

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE

**Westin Jekyll Island
Jekyll Island, Georgia**

March 4, 2020

SUMMARY MINUTES

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Rick DeVictor

Dr. Jack McGovern
Dr. Clay Porch
Duane Smith
Erika Burgess
Dr. Wilson Laney

Other observers and participants attached.

The Snapper Grouper Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Westin Jekyll Island, Jekyll Island, Georgia, on Wednesday, March 4, 2020, and was called to order by Chairman Jessica McCawley.

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're in Snapper Grouper. Once again, everybody is a member of this committee, and our first order of business in the Snapper Grouper Committee is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any changes or modifications to the agenda? Any objection to approval of the agenda? All right. The agenda stands approved. The next order of business is Approval of the December 2019 Committee Minutes. Any modifications or changes to those minutes? Any objection to approval of those minutes? All right. Those minutes are approved. Now I'm going to turn it over to Myra, and she's going to turn it over to someone else, on the status of commercial catches versus quotas for species under ACLs.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Jessica. Rick DeVictor is going to walk us through the landings first.

MR. DEVICTOR: Myra has it on the screen there, and these are commercial landings for snapper grouper species through February 24. I won't go through all of the fifty-five species we have for snapper grouper, but I will just highlight some of them. Black sea bass is at 15 percent, a little bit over last year, and so, of course, as I always point out, you can go to the right-hand column and see what the ACL was last year, what the preliminary final landings are from last year, and the landings from around the same time period, so you can compare where we are at this year compared to the previous year.

Blueline tilefish, that's at 9 percent. Moving down the list, golden tilefish hook-and-line, that's at 30 percent, and that closed down in July of last year. Golden tilefish longline, we're currently at 91 percent, and, again, that was through February 24, and that value may have gone down in the last couple of days, and so I just want to pause here and point out that we're going to wait on projections from the Science Center on golden tilefish longline, and we expect to be able to reopen golden tilefish longline, and so we'll see. We'll get projections hopefully next week, and we can put out a fishery bulletin and announce what days will be open and when it would close.

Moving on down, we have jacks, and that's at 15 percent, and that's the jacks complex. The shallow-water complex, of course, that's closed. Red snapper, I would point out that we were at 97 percent last year, and that closed on August 30th. Moving on to the next page, these are where we have split seasons, and so I will just point out that Regulatory Amendment 27 went into place, and that went into place last Wednesday, and so, in that amendment that you submitted to us and that we implemented through rulemaking, we have split three of the seasons, and that would be greater amberjack, red porgy, and snowy grouper.

You can see, on the bottom there, we have what the splits are. Greater amberjack, that fishing season starts on March 1, and we show what the proposed ACLs are, because that starts on March 1, but we were at 54 percent of that.

For red porgy, you can see the two values. Red porgy has 30 percent in Season 1 and 70 percent in Season 2, and so January through April is the four months, and then May through December has the eight months. Only seventy-five pounds have been landed in that first season.

Then snowy grouper was the last species that you did create two seasons for through Regulatory Amendment 27, and so that's a 70 percent split in Season 1 and a 30 percent split in Season 2, and those are two six-month seasons, and so you can see what those values are for that. We're at 27 percent for snowy grouper, and so, again, those regulations just went into place last Wednesday, and that's all I have.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I see hands in the air.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I was wondering, on you all's website, is there anywhere where they do the quota monitoring that will show the previous year, just like you have here on your thing? Is there a chart that I can go to on your quota monitoring page that shows it?

MR. DEVICTOR: Yes, and we do have a section in there where you can go see past years, and we've changed it, and so now you can see one PDF form that shows a number of the years, and so more than just one year, and you can see I don't know how many years it's going back, but, yes, that's all on our website.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Any more questions for Rick? Then are we going to Mike Larkin now? Okay. We're going to do the status of the amendments, and back to Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: We've been busy with rulemaking with six amendments, and the first four on this list that's in your agenda right here, we published the final rule, and so I'll just go through the effective dates of those, and I won't go over when the final rule published. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26, and those are the recreational management changes, that will be effective on March 30. Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 that I just mentioned, that was effective February 26.

Amendment 42, and that's the sea turtle release gear, that was effective on January 8, and Regulatory Amendment 30, and that's the red grouper rebuilding plan, and that's effective March 9, and so coming up here in a few days, and so those are the four where we published the final rules, and they have been effective or will be soon.

The last two, we're working on the rulemaking currently, and so there is Regulatory Amendment 29, which is best fishing practices and powerheads, and Abbreviated Framework 3, which changes the blueline tilefish ACLs, and it increases them, and so, again, we're working on those proposed rules.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Thanks, Rick. Any questions? All right. Myra, are we going to Mike Larkin now? Go ahead, Rick.

MR. DEVICTOR: I will just start off, and so, each year, of course, as you know, we project the length of the recreational fishing season for red snapper, and last year we did it in March, and so the same time, where Mike gave a presentation stating the projected days, and you have that on the screen there.

This year, it's a little different, because of Regulatory Amendment 33 that you all took final action on, and you all know well that what that does, that regulatory amendment, is it would remove the minimum season length provision, and so, of course, if the projected commercial or recreational

fishing season is determined by NMFS to be three days or less, then the commercial or recreational fishing season will not occur for that year, and so we are working on that amendment right now, and we expect a proposed rule can publish soon, and so that's important, because, as you will see in Mike's presentation, we predict a three-day season, but, of course, Regulatory Amendment 33 has to go in place, but our timing shows that we can get that in place before the season would start in July.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right.

DR. LARKIN: South Atlantic red snapper 2020 recreational season, this is a pretty short presentation, but Amendment 43 in 2018 implemented a South Atlantic red snapper recreational ACL of 29,656 fish. That's the current ACL for the recreational sector. Then, in 2019, we had a five-day season. We had July 12, 13, 14, 19, and 20, and so, really, it was announced in July, and the plan is, if all goes well, it would be in July of next year, and so, really, you're looking at the 2019 landings to make a prediction for future landings.

Some states have specific surveys, and so the table down below kind of breaks it down by charter, private, and headboat, and I first want to say, for headboat, we get all the data for headboat from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, but, for the states, it depends on which state's MRIP for their state surveys, and so, for North Carolina, for charter and private, they just have a volunteer carcass program, as opposed to MRIP, which is more of a survey for total landings, and so, in North Carolina, instead of using the voluntary carcass program data, we use the -- North Carolina uses the MRIP for charter and MRIP for private, and then, in South Carolina, they have a requirement where the charter boats have to report their red snapper landings, and so we use that data from that South Carolina program for the charter data, and then, for private, we use MRIP in South Carolina.

