

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SEDAR COMMITTEE**

**Westin Jekyll Island  
Jekyll Island, Georgia**

**March 7, 2019**

## **SUMMARY MINUTES**

### **Committee Members**

Jessica McCawley, Chair  
Dr. Roy Crabtree  
Doug Haymans

Mel Bell, Vice-Chair  
Tim Griner  
Steve Poland

### **Council Members**

Anna Beckwith  
Dr. Kyle Christiansen  
LCDR. Jeremy Montes  
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### **Observers and Participants**

Dr. Clay Porch  
Dr. Jack McGovern

Shep Grimes  
Rick DeVictor

Other observers and participants attached.

The SEDAR Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Westin Jekyll Island, Jekyll Island, Georgia, Thursday morning, March 7, 2019, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Let me read who is on the committee. It's myself, Mel Bell, Bob Beal, Roy Crabtree, Tim Griner, Doug Haymans, and Steve Poland. Our first order of business is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any changes or modifications to the agenda? I would like to talk about the MRIP letters that FWC sent to the council and to Chris Oliver. Are there any other changes to the agenda? Any objection to approval of the agenda? Seeing none, the agenda stands approved.

The next order of business is approval of the committee minutes. Any modifications or changes to the committee minutes from our last meeting? Any objection to approval of those minutes? Seeing none, those minutes stand approved. First up is Assessment Activities Update, and this is going to include some of what happened during the shutdown, I think, and I'm going to pass it over to you, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you, and so this Tab 9, Attachment 1, the SEDAR Activities Update. This was going to be a really short meeting, I thought, about a week ago, and then the SSC had their webinar to go over the MRIP revision assessments, and we had the greater amberjack assessment webinar, and, as Jessica mentioned about the letter from FWC, and there is a lot more questions now surrounding those MRIP revision data, and they are affecting a lot of what is going on in SEDAR here now, and so this reflects what we knew at that time, but there will be a few things that will need to be updated a bit, and I will highlight them for you.

As stated here, the general changes in this project report at this point is less about what was done since the last meeting and more about how we were impacted by the shutdown. SEDAR had a lot of activities, not just in the South Atlantic, but with all of our other cooperators that were scheduled in January and February, and many things got postponed as a result of that shutdown, unfortunately.

The good news of that is that, once the Center got back in their offices and up to work, they really did a great job of getting things back on schedule, and even more impressive, considering how much difficulty we were having at the end of last year, if you recall, in just getting the data deliveries met and dealing with that MRIP transition and all that had to be done once the basic calibrated data were available.

There is processing that the Center has to do, and there is a lot of work that has to be done to go from raw data to assessment inputs, and they were working really hard on that, and so, to come as far as we could is actually testament to the kind of work that those guys have done, and they have really committed to getting this data stuff moving, which is great, and as well to all of our other cooperators that work on this at the states and everything else, who are critical to providing data and taking part.

The first project is Atlantic cobia, and that one is going to have a data workshop in January. That has been pushed back to the first week of April, and recall this will be transferring over to ASMFC. SEDAR is running this project, and we have SSC members taking part, but that will be the extent of the council's involvement. The SSC won't need to review this assessment, and so that should

certainly lessen our involvement down the road, and then the SSC has had a number of issues with the MRIP data.

I think, in the case of cobia, because this is going through the full benchmark process with the full data workshop, there should be an opportunity to address any issues that folks may have with the revised MRIP estimates and have that addressed, and so, the SSC concerns, and we'll talk about those a bit, and I don't think they're going to carry over here into cobia, because they are having that full evaluation opportunity.

The next project is greater amberjack, and this would look to be coming along pretty well initially, but then there was a webinar with the SSC last week, and they were going over the data, and it followed up from the webinar that the SSC had to go over the MRIP revision assessments, and so there was some further discussion of the revised estimates and how they could affect the greater amberjack assessment.

There was a lot of attention, in the case of greater amberjack, on a few data points that were possibly outliers. They are certainly somewhat oddities. Whether or not they are outliers or not is one of the questions that the scientists don't seem to quite agree on what the actual definition of an outlier is when you are dealing with this MRIP data.

The way greater amberjack ended, that webinar ended, was that there needs to be a delay in this project while the SSC works out its intentions relative to the MRIP revision data, and I think there's also going to have to be some discussion of what really is an outlier and then how do you deal with it within the modeling framework, and that's going to have to be something that the SSC and the folks doing the analysis are going to have to come to consensus on, because we can't continue to get into situations where the SSC being the review body raises issues with these things after all the work is done and then decides that the assessment is not adequate, and so that sort of undermines all that we're trying to do, and so we're going to have to have some work done here upfront to try and get on top of these issues regarding outliers and also regarding what we're doing with this MRIP revision data.

That translates over into porgy, which was one of the concessions to the rescheduling, was it was proposed to cancel the planned in-person workshop for red porgy. Now, given what I just talked about in the SSC's webinar, I don't think that that is realistic or practical, and the only way we would be able to cancel that would be if we are actually having some type of other workshop where we look at the MRIP data in detail across all of our species.

