components for stock ID, the data workshop, and then the review workshop, which will now include CIE members as part of the recommendation from the committee, but I thought I saw a hand fly up.

DR. BUBLEY: C.J.'s hand was up. I don't know if -- It's back again. All right. C.J.

DR. SCHLICK: Yes, and mine was just a question on if we knew anything on timing for this one or not yet.

DR. BUBLEY: That was what I was going to ask a question about, too.

DR. CURTIS: Not yet, and so, you know, initially, or originally, it was penciled in for a start year of 2027. That may shift back a few months, and so we do not have a schedule yet available for this, and so that's something that I'll work with Emily with, as part of the SEDAR process, to generate a schedule, and so maybe that -- Once we have that going, it would be a more appropriate time to populate these assessment components with participants.

DR. BUBLEY: I think that would probably be useful. Thank you.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. All right. The same can be said for snowy grouper as well, although this is just a topical working group for SADL. I'll pause here, Mr. Chair, if there's anyone with a burning desire to jump on it. If not, we can revisit this at a later meeting.

DR. BUBLEY: I mean, I'll have my burning desire to jump on it. It probably makes sense for me to be on this, and so I will be on it. Jim Gartland has his hand up as well.

DR. GARTLAND: Yes, and I would like to be involved in this one. I think it's a cool survey.

DR. CURTIS: Okay. Excellent.

DR. BUBLEY: Marcel has his hand up.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and I chaired the earlier review workshop, and so I would be happy to participate.

DR. CURTIS: Excellent. Okay. Look at that. All right. Well, Mr. Chair, thank you. That is all the recommended appointments we need for right now, and that concludes Agenda Topic Number 7, and I think all the major business that we have.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, and we're moving along, and so I will say do we have any other business to go over? Actually, we have a hand up. Hold on. Marcel.

DR. REICHERT: Yes, and, before we move on, can we get an update on the proxy working group? That's been a while now since we had that, and has there been any activity in the joint working group? We can come back to that in our April meeting, or in our October meeting, but, Judd, maybe you can briefly update us on what's happening there.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and the brief update is we haven't convened that yet. We've had numerous scheduling conflicts that have created some trouble getting that workgroup together. Part of the thought is that we might be able to get members that -- If there's overlap with the black grouper management procedure, although, looking at our membership here, there's not, but we might have people come -- Potentially, we could have people coming in early, before that joint meeting in October, to have an in-person joint MSY workgroup, and get some of that work accomplished, but, today, we have not met yet, and so there's no functional updates that I can provide.

DR. REICHERT: Can I ask if we can come back to this at our October meeting and see if it may be appropriate to just go ahead as the South Atlantic SSC to have a conversation about this, because this will come up both at the black sea bass assessment and the red snapper assessment, and I think it's really important for us to at least investigate that, or have some guidance, and so, anyway, I just wanted to throw that.

DR. CURTIS: Yes. Absolutely. I'll make a note to revisit in October, and hopefully we can get a meeting. It's only two months away now too, but, yes, I'll provide an update in October, and we can have that discussion if we want to proceed just with the South Atlantic.

DR. REICHERT: Thank you, Judd. I appreciate that. I know you've been working hard on making this happen, and so I just think it's important for us to see at some point if we can move forward.

DR. BUBLEY: Thanks, Marcel. It's a good suggestion to keep moving forward with that, or try to get it going. All right. Other business. Does anyone have anything to bring up? It does not appear to be so. Judd.

DR. CURTIS: Council staff does not have any other business either.

CONSENSUS STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. All right. Public comment. Last session of public comment. Anybody want to say something? Raise your hand. No hands, Judd. That leads us to the consensus statements and recommendations. We, obviously, do not have time to really go over any of this information that we've covered today, but thankfully we've got this working document, that we all have access to, right, at this point, and so please go over that, make your suggestions, and then I will be working on putting this together for the final report, and so this is your opportunity to go over that at this point.

DR. CURTIS: Wally, there was a few members that had some trouble accessing it. All the troubleshooting did not resolve it, but, if you all want to send me those that couldn't access the document, please just send me, via email, your comments, and I can include them into the document, and then I can circulate that back to you so you can see all the committee responses.

DR. BUBLEY: Judd, would you be able to send out the document in its form to them, so they can -- They're not working in the dark completely?

DR. CURTIS: Yes.

DR. BUBLEY: Okay. Great.