Georgia did a telephone census of all the federally-permitted snapper grouper charter captains, and so, using that data, I got the Georgia red snapper landings, and so I used that Georgia survey data for Georgia for the charter sector, charter mode, but then, for Georgia, for private, they just have a volunteer carcass program, and so, for private for Georgia, we used the MRIP data. Then, in Florida, both for the charter and the private modes, they have a special red snapper survey, and so we used that for both charter and private mode data for Florida.

This is what you get when you compile it all together, the preliminary 2019 recreational landings, and this is all we had during the season last year for July. The red snapper season in 2019 comes out to about 49,674 fish. As I discussed earlier, the ACL is 29,656 fish, and this was the ACL last year, recreational ACL, and this was based on a five-day season.

Every year, we see 1,000 fish harvested outside of the federal season, and then we see that year after year, and so, again, making that same assumption for 2020, that there will be 1,000 red snapper harvested outside of the federal season, and so, following the assumption, the ACL goes from 29,656 all the way down to 28,656 fish, and so we take a thousand off of there, and then the preliminary 2019 landings were 49,674 fish, as I just showed, and that was a five-day season, and so that comes out to a catch rate per day of 9,935 fish.

Then you take that ACL of 28,656 fish and divide that by the 9,935 fish, and you get that possible three-day season, and, as Rick pointed out, right before I talked, since the recreational ACL in

2020 -- Since there will be a three-day season, there will not be a recreational fishing season for red snapper unless Regulatory Amendment 33 is implemented. That's it, and so I will be happy to go through any questions that are asked.

DR. CHRISTIANSEN: On the 1,000 fish caught out of season, is that done by survey, or is that just a number you picked out?

DR. LARKIN: That's from MRIP, and so that's outside of the recreational season, and so like meaning -- For the last year, January through May, and then from August to September, and so we show that year and year, and I can modify it, and it would depend on when the season was, but that was estimated by MRIP outside of the federal season.

DR. CHRISTIANSEN: Again, where does MRIP get those numbers? Is that done by the number of tickets they issue for red snapper caught out of season?

DR. LARKIN: No, that's just from both the dockside intercepts and the effort, which was a phone survey, but now it's a mail survey, but that's basically from the dockside intercepts, from the MRIP, which is a combination of both the dockside and the effort survey from MRIP, if that helps you.

MR. GRINER: Are the Florida numbers -- Is that just during the five days, or is that Florida numbers for the entire year from their state-water fishery?

DR. LARKIN: No, good point, and I should have made that more clear, and that was just from those five days. They do a special survey, and they do it just on the days when the season is open, and so that's just from those five days.

DR. CRABTREE: That is not an MRIP number. That is a number that comes from Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission on a special survey that they do. The outside of the season though, the guys who are doing the dockside sampling are apparently seeing some red snapper at the dock, and I don't believe that all of the states necessarily close state waters, and so that may be responsible for some of it, but I don't know. Mike, do you know? Are most of those landings coming from Florida? I'm guessing they are, the outside of the season.

DR. LARKIN: Yes, Florida and Georgia, yes, and a little bit of South Carolina, but, yes, Florida is the primary.

DR. CRABTREE: All right. Thank you.

MR. BREWER: Are we asking questions right now with regard to this, or do we make comments at a later time, because I do have some comments about this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, I have some comments too, but let's -- Do we have more questions for Mike about this presentation? Let's do that first.

MR. WOODWARD: Thank you, Mike. I am just curious, I guess, about the mathematics that yield these landings, because, if you look at MRIP Wave 4 for Georgia, we had an estimated harvest of 15,912 fish, and, of course, they had very high PSEs, 62 and 91 percent, around them,

and we actually encountered, through the state survey and the donated carcass program, 459 fish, and so I'm just curious how we convert roughly 16,000 fish back into 2,243 fish.

DR. LARKIN: Were you looking at the website? Maybe you were looking at FES data from the new survey, and is that where you got the -- Your 16,000, was that from the like Office of Science and Technology website?

MR. WOODWARD: That was provided to me by the person that manages our APAIS and MRIP involvement for the State of Georgia, and so she sent me a spreadsheet that showed that, and I assume it came off the MRIP website.

DR. LARKIN: Gotcha. Well, ours is kind of like -- Ours is not the FES, and, if you go back to the Coastal Household Survey, and so it's based on that, and it comes from the Science Center, and so it is misleading, and the FES data is certainly, again, the higher, from the mail survey, whereas our comes from -- That 2,039 fish came from the Science Center, and it's the same MRIP raw data, but they're able to convert it from FES back to the telephone survey and generate it that way, but I can confirm that, that that 16,000 matches up with the FES.

MR. WOODWARD: Thank you, Mike.

DR. LARKIN: I'm thinking that's where it came from.

MR. WOODWARD: I'm not trying to put you in the hot seat, but it's just trying to make sense of how we resolve all these numbers back to what we're seeing, because they're ultimately things that limit us, in terms of our opportunities for harvest.

DR. LARKIN: I've got you. Yes, off the top of my head, I'm thinking that may be an FES thing, but I can certainly look into that and see where the 16,000 came from, because I've got 2,000 for my Science Center data.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more questions about the PowerPoint from Mike before we get into other comments? All right. I'm going to go back to Chester. Thank you, Mike, for the presentation, and so I'm going to go back to Chester for other types of comments on red snapper.

MR. BREWER: I was fortunate enough to attend the Gulf Council meeting in New Orleans just recently, and my buddy J.D. was there, and we had a good time. One of the things that just hit me over the head was the fact that, in the Gulf, the ACL numbers for red snapper in the catch was not modified, I guess you would say, in any meaningful way, but, for the private recreational and the state charter boats, the states got together and collected the data, and they were looking at seasons, and I think, a couple or three years ago, they were looking at a five-day season or a six-day season or four days, three days.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Three days was the federal season back before the state management exempted fishing permits, and so a three-day federal season.

MR. BREWER: Right, and there was about an hour-and-a-half-long presentation, or maybe a little longer, and it was very detailed and very good, and they were talking about their seasons were sixty days, 109 days, and they had a very -- Their data seemed quite sound, and their verification

was quite sound, and something here is broke. I mean, we're going down from five days to three days, and yet, in the Gulf, without them changing their ACLs, they go from three days to twenty-times that, if not more, and still are staying pretty much within their ACLs, and I think Louisiana went over by -- Was it Louisiana that went over by 20,000?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I believe Alabama went over, I think, also.