The request here was to have you guys consider cancelling that in-person DW/AW, and I don't think that's a decision that we're in a position to make here, because we're going to have to see how this MRIP stuff plays out, and I don't see the SSC at all supporting this, given that they are asking for more workshops.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, I had a concern about cancelling the in-person data workshop as well, based on all the MRIP numbers and trying to get that figured out, and so, yes, I had similar concerns about cancelling that in-person workshop.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thanks. I'm glad to hear support for that, and we're going to have to continue on these, and I think both of these projects will probably be delayed further from where

they are. The initial plan was they could make it to the SSC by their fall meeting, and I'm not so sure that's going to be the case, given where we now stand.

The next project is the yellowtail snapper, and this had a data workshop that was going to be held at the end of February, and it's been pushed back to the end of June, and we're still working out the details of exactly when this project will then wrap up, but that work is underway now, and this is being led by FWC, and so we're certainly working closely with Luiz and the guys in his shop to figure out what the remainder of this project schedule will look like.

The scamp research track is the one project that took the biggest blow, in terms of scheduling and delays to accommodate making progress on the other things, as we recover from the shutdown, and, right now, we're looking at a data workshop probably early in 2020 and this thing being pushed back into 2021 to be done, with the operational assessment in late 2021, and so, on one hand, that's -- It's just a delay to scamp, but I think the concern, when we talk about the SEDAR schedule, is our plan was to get through this scamp as a pilot research track, before we got into research tracks for things like red snapper, and both the Gulf and South Atlantic had a red snapper request to come in in 2021, and now those could potentially overlap with where we stand with continuing to work on the scamp at that time, and so I think that's going to be an issue that the Steering Committee is going to have to come to grips with when they meet in May, as to how they feel about starting some other research tracks before the scamp research track has run its course and we have fully vetted that system and really feel like we know how we want to do that.

Looking ahead to the future, we have the South Atlantic tilefish, and I view this as a big priority of the South Atlantic Council, and we were trying to get things rescheduled to deal with the shutdown, and it was maintaining having this done for April of 2020, for SSC review, and I suspect that's still a priority for the council, and, considering this in the context of all that I talked about with the MRIP data, there is not a lot of recreational landings on tilefish, and so this may be one that we can keep on track, even as we have to work with more of the recreational issues on say greater amberjack and red porgy, and so I would think that, if, and I just want the council's verification of this, but, if greater amberjack and red porgy get slipped back some in time of completion, do you still consider it a priority to get this tilefish done by April of 2020?

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Just for clarification of the record, John, do you mean golden tilefish?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, golden tilefish.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I will look around the room to the committee members, or anybody else on the council, but, I mean, my priority is trying to figure out what's going on with the new MRIP numbers, and, if items are getting pushed back because of that, then so be it, and I understand that it's going to be kind a chain reaction of items, as we try to get that figured out and then get the assessments moving again.

MR. POLAND: I agree with that, Jessica, and another concern I have with golden tilefish, and this was something that was pointed out on the SSC webinar last Monday, was that, at least for the blueline assessment, because there wasn't a lot of recreational landings, they used snowies and goldens and bluelines to get a proxy, I guess, for recreational landings, and so I suspect that we'll have the same problem and the same concerns with golden, and the SSC was very not comfortable with that, and so I would certainly agree with Jessica to let's just kind of pump the brakes a little

bit and get this MRIP issue figured out with the SSC before we really move forward too much on any of these other ones.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right. Yes, that's certainly helpful, and it clarifies where the priorities lie.

DR. PORCH: I just want to point out that the agency is actually working on a white paper explaining the differences between all the various surveys and why the agency, I believe, will end up recommending, for the time being, that we go with the FES MRIP numbers as the most defensible. That should come out in the end of March or early April, and so, with that in mind, I think we want to be careful about scheduling a lot of in-person data workshops over this issue, because it's the same issue for many species, and so we don't need to have one for each individual species. I mean, that said, I don't have an objection to having a red porgy data workshop, per se, but I just wouldn't want to see everything held up because we keep wanting to have a whole bunch of data workshops addressing exactly the same issue for individual species. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Clay, and so it was my understanding that that white paper was primarily focused on the differences between the state surveys in the Gulf and the FES and that it wasn't necessarily even an entire southeastern U.S. white paper, and I thought it was focused on the differences between say the Gulf Reef Fish Survey, Snapper Check, LA Creel, et cetera, with the FES and which one was the best to use in moving forward for data purposes or for assessments in the Gulf, and I didn't think that it was really going to be looking into the overall things that we brought up in our letter and concerns about the results of the FES.

DR. PORCH: Well, it will be addressing CHTS versus FES and why the FES is considered a considerable improvement, and it's something that, essentially, during all the data workshops, we as an agency would be pointing to in justifying the choice that ultimately gets made for all the stock assessments. It will not address, as I understand it, the issues with rare-event species, but that's still the same issue for multiple species, and so I wouldn't want to see us scheduling data workshops for every single species to address a common issue.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess that my concern -- I am not suggesting that the mail survey is not better than the Coastal Household Telephone Survey. I am suggesting that some of the results that we have coming out of the FES just don't seem plausible, and so we have talked about them in our letter with the Florida estimates, and we talked about them at a previous council meeting for the State of Georgia, especially for the shoreline estimates, and we gave, in our letter, an example of how we compared some of these effort estimates to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey, and so we're not even suggesting that the comparison to the old MRIP, which could have underestimated the numbers -- We have also compared to other surveys, and it just doesn't seem that the results are plausible. We are not suggesting that the paper survey is not superior to the Coastal Household Telephone Survey, but I just feel like the results aren't necessarily plausible, and I don't know if Doug wants to add something from Georgia.