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and I can do that after the meeting lets out.

DR. BUBLEY: Thank you very much. Okay. This is onto the next meetings. Judd, will you handle that?

NEXT MEETINGS

DR. CURTIS: Yes, and so, as mentioned, our October 20 to 22nd meeting will include, in the morning of October 20th, a joint review of that black grouper with some Gulf SSC members. All other South Atlantic members not participating in that joint workgroup, be prepared for a Tuesday afternoon start time of 1:30 on the 20th, and we'll roll through noon on the 22nd in Charleston, and we have dates already on the calendar for our April and October 2027 meetings, that are on the screen there, and then you have, listed below, the different council meetings coming up, the next one in North Charleston in September, and so, as the chair mentioned, we'll need to get the final report ready for the briefing book for the council meeting, which is due on August 28th.

DR. BUBLEY: We have Steve Turner with this hand up.

DR. TURNER: Yes, and the April 2027 meeting looks like it starts on a Monday. Is that the correct date?

DR. CURTIS: That's the SEP that comes in and is held on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning, and then the SSC would start April 20th afternoon through the 22nd. Thanks for the question there.

DR. TURNER: All right.

DR. BUBLEY: All right. Do you have anything else, Judd?

DR. CURTIS: I am good. I just want to say thanks to the committee and chair for putting up some of the technical difficulties we had with this new GoTo framework, and the shared document, but we're working through the hiccups, and I think we're just about there.

DR. BUBLEY: We'll get there. I think it makes sense to do it this way, and so I'm glad we're getting to that point, and so I appreciate it. Thank you, everyone, for staying around much longer than we had planned on, but, at this point, I will adjourn the webinar for this session and see you all in October.

DR. TURNER: Wally.

DR. BUBLEY: Yes, Steve.

DR. TURNER: Sorry. The October 2027 meeting, the dates indicate it starts on a Tuesday, and I assume that should start on a Monday.

DR. BUBLEY: Well, that one doesn't have the SEP associated with it, correct, Judd?

DR. CURTIS: Correct. That's just the SSC, and so it would begin Tuesday, October 26th.

DR. TURNER: Thanks.

DR. CURTIS: All right. Thank you, everyone. Appreciate it.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 12, 2026.)

- - -

Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
August 17, 2026

August 2026 SSC

Attendee Report: Meeting

Report Generated:

08/12/2026 02:44 PM EDT

Webinar ID	Actual Start Date/Time	Duration	# Registered
450-429-859	08/12/2026 08:15 AM EDT	4 hours 39 minutes	40

Staff Details

Attended	Interest Rating	Last Name	First Name
Yes	Not applicable for staff	Council	South Atlantic

Attendee Details

Attended	Interest Rating	Last Name	First Name
Yes	41	""-DNR-"	Alexei
Yes	85	0	0
Yes	39	Belcher	Carolyn
Yes	40	Bianchi	Alan
Yes	93	Bradshaw	Christopher
Yes	56	Brouwer	Myra
Yes	46	Bubley	Walter
Yes	55	Buckel	Jeff
Yes	36	Byrd	Julia
Yes	49	Carmichael	John
Yes	33	Coffill-Rivera	Manuel
Yes	36	Cox	Jack
Yes	49	Damiano	Matthew
Yes	44	Gartland	Jim
Yes	50	Grimes	Shepherd
Yes	57	Hadley	John
Yes	64	Horton	Chris
Yes	91	Iberle	Allie
Yes	38	Kersting	Anne
Yes	36	Kolmos	Kevin
Yes	46	Mehta	Nikhil
Yes	64	Murphey	Trish
Yes	40	Nesslage	Genny
Yes	51	Ott	Emily
Yes	70	Reichert	Marcel
Yes	69	Roberts	Kelsey
Yes	39	Schlick	CJ
Yes	87	Schmidtke	Michael
Yes	41	Smart	Tracey

Yes	40	Smillie	Nick
Yes	95	Sweeney Tookes	Jennifer
Yes	58	Turner	Steve
Yes	97	Walsh	Jason
Yes	37	Walsh	Mick
Yes	38	Williams	Erik
Yes	89	collier	chip
No	0	Curtis	Judd
No	0	Dela Cruz	Cindy
No	0	Hardy	Jake
No	0	Lorenzen	Kai

Note: Some values starting with these characters (=,+,-,@,\t,\r) might have been