MR. BREWER: Alabama was like 1,500 pounds or something, but they stayed awfully close, and I think Louisiana is going to have a little payback next because of their overage, but they are managing that fishery in such a way that they are meaningful seasons for the private recreational and the state charter people. We don't have that, and something here is broken.

We are going in the wrong direction, despite all the efforts of this council, and, with a three-day season -- I mean, we're going to have derby fishing on steroids, and it's going to be almost as much of a bloodbath as -- Well, I keep harping on it, but the mini-season for lobster. I don't know what the answer is, and we've talked about it over and over and over again, and we've had several amendments, and we've done what we can do, and yet we're going in the wrong direction.

I understand that the numbers that we're looking at here for the number of fish caught -- There is some question there, but, again, if the FWC says that we caught forty-something-thousand fish, I believe that number. It seems to me that the problem that we face is in an ACL that -- I will just go back to it. It's not right. It's simply not right, and this is, to me, a perfect example of failure of management. The economic damage that's being caused to all of our states, more so Florida, is for real, and, headed down the path that we're headed, it's only going to get worse, and I just -- I am just disgusted with it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for those comments. Before I go to Roy, I had a question about the overall number, and so I feel like, a couple of years ago, the council helped figure out what that number was, and I thought that we were using a scalar, and I think that this number was coming out -- The scalar was coming out of the MARMAP survey, and so we saw a presentation, I think at the last meeting, from Marcel that was updated MARMAP information, that it looked like a lot more red snapper, bigger red snapper, and I was wondering if we couldn't talk about that analysis a little bit and why we couldn't update that with that new MARMAP information.

I know we've talked in the past about the FWC information and that that couldn't be brought in until the next stock assessment, and so that's not included either, but the MARMAP was, and I believe the MARMAP was used in the scalar, and I don't know if John or Chip -- I know that they were the ones that worked on that, and I don't know if they want to come up and maybe talk about that a little bit, about how that number was derived.

DR. COLLIER: What we had done is we provided you guys a couple of different options on that one, and one of them was looking at a scalar, and so it would be scaling the ACL based on the index of abundance that was provided by MARMAP. However, what ended up being decided upon was a previous catch level, where it did not indicate that the population had decreased after that catch level, and so what we were trying to do was prevent overfishing just based on numbers of fish, and so it's not necessarily based on that scalar. That was Option 4, and that was not selected as a preferred.

MS. MCCAWLEY: But the numbers that you came up with, did it include the MARMAP information, and so is there not a way, now that we have this updated MARMAP information, that we could not include maybe 2017 and 2018, or 2017, 2018, and 2019 MARMAP information, and derive a new number, through the same process?

DR. COLLIER: You would have to go through an amendment for that, but what we did, as opposed to using that number in order to scale the value, that value was set based on previous landings, and the information from MARMAP was used as supporting evidence that we were not going to incur overfishing based on the new options.

DR. CRABTREE: A few things. One, it's really important to understand how different the situation in the Gulf of Mexico is and what's going on here, and the problems are completely different. In the Gulf, we have a recreational quota that's over six-million pounds, and that's just the recreational side.

The reason the season got so short in the Gulf is because states were opening up state waters for an extended season. In the Gulf of Mexico, all of the states were able to manage red snapper out to nine miles, and so the quota was being caught up in state waters, and so it was never that the season was that short, really, but it was the federal water season got shorter and shorter, and, eventually, there wouldn't have been a federal-water season, because the states would have caught the entire quota.

The main thing that state management did is it married the federal and state seasons, and so we don't have that disparity anymore, maybe with the exception of Texas, and so that was the situation there. Now, Chester, you point out the difference, and the quota in -- Right now, the overall recreational quota in the Gulf I think is 6.2 million pounds. At ten pounds a fish, that's six-hundred-plus-thousand fish, and our quota is 29,000 fish, and so the Gulf's quota is about twenty-times higher, which is why they have a season that's around twenty-times higher than what we have.

Now, we put in place, in Amendment 43, an ACL that was based on what we had seen landed in one or two or maybe three of the years prior to when the fishery was closed, and we put that in place, and it's just set, and it doesn't scale up based on anything. Now, we had an ABC, at the time, of 53,000 fish from the SSC, and we stayed below that, and not a lot below it, but we stayed below that, and so I understand the frustration here, but the reason the season is getting so short is because we have a very low ACL, and, meanwhile, we have a growing stock.

The only solution I see to this is to have more fish available to catch, and I don't see how we get to a longer season, unless the ACL can go up, and, to raise the ACL, we're going to need a new ABC from the SSC, and a new catch level, and so I think what we really ought to focus on is when can get new science, or what's the timing on the assessment, what can we get in order to get something in front of the SSC to re-look at this, and I don't know if it's going to go up or not.

The good news of all of this is the stock does, by everything we're seeing, appear to be rebuilding and recovering, and so that's getting better, but I agree with you that everyone is going to continue to be frustrated until we find some way to have the catch levels increased, along with the improvements that we're seeing in the stock status, and so, to me, the real question here is when can we get some new information out of an assessment that we can get in front of the SSC and get

a new catch level recommendation in front of them that we could hopefully put in place so that we can remedy this situation and not go through this again next year.

MR. GRINER: What are the annual landings for the State of Florida?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would have to look that up, but so you saw the number from the season, and so that was the number that FWC reported through our sampling methods, because we don't feel like MRIP really is sampling red snapper, because of this pulse fishery that we have.

MR. GRINER: Yes, but that was for five days. What I am wanting to look at is what is their 365-day landings.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would have to go in and find those numbers.

MR. BELL: I certainly understand and share Chester's frustrations and all, and I think Jessica was kind of heading in the direction that I was going to ask, which was is there any way to create more fish, as Roy said, by modifying the current ACL, and it sounds like not short of a plan amendment, and then the way eventually we will modify the ACL is when we complete the stock assessment and get an ABC from the SSC.

Another component to the frustration I think is how we count fish, and maybe part of what Chester was referring to is what the Gulf coast states are able to do, is they do have their own programs in place, which have been MRIP certified, I guess, for lack of a better term, that they can count their own fish, and, of course, Florida has a mechanism in place, but the other three states don't, and we're reliant upon MRIP, as it stands right now.

The other difference, and Roy did a nice job of explaining the difference, and another difference is in the system they're using now, where the states are assuming responsibility for that season, is they have approved methods for counting their own fish, which we don't have access to, and, of course, you could develop those programs, but you're talking about millions and millions of dollars, probably, to do that, and I guess that's what it took down in the Gulf. Collectively, all of the states had access to some funding to work towards that, the various mechanisms.