MR. HAYMANS: I was just going to chime in and be the third of the states to say that this has to be, in my opinion, much more important than where we are in the SEDAR process for all these species, because, if we're going to use what at least three of the four states consider to be very questionable information, it's not going to result in a very believable SEDAR, and, to be paramount -- I understand the white paper is coming out. To me, that sounds like you're already defending

FES, as it stands right now, as compared to why does this huge discrepancy exist that the states can't get behind, and so I guess I would like to really see that, as opposed to a simple defense of why FES is better than the Coastal Household Survey.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, we couldn't continue the Coastal Household Survey, because people don't answer the phones anywhere, and so there had to be a shift, and so there was a team of people put together, and many of your state agencies were intimately involved in all of this, and they hired a number of survey experts in, and it was pilot tested and reviewed umpteen times, and all of this, I think, took place over about a decade, and they came up with a statistically-valid survey design that is the FES.

For now, it's all we really have on the South Atlantic coast. They are the only estimates, and the old telephone survey is gone, and it's not taking place anymore, and so I don't know that we have an alternative, moving forward at the moment, other than to use the FES survey, because that's the only estimates that are being generated, and I don't know that it would make sense to try to convert the FES estimates back into the -- We do have the conversion, where we can convert from the FES currency into the telephone survey, but I'm not sure that moving forward and converting FES back into the telephone survey really makes sense, and it seems like, to me, it would just be scaling the assessments, and I think that calibration model they have is going to get progressively more out of date as time goes by.

Now, everyone involved in this recognizes that we have other statistically-valid surveys, particularly in the Gulf. Florida has one, and Alabama has one, and Mississippi and Louisiana now, and, in some of those states, the FES is running concurrently with the state survey, and they have all been surveyed as valid statistical designs.

Some of them have some implementation problems that give you pause, but they are giving different answers than the FES survey, and generally lower estimates than the FES survey, although I think the Florida GRFS survey gives higher estimates than the old MRIP survey did, and so there is potentially a bias somewhere, but I don't know if the state surveys are biased low or the FES is biased high, and, I mean, we all have our gut feelings about what seems realistic and what doesn't, but I am not quite sure what we can do with gut feelings, and I've got my own gut feelings about all of it too, but we're all aware that we've got these statistically-valid surveys, and they're giving us different answers, and so, to my simple mind, that tells me there is a bias somewhere, but the problem is that we don't know yet what is causing the bias and where is the bias and how do we correct for it.

Now, I'm pushing, and I think we're all pushing, that this is a high-priority issue to figure out, and, once we understand it and figure it out, we can then take the appropriate action to do that, but I can't, sitting here, tell you how long that will take or how you even go about figuring it out, because it gets really technical and specialized to do that.

That is kind of where we sit, at the moment, and it's hard for me to figure how we have a course of action that makes more sense than going ahead and using the FES, but recognizing that there is still work to be done to try and understand some of these changes and what is going on, and I know that's not a very satisfying answer at the moment, and I'm not too happy about where we are either, but I'm just not sure how you get beyond that, and I don't know, Clay, if you want to --

DR. PORCH: No, I share the same sentiments. I mean, of course, the data aren't where we would like them to be, partly because it's very difficult to survey recreational fisheries, especially on the Southeast coast, where you've got people leaving from their own private docks, and you heard people talking about how things are done on the west coast. Well, what was it, Oregon, that has three places where people can put into the water, and the whole west coast is much like that. It's mostly cliffs and rocky seashore, and there is not many access points, and so, yes, it's much easier to survey folks there than it is here on the east coast.

Yes, there are a lot of challenges, and the recreational data will remain highly uncertain for some species, just simply because we can't get enough intercepts out there, and we really need to -- You saw this PSE discussion, and, arguably, you would need to quadruple the sampling, which would cost a fortune, and so we do need to find some ways to deal with rare-event species. I agree with Roy that we would like to understand better why we have differences in these surveys.

I read the letter as well, and some things -- I can see where, when you look at those numbers, they look pretty large, but, then again, I am from Miami, where there is enormous fishing effort, and I could imagine there is a million trips just in Miami-Dade County, and you can hardly catch something decent anywhere near the shore, and so I don't know what to make of it either, but I do think that more work needs to be done to try and discern why you're getting such different estimates, and I can't give you an answer right now to that effect either, but, as Roy said, right now, especially here in the South Atlantic jurisdiction, the FES is really the only thing going, and so I don't see how we get away from using it.

MR. HAYMANS: I'm pretty sure we all are aware of why we got away from the Coastal Household Telephone and why we're at FES, and we understand the white paper that's coming, but I think what we all want to hear is what Roy was discussing about trying to get at the bias and the fact that that is a priority for the Science Center and that, even in this paper that you're about to issue us, that it addresses the fact that this is what you're doing to try to get at the bias, because I realize that Miami has got a couple million folks that live in it, and probably half of those folks saltwater fish, but I have got 200,000, and, based on estimates that came out of FES for us, all of those guys are taking multiple trips per month, and the ones on the beaches are standing shoulder-to-shoulder fishing on the beaches every day, and the numbers just don't make sense. The reality of, at least in a smaller state, what we see is it's hard to justify, to our angling public, that this is what FES is saying, and I guess I just would like to see a head-on tackling of that issue, but, anyway, that's all I've got.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, I share the same concerns that Doug has, which is why we outlined some of that in our letter, and I guess I was just wanting to understand -- Is there a concrete timeline for doing this? Do you have a goal that says something like, in the next three months, we'll have completed this white paper and we'll be determining if there is some sort of bias in the new FES and looking at that throughout the Southeast, and I guess I was just looking for something a little bit more concrete of the timeline and the steps that you're taking, or are you just waiting until the white paper is completed?

It was my understanding the white paper was focused primarily in the Gulf, and so I'm just trying to understand what the next steps are, because I feel like the concern here around the table is us having to use that for management, and I feel like we have already had issues with the public's confidence in the old MRIP, and I am not -- Just like Doug is saying, I am not suggesting that that

Coastal Household Telephone Survey was better than the paper survey and the FES, but the results just don't really seem plausible, and so it is concerning, to me, that we're going to have to use them for management, when I just don't feel like this is figured out, and so that's why I was asking about a specific timeline.

Like, is it six months, and then we put a number of projects on pause, until that can get figured out, because, to me, it's not just about the stock assessments. You have things like dolphin, and we're working on Amendment 10, and there is not an assessment for dolphin underway, but yet we're going to use those FES estimates, and so I'm wanting to know if the bias is going to be determined and then, like Roy said, it's a scalar factor that is then used in the estimates or what, and I guess I'm just trying to understand, more specifically, what's going to happen.

DR. PORCH: First, I want to clarify that the Southeast Center doesn't administer the Marine Recreational Intercept Program, and so that's done through the Science & Technology Office in Headquarters, and so I don't actually have any control over when they look at what, but we were one of the ones that were pushing for at least a white paper to address the issue, which should be completed -- I can't remember if it was late March or early April, but in the next month or so, and that will address some of the issues, but it won't be an in-depth investigation of why there is a difference between say the state surveys and the FES survey.

They do have plans to work with the states to investigate that, and I know Luiz Barbieri has been talking with folks in our S&T office and other state officials to try and understand those statistical differences better, but, that, I don't have a timeline for, and it's not under my control, and so I would need to consult with S&T of when they think they might get that completed. I would be surprised, though, if it happens before a year, or perhaps even two, and it just takes a while to dig down into the details there, but I want to be careful that I'm not speaking for the folks that are actually doing the work.

DR. CRABTREE: I suspect it will take additional surveys and additional research to tease out what are the biases, and they have all sorts of different ways they do surveys to get at how are people responding to various things, but my guess is that's what it's going to take to figure this out. It's not just people sit down and look at what we've already got on hand, and, oh, there's the answer. They have already done all of that, and, if the answer was in there, I think they would have -- We would know what it is, and so I think it's going to take additional research, and so my guess is that we're talking over a span of several years before we figure out exactly what's going on.

MR. BELL: I don't think there is any quick solution, or inexpensive solution, and so have always had -- Even before the FES, we had issues with MRIP doing the phone-survey-based approach, and there were always outliers, and there were things that were unbelievable, and those have existed as far back as I can remember, and so what we've done, through the improvement of the survey methodology, is, of course, shifted to the mail version, and they get a much better response, and your effort goes up, and so now the outliers we've had in the past are perhaps magnified, which makes them look even more implausible, but, short of completely redesigning something -- I mean, it's a survey that generates an estimate, and we are working towards and have touched on some of the things that are coming up, with alternative surveys, and some of the states have been able to afford to do their own survey work and things, and some good programs have come up.

We know that, if we can improve, for just say snapper grouper species in particular, if we can somehow bring the universe of people down to a known universe of snapper grouper fishermen, you could get better results that way, and then some of the underlying issues that we have related to just low-intercept species -- Like Clay said, you can go out and do four-times as much effort at the boat landings and all, but that's ridiculously expensive, and so, I mean, I listened to the whole discussion the SSC had about this, and I get it.

I know some of the numbers just look totally unbelievable, but it's a survey, and you get outliers, and we have always had outliers, and you just have to manage how you deal with that, but there is not a simple, quick fix, and so I think it is -- I do truly believe that going to the FES was an improvement, but it was not only an improvement, but it was necessary. Like Roy said, nobody answers their phone anymore, and so going to the mail version is what you had to do, and so it's kind of how to -- I know, in states where you have your own survey, you've got something to compare with those numbers, and, in South Carolina, we don't have our own separate survey, and so we have nothing to kind of hold against it as a measure and say, well, this is really crazy, because our numbers look like this.

We can do the same thing that others do and go, boy, that looks really, really high, and that's unbelievable, but it's the number, and it's sort of the only numbers we have, and so it's not an easy solution, but I think it's -- I don't see a short, quick resolution to this. I think those are the data that we're going to have, and those are the data that we're going to have to manage to live with, somehow, for the time being.

MR. POLAND: I agree with everything laid out in the FWC letter and that these new estimates are just not plausible, just given the way the fisheries occur in the state, and the shore landings are just unbelievable, but, unfortunately, at least in North Carolina, we don't have a defensible alternative explanation to refute these numbers, and so this is what we have, and, at least at the state level, all it has done is just really prioritized us getting out there and developing our own survey, not necessarily for all our species, but certainly highlighting these species that are the biggest concern and moving that way, but that's going to take time, and so I guess that really my question to the committee is, all right, how do we move forward?