That's part of the frustration, and so it's how do you get more fish, and then how do you improve your counting of the fish, perhaps, but that's some of the unique challenges that we're facing compared to what's going on in the Gulf, and it is a completely different world down there, in terms of how this is all played out and developed.

MR. POLAND: Real quick, I want to jump off of Mel's comments, and then I have two questions. As far as the state-based survey, obviously, my state doesn't have one, and it's not because it's not something we're interested in, but it's just money and priorities. I know, in the Modernizing Fish Act, there is an opportunity in there to get some funds for the states to work with MRIP and develop their state-based programs, and so I would certainly love an update on that at some point. Have any of those monies been dispersed, and is the program available yet, but, to my questions, first, I just want to be reminded. What is the timing of the next red snapper assessment? I would look to John or Chip.

DR. COLLIER: That stock assessment is going to be discussed at the next SEDAR Steering Committee, and it hasn't been finalized. Based on what you guys had talked about at the last meeting, I think we were going to be beginning in 2021, and hopefully that would be available in 2022, but Clay can discuss more if I misspoke.

DR. PORCH: At the end of the September Steering Committee meeting, that's exactly what we had come up with. The Steering Committee elected to go with having it as an operational assessment rather than a research track, because the research track would have taken it into 2023, potentially, but the statement of work that came back from the SSC looks an awful lot like a benchmark, which would really probably push it pretty late in 2021, and probably into 2022, for completion.

Really, it's not an operational anymore, if we actually accepted those particular terms in the statement of work, and so, if we wanted to have this performed more like an operational and be completed earlier in 2021, we would need to slim down the terms in the statement of work, and what I would suggest is, for instance, there is, in there, a call for a data workshop, which takes a lot of time, the process and all that, and you could still have a workshop, but maybe it focuses on a few key things, and then you have external experts, if you would like, to give advice on exactly how they would use, for example, the selectivity information that's coming from the Florida study.

In that case, the Science Center would only be marginally involved, and you would have sort of a separate working group from SEDAR that would provide the peer review, so that it could be plugged into the assessment, but it's a long list of things in the statement of work that we would probably need to cull if we want to try and get this done by say April of 2021.

MR. POLAND: Thank you, Chip and Clay, for that update, and so, best case scenario, the assessment is completed early or mid-2021, and, I mean, we could probably get ABC recommendations, or an ACL, in place by the end of 2021, or early in 2022, at best, and I'm looking at Chip.

DR. COLLIER: The assessment would start in 2021.

MR. POLAND: That's the start, and so late 2022 or early 2023, best case scenario, for getting a new ACL.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Right now, it's scheduled to occupy most of 2021, and I think what Clay said is important. The statement of work from the SSC was very extensive, and I think, if the council -- One of the things they asked for was two workshops, as I recall, and so I think, if the council really feels that expediting this is important, some guidance here now to Clay, and as well as to Jessica and Mel, who are going to the Steering Committee, to say, you know, we understand what the SSC had asked for, but, if the Center sees some way to expedite this and get it completed, so it goes to the SSC by say -- Would you say April of 2022?

I don't know if October of 2021 is even realistic, and we could have a special SSC meeting to look at this, so that you get results by like March of 2022, perhaps, and that's something that could be reasonable, but you give us some guidance now that you're willing to let Clay come up with a more expedited plan, and I think that would help.

DR. PORCH: If you wanted to use 2020 information, then, yes, it would go into 2022 to complete it. If you wanted to go up through 2019, and we slim down the statement of work here, which could include -- I think it should include the new information on selectivity from the Florida study, but you could have a separate independent peer review that, if you could start it right away, conceivably we could actually have some -- A slimmed-down version of an operational assessment completed even by April of 2021, which would mean we would have to move up the schedule and start it a little bit this year, and that would be rather ambitious, and, again, we would have to keep it pretty much to the real spirit of an operational assessment, which is an update, but looking at a couple of key things, like that Florida selectivity study.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Steve, do you have anything else?

MR. POLAND: I feel like we'll probably take this discussion further, and so, just real quick, my second question, and it was more just a question of clarification for Rick, and I just wanted to make sure that I heard it right, and so do you feel confident that Amendment 33 will be implemented this year, prior to July?

MR. DEVICTOR: Yes. We worked out the schedule, and stuff always pops up, but we believe that we can get that in place by July.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: I will say one thing that I wasn't going to say, but, regarding Amendment 33, it's not even gone out for public comment, and so this is all supposing that a final rule gets implemented to implement your regulatory amendment, but you have to take into account public comment and all that, and so I don't want to make this sound like we've already decided this was going into effect before we've even had public comment, and so I just caution you on that part.

The other part is I haven't looked at what the SSC suggested, or recommended, for the next assessment, all those items to be done, but I do recall that I painstakingly read through their minutes when they reviewed all the red snapper assessments, and you had them go back, and you gave them different charges at different times to look at different things, and the thing that kept coming through was that the assessment they were looking at, and I guess it was from -- The last year was 2014, I think, that they used that data, and there was so much uncertainty, and they had so many questions about it, that I would assume that these items that they're asking to be done in the next assessment go to trying to quell some of that uncertainty and get answers to some of those questions, and so I would just caution you, in your rush to get something done -- I remember how much uncertainty there was in the last assessment, and so I think you have to weigh that when you're deciding when you want things to get done.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Monica. I agree, and I had some of those same concerns.

MR. CONKLIN: I just want to say that, for that mini-season we had in 2019 on red snapper, we had five days available, and I know that at least four of them were close to small craft advisory up in the Carolinas, and so these numbers, while I don't think they represent one day of fishing, it was just really bad.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Chip, did you want to offer other comments? I had you in the queue here.

DR. COLLIER: I guess my question was directed to Tim about the landings or catch. Were you referring to overall landings, or are you talking about landings plus discards in Florida?

MR. GRINER: I was talking about landings, but landings and discards would be great to know.

DR. COLLIER: Going back in time, I think 90 percent of the landings and discards occur in Florida, and I don't know if that helps, and then it's sporadic through the other states.

MR. GRINER: I was just trying to get a sense of is that 10,000 fish a day, or 9,000 fish a day, and is that indicative of landings year-round in the State of Florida?

MS. MCCAWLEY: No.

DR. COLLIER: If you look at the number of fish that were discarded, and this is based on the newer MRIP numbers, I think it was around two-million fish, and so that's definitely not representative of year-round.

MR. GRINER: The discards were how many fish during the five-day season?

DR. COLLIER: In the five-day season, I haven't looked at that.

MR. GRINER: So the two-million you said, that was on an annual basis, just for the State of Florida or for --

DR. COLLIER: Just for the State of Florida, I believe, yes. I mean, it's available on the MRIP website, and so you can check in on that.

MR. GRINER: Does Florida count their fish separate from MRIP for the rest of the year, or just during that five-day season?

DR. COLLIER: All the states have specialized surveys for that five-day season, whether it's a carcass collection program or whether it's surveying all their charter boat captains. They all do something a little bit special during that time period, in order to enhance what's available through MRIP.

MR. GRINER: Thank you.

MR. POLAND: I just want to respond to that, and so North Carolina does not have a special dedicated survey for red snapper, and it's a voluntary carcass collection program, and we have never provided those numbers, because they just are inherently biased, because it's a voluntary program, and we do it more for biological data collection, more than anything.

MS. BECKWITH: My comment was just about the expedited stock assessment, and I would just -- I won't be here, but I will caution you guys to make sure you're really comfortable, because I think, if we expedite something, and not everything is considered, you're tied to those results for another five years, and I didn't want to change it from a research track originally, but, if we bring

it all the way back, and then we're not happy with it, then, well, it is what it is for quite a bit of time.

MR. POLAND: I just want to say that I agree, and, I mean, I don't want to be misinterpreted as advocating for a fast track, but I am interested to hear Clay's thoughts, since he suggested that the Science Center could come back with some time-saving changes to the purpose and need or the TORs or anything like that, but, I mean, certainly I feel like this assessment -- I mean, due diligence needs to be done on this, and we need to get it right, or as close to right, as we can, and so I certainly don't want to rush it and jeopardize certain data sources coming in or issues with selectivities and confidence in certain datasets not to be fully vested.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Chip is trying to work to find the scope of work, and I was just wondering, Clay, if you guys had a chance to talk about specifics yet, about what it might mean and what some of the things that were asked for by the SSC that might have to be put off, and I was looking at it, and Chip is going to try to get it on the screen, so we could show it up.

You know, the selectivity issue -- As Clay mentioned, the SSC talked about that a lot in the Florida study, and they felt that should be included, and I felt they thought there was a way, but, you know, the SSC went pretty far on this, in terms of how it's being done and reevaluating selectivities, and one of the things that struck me is they talked about reevaluating the chevron trap index further back in time. That strikes me as something that I would say the Center would look at and say, you know, that's really kind of a benchmark issue, and that's going to take a lot of work, and it might be something where some of these things can be acknowledged and the Center agree that we will look at this over the next few years and try to address it for the next iteration, as well as doing a more closer to the last assessment that's more expedited.

The SSC asked for two workshops, and that is certainly cause of concern, and I think, as Clay mentioned, do a workshop where perhaps you settle on the selectivity pattern, and you discuss if there is new information or alternative discard mortality, because that's going to be a huge topic, and what guidance can be given to the analysts about discard mortality, best practices, descending devices, how that might be folded into projections, as the SSC asked, and I think they could do that kind of stuff.

They also asked for information about the MyFishCount and that sort of alternative information, and that one, again, is another where it could be a real sticky wicket to get that folded into the assessment process, and it might take greater thought than what you can do in an expedited process, and so I think, Clay, if there's some other things to add to that, to maybe give the council some comfort in what the assessment would look like, and if these other issues would be addressed, and we might be able to get this really moving ahead faster.

MR. BELL: I think this has been a very good discussion, and it's good to have all of this on the record, but I think we should be quite clear that the council certainly understands the sense of urgency on the nature of -- From the public, and we feel that ourselves, and, in moving forward with the assessment, we want to do it correctly, and the discussion we just had about how we do that, and I know that I would trust Clay and others to understand that, while there is a sense of urgency, it needs to be done correctly, because, whatever comes out, we're going to have to live with it for quite a while, and Monica's points are well taken, but we certainly understand that.

I think the sense of perhaps probably frustration and our sense of urgency is only going to increase. Let's say we have a three-day season this year. Again, given the fact that the stock does appear to certainly be rebuilding, and, to Chris's point, four of our five days this past year for us weren't good days, and imagine if all five of them had been beautiful, perfect days for fishing, and so I think we could find ourselves, next year, in the same place, having a discussion about a lot more fish were caught than are currently available, and so, again, that will only increase a sense of frustration with the public, and we understand that, but we want to do this correctly.

I trust our science people to work together to do that, but, again, whatever comes out of this has to be something that is robust enough and credible enough, and we've got to be willing to live with it for the near term, until there's another assessment, and so I think this has been really good, to point this all out, and it's certainly a challenge, and it's, unfortunately, a problem we're having because the stock is rebuilding, and so we are -- This is the price of success and all the hard work and the sacrifices that people have made, and this is what success brings you, but it's certainly challenging, because of the way we have to do this and do it correctly. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. I had Spud next in the queue. After Spud talks, maybe we can go ahead and take a lunch break. When we come back, we could try to complete this discussion. If you wouldn't mind, is there a way that you could email around this document that we're looking at, so folks could take a look at it and contribute to the discussion a little bit after lunch? Spud, you've got the last word before lunch.

MR. WOODWARD: Perhaps, Madam Chair, we need to break for lunch, because I'm not sure that my comments are going to -- Maybe I should save them for after lunch.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That's fine. All right. Spud wants to take his turn after lunch, and so let's go ahead and take a lunch break, and we'll come back at 1:30, and we'll continue this discussion.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: We're going to get going again. Where we left off was we were talking about red snapper, and first on deck is Spud, and I think that Kelly sent around the red snapper operational assessment scope of work to everybody. I am going to go to Spud, and, if other people have had some thoughts since lunch, then just raise your hand, and I will put you in the queue to speak.

MR. WOODWARD: Thank you, Madam Chair. There is obviously a lot of sources of frustration about the situation with South Atlantic red snapper. I mean, when you've had thirty-eight total days of fishing for the recreational sector in a decade, and in concert with an unexpected increase in abundance of the species, a broadening of the distribution of the species, all of that is combined together, obviously, to create a great dissatisfaction in the regulated community, and it's hard to know where to focus your efforts when you're in a situation like this and you've got concerns about the quality of the data that we use to estimate catch, which will ultimately drive the next stock assessment, which becomes a whole other issue of the trustworthiness of the results of the assessment when the data that feeds it are questionable.