Given what we heard about timelines from Roy and Clay, what do we do, because I certainly just don't want to stop work on everything for two years. That is not going to work, but our SSC has raised some concerns, and they haven't really fully explained a lot of their concerns, but it's pretty obvious that they have some heartburn with it, and, if they're not going to be comfortable giving us recommendations on catch levels and that kind of stuff -- My big thing is I want to figure out what they need to get comfortable with this so that we can move forward and start managing these fisheries, and, in the meantime, figure out how to improve these estimates, or at least improve reliability and just us buying into them.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John, I didn't get to see all of the SSC meeting, and can you recap a little bit of what happened at that SSC meeting last week? I agree with Steve that it's kind of trying to figure out what needs to happen on the management side while the data is being looked into and is there something that we need to direct the SSC to do or what, and I guess I'm looking for your explanation of what happened at the meeting and maybe some guidance for us.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Sure, I would be glad to do that, and I kind of thought that we might get through this before we got there, but let's strike while that iron is hot and go ahead and take care of this. The SSC had a webinar to look at the MRIP revision assessments, and they received those in October, and they didn't feel that they had the details that they needed to evaluate those models, and so they requested a webinar, where they could focus in on each of those individual assessments and evaluate them.

They started out with the concerns about the FES data, and Luiz relayed the issues in Florida and some scaling problems that they had, and then the committee got into the blueline tilefish assessment and spent an awful lot of time talking about some of the data points in blueline tilefish. One of the things interesting about those revision assessments is they used a ratio approach to just scale the MRIP landings from the earlier assessments to the current, to the revision assessments, and they weren't using the estimates fully drawn from the revised stuff, and so that's one of the reasons they looked at other species, for the tilefish thing, for example, as Steve noted.

That said, they really got into deep discussion about different data points, and they discussed a lot about how they really didn't understand the FES implementation, and there were concerns voiced about bias from the FES, and there were concerns voiced about specific points, and there was a lot of questions about whether or not the revision assessments accounted for additional uncertainty and concerns about constraints on the analysts, due to the process, and so it really came down to a lot of, in their words, not understanding the FES and what are the changes in the FES and concerns with the magnitude of the changes, and then also the process side of things, and so they kind of said they weren't sure that the analysts had the freedom they needed in the revision assessment to get into fitting the model better.

Now, in my mind, I felt like the SSC didn't really spend a lot of time looking at the actual model fits, and so it's really difficult to go through and see what were the fit problems with the revision assessments and where did the process fail the analysts, in terms of the revision assessments, because we didn't hear from the analysts, and they weren't asked if they felt like the process allowed them to get that, and so, to me, there is sort of two issues that were developing with the SSC.

One is just the magnitude of the data, and the other is more process, and the recommendations were that the revised MRIP data should be incorporated through more formal SEDAR assessment than the MRIP revisions that we did and that the SSC could specify the uncertainties in terms of reference for future assessments and that there needs to be a process to address the outliers.

When we went into greater amberjack, we had a bit more process, and this was a standard assessment, and there was a webinar that talked about the detail. At that point, we had just a few SSC members on the line, but there were similar concerns about some of the data points, specific points, and there were also concerns about how you dealt with the outliers, and so we saw the process issue coming in and that thing about outliers. What is an outlier, and how do you deal with an outlier, and there is not a clear agreement, I would say, between analysts and SSC members and SEDAR panels about what is the best way, analytically, to deal with an outlier, and no one really widely agrees on what an outlier is.

In greater amberjack, they recommended that -- They really wanted to see more about where the SSC's final report was going to be from the webinar, which took place the day before, and they

felt like there needed to be a workshop to dig into the revised estimates before using them in any of the ongoing assessments.

Now, to me, and I think I mentioned this on the webinar with them, it was like, well, there's a lot more issues about this revised data than just the assessments that are underway, and I totally agree with Clay, and it was never our intention to have any individual workshops. I think that would be a huge waste of time, and we would probably have big issues with not being consistent. My take on this, and I think what we're going to try and push the SSC in April, is to say -- If you guys agree that we should have a workshop, then to say that we need to have a workshop with our SSC members and probably folks from S&T and the MRIP program, and maybe some of the guys down in Clay's office who work with the MRIP data day in and day out, so that we can address the SSC concerns about not understanding implementation and to let them tell us where they think the bias exists.

If the SSC thinks that something is biased, can they identify any bias? If they think something is more uncertain, can they identify those higher uncertainties, and, until we do that, it's really hard to know how to resolve them, but then I think the other part, to me -- That would be sort of the informational phase, but I think the other part that has to happen in this workshop is, as Mel said - - He said, you know, we have outliers, and we've always had outliers, and that is absolutely the truth.

Every assessment I have ever dealt with, from the day I started doing marine fisheries and worked on the tautog FMP at ASMFC, there was an issue about an MRIP point. There are issues about MRIP points, and they have been discussed at every SEDAR assessment, and they have carried over into the FES, and, in some cases, those same issues just seem a lot bigger, because of the scaling of the numbers, but what Mel said about you have to manage how you deal with the data and come up with a way to deal with these outliers, and I think that's what the outcome is that needs to come out of this workshop, is to say, yes, there is potential uncertainties, and there is maybe bias, and Roy is exactly right. We're going to be years before we address this bias.