I guess one thing that concerns me, that we always come back to, is the inadequacy of the data that we use to do stock status determination and compliance with management measures, but, yet, when we were talking about our spreadsheet this morning, Amendment 46, recreational reporting and

permitting, never seems to make it up the line, and I just urge us, as a council, to reconsider that. I mean, we've got a lot on our plate, but it doesn't do you any good to repair your roof if your foundation is cracked, and we have got to work on the foundation of our ability to manage these fish under the law as it's written, and we would all like to see some of that changed and give us the ability to do things we can't do now, but we're constrained right now by the law, the way it's written and interpreted, and so we need to take the steps necessary to improve the core data, so that we can restore some of our confidence in the results and restore some of the public's confidence back in the results of our management.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Spud. Nicely stated. Other folks that want to talk about red snapper? Chip, do we need to do something here with this scope of work? I mean, you've heard how we could speed things up a little bit, if we slim this down, and you've also heard concerns and the caution from Monica, but concerns from folks about maybe not wanting to slim this down, and is there something that we need to do here today?

DR. COLLIER: I mean, I think we need to -- It would be good to clarify whether or not there are some things that you guys would be comfortable removing or discussing, in order to make it a little bit easier on our discussions with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center on how to pare things down and make them a little bit quicker.

I mean, obviously, some of the consideration was we definitely need to address landings, and you guys continue to discuss that, and there were different mechanisms that were used in SEDAR 41 to estimate catch, in 2012, 2013, and 2014, and so that needs to be continued into the next assessment, because that was used in the last one. That is going to be a little bit time-consuming.

There is things in here, like look at the F metrics, and there was discussion on looking at several different F metrics for this, and maybe that's not done in this assessment, if you want it done a little bit quicker, because that could involve several different runs of the assessment and writing different code for the BAM model, in order to make sure it's outputting the correct things, and so things like that. If you guys want to look through this and go through it, we could go through it line-by-line, or, if you leave it up to staff to have the discussions with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, we're happy to do that for you as well.

MR. BELL: Just my personal opinion is the assessment itself is a creature of science, and, between the SSC, Clay, and whomever -- I mean, we can go through that, but, personally, I don't feel qualified to kind of tell you where to try to improve the efficiency of the timing of this by deleting certain things or -- I mean, I would trust you all's ability to kind of work through this, understanding what the desire is, and it's to have some efficiencies, maybe, to improve the timeliness of the outcome without sacrificing the necessary robust nature of this and the solidness of the assessment itself, but I don't, personally, feel comfortable picking or choosing, and that's just me, and others might --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Well, I guess I would say I don't think I want staff to determine that all on their own. I feel like we went through some specifics in here, and I do have some concerns, and we talked about selectivity, and we talked about some other things that the SSC brought up that they felt like were hindering them from making some decisions last time.

I just want to make sure that those things are fixed up, because, just like others have said, I don't want us to be two years or three years down the road, and we've gone through all of this work for the stock assessment, and then we have Clay saying, well, you guys wanted to hurry, and so we took out these two things, and, ultimately, the SSC couldn't make a decision, and we're right back where we are, and it's five years later, and so I just -- I have some concerns about where to slim down, to be honest.

MR. BELL: Well, I do too, and I agree with you, and that's why I would be more comfortable trusting our science advisors, realizing that that's not the outcome that you described of, oh gee, we didn't do this or we didn't do that, and that's not a desirable or acceptable outcome, and I don't know if it feels like we're dumping too much on them, or asking them to decide too much, but I would be -- That's just me, and, I mean, I would be uncomfortable just picking and choosing certain things myself.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right.

MR. GRINER: I agree with Mel. I am not real comfortable, because of lack of knowledge of the process, to try to slim it down or see how to speed it up, but, also, I was just curious. If you start slimming it down, how much time are you really going to save, a month, two months, three months, six months? I mean, what are we really talking about, as far as what are we really gaining as a timeframe?

DR. PORCH: I was just going to say, if you like, I could kind of walk through this quickly, so we get a better idea of what we're talking about, and so the first bullet there, where it says model and additional data years, I mean, that's pretty standard for an update, and that's something that we plan to do, and we should be able to knock that out pretty quickly. The main issue there is, if we were going to try and get an assessment completed by April of 2021, then we wouldn't have the data for 2020, because that usually doesn't get processed and completed until you're getting into the June or July timeframe, and so that would be the only decision point there. If you would want to incorporate that data, then probably the assessment would be completed closer to the end of 2021, if it were an operational and not a full research track.

Then the next bullets under data updates, I mean, we would plan to include the revised MRIP recreational estimates, and so that means FES, and that's already gone through an SSC review, and so the bullets under it evaluate this and evaluate that, and I don't think one would make that much difference to the assessment, and, two, I wouldn't see us running a whole bunch of different scenarios with different guesses of what the alternative scenarios for recreational catch is.

The evaluate information submitted voluntarily by fishermen through MyFishCount, that really should happen outside just a stock assessment, and that should be a whole workshop unto itself, because it affects things besides red snapper, and that is probably not a lift that you want to just leave to the assessment folks.

When you get to include any newly-available information on steepness, there is not going to be any new information there, and so I wouldn't recommend pursuing that. I would probably take that out, and so, all of those things I just mentioned, if you take that out, it would save a considerable amount of time.

Then there is the next one, include any new and updated information on discard mortality and life history, and I don't think there's going to be a lot, but I would be a heavy lift if we're just saying, okay, now we're going to look at what few samples are here and try and recalculate everything, and that drags it out, but, from what I have understood, there is not a whole lot of new information there, and so we shouldn't have to recalculate, in other words, how many eggs each female of each age produces or anything like that, and so, if we did try and gather up every scrap of information and recalculate things, yes, that adds quite a bit of time, and I don't think there will be much to gain from doing that, and so I would recommend dropping it.

Calculate different F matrices, it really depends on what you want to do there. In principle, I can see why people are concerned about apical F, because it doesn't -- It, intuitively, doesn't make a lot of sense to a layperson. What we have gone to in some of our other stock assessments is just showing the fraction of the stock removed by fishing, which is a lot easier for people to grasp, and so I think we could do that, actually, pretty easily, and that's not real -- I mean, that might be an hour to tweak the code or something, and it's not a big lift. Maybe I'm exaggerating a little bit, but it's not a big lift.

Running alternative projections that incorporate the use of descending devices and venting tools, it really depends on what we wanted to do there, but the bottom line is, if you're giving management advice, unless you actually can do that, it's not going to be really helpful for setting an ACL, and so that's something that could come up afterwards. In other words, if we need to get the assessment done by April, we could leave that for some analyses sometime down the road, and so that doesn't have to be part of the assessment process.

The selectivity one is a big one, and that is the one that I think, from the discussions, would have the greatest chance to have a noticeable impact on the catch advice that comes out of the assessment, to the extent that there's dome-shaped selectivity. We have done some preliminary work already. What we've done so far hasn't shown a huge impact, but it does show some, but that was just preliminary work, and so this is one that I think does deserve attention.

I think, if we conducted a workshop that is sort of -- I mean, it could be administered through SEDAR, but we get the relevant experts working independent of the Center, and we can have some Center participation, but, if the lift wasn't the Center's lift, and somebody else was doing it and made a recommendation, and then we just had to plug those recommendations into the assessment, it wouldn't be a huge lift. We would want to be involved and make sure we're all talking the same language, but I think, in this case, we could have a sort of data workshop, but focused on this particular issue. The way it reads now, it sounds like they will look at many, many things, which then becomes a pretty heavy lift and requires a lot of involvement on my staff that they haven't budgeted for. If we were going to do that, we would have to talk about shifting snowy around and doing a lot of things that we're trying to avoid.

Reevaluating the use of the chevron trap index, I mean, we've looked at that pretty hard in the past, and it was -- That part of that index was rejected in the past, and I really doubt that we're going to change our minds. I mean, I can't imagine a scenario where that would happen, and so, one, it's a fairly heavy lift to do all the analyses we might need to do, and, two, it already has kind of been rejected, and so I would kind of shelve that one.

Then, finally, the process, down here at the bottom, is talking about holding these in-person data workshops, which, when my staff read that, they read a pretty comprehensive evaluation in many aspects, and, if we just limited, again, to the selectivity issue, and have relevant experts participate in that, then I think the lift won't be so hard, and we should have a good shot, assuming that everybody provides data on time, to getting the assessment completed in April.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks for that, Clay. I have a couple of questions before we go to Steve, who is still in the queue. Chip, can you go back up a little bit more? Right in there. A couple of things. The part where we're talking about -- It's the evaluate that Chip has struck through that area there, that he has highlighted, I just want to make sure -- Actually, it's the next one, where it talks about MyFishCount and other stuff.

I just want to make sure that, by eliminating some of these things in that bullet, that we would still allow say the FWC data that has been used to determine how many fish were caught, et cetera, because we're really having to supplement MRIP, because MRIP is not really picking up this pulse red snapper fishery, and I just want to make sure that that type of information could still be used, based on what you were suggesting removing, and it was unclear to me if that would still be used as part of this.

DR. PORCH: Honestly, I don't remember if we substituted those particular estimates for MRIP, and maybe somebody can tell me that, in the past assessment.

DR. COLLIER: The way I hear Clay saying this is they wouldn't necessarily -- The Science Center would not necessarily evaluate and look at all these different new data streams, and this would be done through that workshop that he's talking about. They could look at these different pieces of information and provide recommendations to the Science Center on whether or not they should be used, and, if they are used, how to use them. In regard to the FWC estimates of catch for the red snapper mini-seasons, those were used in the past, and so they were used in 2012, 2013, and 2014, and so I would imagine that is going to be the method that would be used for the other years, the subsequent years, that have been opened.

DR. PORCH: That was part of what was done in the last assessment, and we would continue that, and I just couldn't remember that detail, since I didn't participate in the assessment back then. In that case, I would expect that we would continue using the same sources of information in recent years, but, just to amend one thing, I wouldn't suggest that the workshop evaluate a whole suite of things that we're talking about and then suggest that we incorporate all of that, because there's a number of things in here.

For instance, if they decided they wanted to change the reproduction or something like that, based on whatever new information, that still would require more than just having a group come together and give us some information and say plug it into the assessment, and so what I'm suggesting is, if we had an independent workshop of independent experts, we focus on the thing that probably would have the most impact, and that's that selectivity information.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I appreciate that. To me, the selectivity is very important, and so, right in the same area where Chip is, where he had "life history" highlighted, and so there's a bullet that says to include any known update information on discard mortality and life history, and I guess that I was just a little concerned about discard mortality. I feel like we've had a lot of discussions here,

and, a couple of years ago, I felt like the amount of fish discarded -- Some are suggesting that that number is a lot greater than the actual amount of harvest for the entire South Atlantic area, and I don't want discard mortality to be just not considered or looked at carefully here, I guess, since it was a sticking point in the past.

DR. PORCH: Just a point of clarification, looking at this. Do you mean discard mortality rate, the fraction of discarded fish that die, or are we talking -- I mean, discard mortality is the total number of dead discards, which is dependent on the MRIP estimates, and I don't think there is an alternative estimate for total discards.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I was talking about the fraction of fish that die, and so are you suggesting that that not be included or there not be a discussion on that?

DR. PORCH: That would, in principle, not be a big lift if there is clear evidence for changing that rate, and it starts getting a little gray when you start changing key pieces of information like that and don't have the independent peer review that we normally follow, but, if you put this in a workshop, and you do have some independent reviewers, and there is pretty strong consensus that the discard mortality rate should be changed to this, that's probably defensible on our end, and we could use it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Then, at the very bottom, if you could scroll down, Chip, one of the things that we spent a lot of time talking about is that last bullet about bring in these external experts to participate in the review with the SSC, and do you think that that's still possible, or are you suggesting that this is just too much? I actually thought you were talking about the other bullet, that this is maybe some of the stuff that we would cut out, and so I was just trying to clarify that the bottom bullet about the external experts that have red snapper experience -- That that could still occur through one of these processes.

DR. PORCH: Except it's all in conjunction with the data workshop and assessment workshop, and, if we're doing that, that's a benchmark, and so this is -- We are moving to research track and operational, and so then we may as well go back to a research track. That's not to say that -- My position is the external experts should be involved in the new information that we're looking at, and so that would, in this case, maybe be the discard mortality and the selectivity study. If we're going to have external experts reviewing the entire stock assessment process, that's going to require a lot heavier lift, in terms of communication, having webinars, which then, again, makes it more like a benchmark or research track.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right.

MR. POLAND: Initially, I just raised my hand just to ask for Clay's input, but thank you, Clay, for that, and so, in conversations that I've had with Clay and other Science Center staff and council staff and others, the concern I had was having all these additional workshops and heavy lifts piled on top of what we had already decided to be basically an assessment update and just kind of trying to tease out what was necessary and what was achievable if we stick to that original timeframe of just making this an update, as opposed to a full research track.