I think we need the SSC to give us some guidance to say how are we going to deal with this situation in a real-world, practical sense in the next couple of years, knowing that we're not going to get this bias addressed, and we're probably not going to have all the answers they want, but how do we develop catch limits, and, to me, it's critical. If we're concerned about a data point in a stock assessment that has indices and age structure and multiple fleets and just population structure and fit, I am ten-times more concerned about a data point where I'm going to give you an ABC based only on average landings, and so I think we get into this, but we can't just look at the assessed stocks.

We do have to look at all of the stocks that we're managing, because every one of those has to have an ABC, and that's going to be a big deal. That's going to be the better part of a week, maybe, to get the SSC to come to grips with this, but I think that's right, that we have to deal with that, and probably get a sense of what are the various concerns in the states too, if we can capture some of that from our state reps, and that might help us direct the MRIP S&T folks into the right direction.

I agree with what Steve said about the SSC needs to more fully explain their concerns, and we're hoping to get some of that at the April meeting, and we're thinking of some questions to put to

them, to say what are your uncertainties and what are your concerns with fit in the models and what are your concerns with process, because, until we know that, it's hard to structure this workshop, and we can have a workshop, and I'm fully confident that we can pull this off.

Getting all those people in the room probably means we might be looking at three months before we can schedule it, and I would love to have the participation of the state folks. They are so critical to working with the MRIP data, like Chris Wilson in North Carolina and Bev in Florida and Kathy Knowlton here in Georgia and Amy Dukes in South Carolina. I think to go down this path without those guys would be wrong, because they know the data, but they're also really involved in the program, particularly now that the states have a bigger hand in it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I really like the idea of the workshop, and I think that that needs to happen, and so one of my questions was going to be, and you kind of were getting there, is it doesn't seem like the workshop can happen before the April SSC meeting, and so then the workshop would happen in -- I like what you said about how the workshop would be trying to figure out what's going to happen in the interim and what's going to happen in the next year to two years and how can we -- How can the SSC come up with something that we can use while maybe there is an overarching look at what might be the bias in the new FES survey.

Can this committee give you direction to try to have the SSC put together this larger workshop with the state folks and with the right people, and the workshop might be a week, or four days or whatever it is, whatever is needed, to try to dig down into the weeds of this, and so can we give you that type of direction?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes. I think, if you support that, conceptually, then we would work with the SSC, at their April meeting, to maybe get some terms of reference or questions that need to be addressed, and then we would start reaching out to others who would be critical to that process and work up a cost estimate, and then we would have to run that through council leadership, to see how much it would cost to do this, but, yes, we can do all of that.

MR. BELL: I was just going to say that I know why we used the webinar format here, for expediency and scheduling, but, if there was one topic that probably would have been better in a face-to-face, it was that one, because it was -- I really felt for George and Mike and other people trying to keep things going, and it was difficult, when people are kind of weighing-in, and there were a lot of people on the call, but not necessarily everybody was commenting, but that was a tough subject for them to try to work through, and, I mean, they did the best they could, given that format, but some sort of -- That one sort of needs to be tackled in a face-to-face setting, I think, and that's just an observation.

DR. PORCH: I don't disagree that it would be useful to have the meeting as described, although I'm not clear exactly what you're thinking to tackle. If you were focused on how to deal with what we're calling unusual-event species, and so, whether you use multiyear averages or you have to do multiple species at once or something like that, I think there might be some chance that this meeting could come to a useful conclusion. There is a working group now that is trying to look at that, although I'm not sure their timeframe is as early as this proposed workshop.

If you're talking about looking at the details of the Marine Recreational sampling itself and trying to understand how it works and the potential for bias, whether you're just looking at the FES or

you're looking at competing designs, that's an enormous undertaking, and I think few people on the SSC have the statistical chops to tackle that, and, even if they did, even if there is professional statisticians on it, they're going to need to do considerable homework, and so we would have to give them all of the details of the sampling design and the survey protocols, and they're going to need to spend the weeks it takes studying that in order to really have an informed conversation.

It's not trivial, and I was on, and John was on it too, the transition team, where we looked at all the calibrations going from CHTS and FES, and it is not simple stuff, even for people, professional statisticians, who are hired to review this process, and so, if you want to go down that path, I think you need to identify at least some key people on the SSC that have the stats chops for this and make sure they are willing to dedicate the time to review those designs. Otherwise, this meeting will go nowhere.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I completely agree, Clay, and I think the purpose of this workshop, the outcome, is along the lines of what Jessica said of just what do we do now. This is our best scientific information available, and there are concerns with bias, but what do we do now, and make it clear that that latter process that you described will take a long time.

I think it could be helpful if this group were to explicitly state some of their concerns, like where they feel bias exists in an estimate, or where they feel the new estimates are not up-to-snuff, in their minds, because I think that could then help this latter evaluation that is probably going to have to happen play out over a longer period of time with a very well-informed and extremely statistically-qualified group of people that can start to maybe answer those questions.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I like all of that, and so, when you say this group, are you meaning this committee, this council committee, or are you saying this group that meets needs to identify -- I am not sure if you're asking for something from us today or you're talking about how this group is going to look into this.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think this workshop group needs to come up with a laundry list of real specific concerns of if they think a species seems to be extremely uncertain, or they think a species exhibits some bias relative to something else, or those sorts of things, and, yes, I think sort of like Florida has gone through and came up with some very specific things, in terms of the scaling of effort, and I think this group could follow-up on that and find are there similar concerns across other states, are there issues not just within effort, but how does that translate into the estimates for some species, and I think -- Because, if you don't get those kind of specific concerns, then I'm not confident that we'll get them addressed at this sort of higher level, as Clay has mentioned, which is going to be necessary, and Roy kind of alluded to that too, that this is a long-term, more research, more evaluation, if you're really going to get to these biases.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All good points, and I am wondering if the state agency reps on this council can maybe try to also identify some things, like what Florida did, and we can try to -- We just picked some low-hanging fruit here, but we can certainly identify some more and have that ready to pass to this group, and so maybe the reps here could look into that and try to provide that for when you have this meeting, because I agree that I think one of the biggest challenges right now is -- If there was something that was very clear cut and someone could say, oh, the bias is this, then that one thing, or a handful of things, could be corrected for, but we don't even know, I think, where to go to look for what the problem is, and there are these outliers, but -- It's not that I am

not concerned about the outliers, but I think there is these overarching issues, like we have identified with effort and such, that concern me as well. I am looking to the state agency folks, and is this something that you could try to come up with?

MR. HAYMANS: Sure, and we'll take the comments that we made at the last meeting in a little more depth and submit a letter, similar to what Florida did, so that John has got that to work off of as well, and we have some key areas that are of issue to us.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

MR. POLAND: Yes, and we've already been working on documenting our concerns with FES and the new MRIP estimates, and, really, a lot of our concerns are similar to what Florida has, as far as the scaling of the effort across the different modes, and I did bring this up at the September meeting, and I used an example out of North Carolina.

We used to break our shore mode out into shore and manmade, and it really helped isolate piers and stuff and some of the fisheries that only occur there, like king mackerel and Spanish mackerel and cobia, and it appears, with the new FES estimate, new MRIP estimates, that, when those two modes were collapsed back down, it seems that effort from shore is being applied across-the-board, and so it's making the landings of king and Spanish and cobia just seem unrealistically high, when, in reality, there is only nineteen piers on the coast, and so there is examples like that that we have discussed a lot internally, and we'll certainly lay that out in a letter and certainly send whatever delegate we can come up with to any workshop.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Great. Mel, I assume that you can do the same?

MR. BELL: Yes, we can do that, and, obviously, we have issues with the data as well, and we've looked at it, and the biggest challenge, of course, is the private boat piece to all of this, and we have an advantage, perhaps, of having our own charter boat, for-hire, system in place for a while, and so we have that to look at as well internally, but, yes, sure, we can do the same sort of thing.

The crux of this is you have the SSC needs to be able to give us sound scientific advice, recommendations, numbers, based on the data that are at hand, and so, with that, there will always be -- The data they're using, there's always going to be some uncertainty about these things, but they give you a number, or they give you a recommendation, or whatever it is, and so, from the management perspective, we just have to be able to make decisions about actions or things that we're doing and kind of weigh the significance of those actions on we're going to make this decision on data, which have this large amount of -- Less confidence or more confidence, and, I mean, this is just the way the system works, and so we may find ourselves just having to, based on the decision we're making, be careful about how we're using it or when we're using it or something, but it's just that's the way it works.

It would be nice if we could get a better confidence in the data, and they've got better confidence in the particular number recommendation they're giving us, and then the significance of what we're doing with it, and we have more confidence in using it, and so it's just an age-old struggle, I guess, and it's going to always be that way, in terms of the handoff and the way that works, and it kind of gets down to how we take that information, and we have a certain comfort level in the

decision we're making with it, and, if we're not, then -- But I think we just can't go to all-stop on a lot of things and just not do things.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I see that you're putting a motion on the board here, and it looks good, and I guess I am just wondering if you want to throw out a timeframe with which the states need to develop these letters, and I'm wondering if you need them for the April SSC meeting or if the letters need to be developed after that. If the April SSC meeting -- If you need it by then, so that helps them have the discussion, I guess you just need to let us know.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think having something by the April meeting would help the SSC understand the scope of the issues and concerns, if at all possible, and so as many as can get something in, and maybe if you only get time to address a couple of things and know that you have more to consider, and any information like that would certainly help the SSC.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so it looks like, to get it in the Friday before the SSC meeting, is April 5, and so is that something that is doable? I see thumbs-up. Will that work, John? Okay. All right. Do we need someone to read this motion on the board?

**MR. POLAND: I move to direct staff to organize an SSC workshop to identify MRIP data concerns across the South Atlantic and to identify specific uncertainties or potential bias and develop recommendations on how to proceed in the short term for using the data in stock assessments and developing ABC recommendations and evaluating ACLs. Include representatives from each state, MRIP S&T, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's seconded by Doug. Any more discussion on this?

DR. CRABTREE: I guess so we have all these inquiries and look at this, and it seems that we're going with the assessed stocks and down the path of incorporating this through the full normal assessment process, and so that will play out over some period of time. I guess my question is what do we think we want to do with the unassessed stocks? We've got the newly-calibrated landings time series, and we have the formula we're using to calculate allocations, and we have got the years we used to get the ACL, and so it seems, to me, that it would be a simple enough exercise to go in and plug the new landings into it and get the new allocation and get the new ACL and then see how much of a change is that.

It's seems, to me -- Take dolphin as an example. You've got some period of years, and the ACL is based on the higher part of the landings in there, and you could calculate all of that out, and then the question would be, okay, if you shifted the allocation in a way that the commercial quota is unchanged, and the recreational quotas go up, what would those numbers work out as, and then how much of a shift would that be from what we've had for the last couple of years?

It may just scale things and not really be a dramatic shift from where we've been, and that might give people some more comfort with it, but it does seem, to me, that would be a worthwhile exercise, is just to see how much of a shift in things and where would it put us and if we would be comfortable then with moving forward, at least for the data-poor stocks.

MR. CARMICHAEL: In this, where I say "in developing the ABC recommendations", that's to - - This is intended to address all of our managed species in these concerns and not just the assessed

stocks, and it's actually -- I think you might have stepped out, but I said those are even of more concern, because you have far less data. We have had all these issues with assessed stocks, and I have far less -- We have already done that, I think, at least preliminary look at these changes, and we're thinking of bringing some of the information to the SSC in April, but, if they have such strong reservations about the FES data that they don't even agree to them being used in the assessments, then it's really hard to see them being used in that way, and so I think they're going to have to go through this and come to grips with how do they want to see these data used.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more discussion on this motion?

MR. HAYMANS: Not on the motion, but a question. I went and looked back at it, and I read your letters, and can you remind me what tab it was under?

MS. MCCAWLEY: 9.

MR. HAYMANS: Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Also, I believe that either Gregg or Kelly sent them around, I think on Monday. Gregg did, and so both of them were attached, if you want to go back to your email. All right. **Are there any objections to this motion? Seeing none, that motion stands approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: Back to the progress report?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, please.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The next topic on the activities update was snowy grouper, and that one is fairly far in the future, and so it wasn't affected by the shutdown, and hopefully we can get this issue we just talked about resolved in time that it won't be affected by that.

I will go to king mackerel, and this is the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, and it will be an update. It's being delayed a bit by the shutdown, and that's another one of those stocks that got pushed back a little farther than some of the others. It is scheduled now to be completed in March of 2020. One possibility is that it could be reviewed at the spring 2020 South Atlantic SSC meeting, and so just a general question, and I don't think I need a motion on this, but would the committee support trying to attempt to organize a joint review by the South Atlantic and Gulf SSCs at our SSC meeting, so that we don't have the two SSCs reviewing this separately and maybe coming up with different recommendations? Would you all support us trying to work with the Gulf on that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, I think it's a great idea.

MR. CARMICHAEL: All right. Thanks. Then we do have one action to consider, is the terms of reference for king mackerel, and I believe that's attached at the back. These have been reviewed by the SSCs, the Gulf and South Atlantic, and so now they're offered here for your approval, and I think the Gulf has already approved those, and so, if you would like to review these and make a motion to approve them, that would be appreciated.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Before you make the motion, one question. The last sentence of the terms of reference says it's not the intent of this update to resolve any outstanding issues identified in the initial SEDAR 38 assessment. I can't remember if there were any issues that were identified, and so I can't say whether that's critical or not.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I don't recall that there were, and that's the boilerplate language, just to make it clear that there may be things that involve like research and major changes that won't be able to be resolved.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I will be looking for a motion. Doug, were you making a motion to approve the terms of reference?

MR. HAYMANS: Yes. **So moved.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It's seconded by Steve. Any more discussion on the king mackerel terms of reference?

MR. POLAND: Just a quick question. Did our SSC provide input on these TORs prior to all their discussions of MRIP and identifying their concerns?

MR. CARMICHAEL: They did, yes, and so I expect they may -- They intend to discuss some about terms of reference, and so they may have something to add across-the-board on things, which we would then come back and append to these.

MR. POLAND: I just know, at the SSC webinar, one of the recommendations was to incorporate terms of reference in data workshops and assessment reviews, just highlighting some of their concerns with this, and is that something that we want to consider, or just if this is just simply a quick and expedient update and just let it ride, since we've already got this workshop scheduled?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I think it would -- I would hope that they will come up with some resolution at their workshop of how they really want to address the terms of reference in future assessments, and so I think that's farther down the road, and so we're probably better off keeping this moving along as much as we can.

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

MR. CARMICHAEL: Unless there is further questions on projects, that largely concludes the report. We have our 2020 assessments, and we'll discuss those at the SEDAR Steering Committee, the request that we have for gag and Spanish mackerel, and the Center is going to be evaluating the workload for 2020. It looks more promising than it did a year ago, based on where we have come now in terms of shuffling the schedule as a result.

Let me go to the agenda, and so that's our other topic, is the Steering Committee guidance, and they're going to meet in May, after the CCC meeting, and they will go over the schedule changes as a result of the shutdown, a lot of the stuff that we just went through, but they will see it from all of the cooperators perspectives, and then we will talk about the 2020 schedule in particular, and that's where I see that we will have to get into this issue of red snapper and whether or not we wait

until scamp is done or do we consider starting red snapper while scamp is still underway, and I think there's a lot of concerns with those involved in the research track about starting another research track in the middle of the pilot research track that's going to help us figure out how it needs to work, but I think that's going to be a big -- That will certainly affect us, because, if red snapper gets pushed back, so does white grunt, and so does gray triggerfish, and all of our first-time assessments are all going to be kind of shoved back, and so that's a little concerning for us, in terms of the long-term.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Does anybody else have any comments on the SEDAR Steering Committee that is coming up or any additional guidance? All right. Any other business to come before the SEDAR Committee? Seeing none, we will conclude the SEDAR Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 7, 2019.)

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Certified By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcribed By:  
Amanda Thomas  
April 2, 2019

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