DR. COLLIER: Right now, we have -- If you look at what I have presented on the screen, we've pared it down to kind of an in-person data workshop, including a panel of SSC members, but we

could also bring in some external experts during that data workshop, in order to address some of these selectivity issues and maybe consider some of the discard mortality rate, as well as the recreational datasets, just to make sure we're covering all our bases, because we will need some review of those recreational datasets, to make sure that they're going through the same process that was used in SEDAR 41.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Before we make any final conclusions on this, I really need to go back to FWC folks and ask some questions of our FWRI assessment team, and then I could bring that input back to Full Council, and so, Chip, if you wouldn't mind emailing me this edited document, and then I'll be prepared with that information by tomorrow. Is there more discussion?

MR. CONKLIN: I am not sure if, within the realm of all this, if you remember that Dr. Barbieri presented the Florida data from the last assessment, and the public brought forward to the public comments to the SSC and to the assessment SEDAR people, and it never really stuck very much, and then, after the fact, everybody was like, oh, well, this would have made the stock look a lot older, and I want to make sure that that and anything else like that is incorporated and it's not omitted and we pay attention to it and take it seriously.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree, and I'm going to go back to Luiz with this and have some more discussions with our folks before Full Council. Is there more discussions on this document or other things about red snapper?

MR. CARMICHAEL: You have always had the ability to bring in the outside experts, as the SSC mentioned, and it's up to you who gets appointed and you would ask the SSC, when it comes around to setting up this workshop, who they recommend to be appointed from themselves. It can be other people, and there's no limitation on this within SEDAR that says it's only SSC members that take part in this. Now, they do have to be part of your SEDAR AP, and, if they're not, if someone is brought in that's not already covered, we would have to add them, and we do that all the time, and it's not a big problem, and so we can handle all of that, even if it's not specifically part of this that goes to the Science Center.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, John.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, it does seem to me that we need to find a way to get this done, so that it can influence their 2021 season. My concern is we're going to fish three days this summer, and then we're going to go over the ACL again, and then, next year, you're going to be looking at one day, or something like that, and it's just going to get -- It's going to get worse, and I think a lot of the things Clay suggested we could hold off on -- I tend to agree with him, and it does seem to me that incorporating the FES data in this is going to be a real change in the input data.

I think, with the discard mortality rates -- I mean, that's always an uncertainty about that, because it partly depends on what depths people are fishing at, and it's hard to have a clear answer to that. Now, we'll presumably have a descending device in place at that time, but it does seem to me that the Center could do some different runs of projections that assume we would choose some reduction in discard mortality, and it seems to me that's -- You could calculate that, okay, if we reduce discard mortality by 10 percent, then that means there are this many fish we are not killing that we could harvest or do something with.

The sensitivity data does seem critical, and I guess a question, Clay. If we decided to run this with just data through 2019, so that we could get it done sooner, we could come back in and do like an interim or an update that pulled in the MARMAP video survey, the fishery-independent index, into that relatively easily, I assume, and we've done that in some other cases where we did an interim assessment, where we had an index that we could use, and would you agree with that, do you think?

DR. PORCH: Well, I am trying to get a better sense of what you're recommending. Are you saying to basically update the assessment with one year of data for all the inputs or just update the assessment with only the index or --

DR. CRABTREE: I guess that's what I'm saying. It doesn't seem to me that the landings are going to be much different this year than they were last year. The ACL is about the same, and we may go over, but it's not a significant fraction without it, and the uncertainty around the discard estimates is so high that I'm sure they're bouncing around, but I don't know that that's a real change.

Now, if we saw a plunge in the MARMAP index that we use, or if we saw it skyrocket, that seems to be a more meaningful thing, but I don't know that we're going to gain a whole lot of insight by adding the 2020 landings data, because I don't think -- There's so much uncertainty in the landings that they're not all that informative, but I really think you need to find a way to get something in front of this council early next year, so that you can take some kind of action, assuming that we get some good news that allows these ACLs to go up, so that you could find a way to implement them and reopen this fishery.

DR. PORCH: The interim analysis that Roy was describing was something that was discussed with the Beaufort assessment staff some time ago, and that is a little heavier lift than the interim analyses that we're using in the Gulf of Mexico. It's a different approach, because it's actually updating the assessment model, and so the short answer is, yes, it could be done, and it probably figures into our SEDAR schedule now, because that's sort of like a mini update, and so it does take more time than what I have described for interim analyses, where you have your catch recommendation from one year, and then you are incrementing it upwards or downwards, depending on the trend of an index.

We haven't gotten to that stage in the South Atlantic, because we need to evaluate what age ranges are being caught by the trap survey and the video survey. Once we're satisfied that that's getting an adequate picture of whatever segment of the stock the fishery is exploiting, and so it varies with each species, then we conceivably could do an approach like that, but we just haven't gotten to that stage yet, and so the short answer is, yes, we could do what Roy suggested, and it would just come at some cost, in terms of the assessment load in the subsequent year.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. I appreciate all that.

DR. BELCHER: I kind of hate to walk down this road, because I'm going back to SSC minutes, and I'm still unclear. If we were to go the route of an update, the issues that we had and we discussed with the SSC aren't going away, and it's not that it wasn't best available science, and the model was fine, but the problem becomes relative to the uncertainty in the monitoring of the landings and the discards.

Rerunning an assessment, regardless of how you take that approach, that's still going to be part of the problem, and so, moving forward, how do we fix that part of it? I mean, you can come up with a new ABC, but, if we've still got all the slop in the monitoring, there's still going to be that chance of going over, regardless of what the ABC value is.

DR. CHRISTIANSEN: Just a quick question, and it's probably just to point out somewhat the obvious to those of us who actually do wet a line, but is there a question of the stock not showing an increase or not getting better? Is there anybody at this table that thinks that it's not? I mean, is that an -- I mean, are we worried about that?

DR. CRABTREE: I think everyone is in agreement that the stock is showing a lot of improvement, and I think the assessment reflects that too, and my recollection is it showed a significant improvement in this fishery, and I remember that it showed that we had more red snapper than we've had since the 1970s, but I am just guessing from memory, and so I don't think that's in question.

Coming to Carolyn's question, I mean, there is a lot of uncertainty about the removals, and a lot of that is because we've had all these changes in the MRIP survey that we're still transitioning from, and we've got the Florida data system that we're not sure how exactly that relates, and most of the mortality is discards, which that is probably one of the most uncertain numbers that we have, but it seems to me that those uncertainties aren't going anywhere, and they are there now, and they're going to be there when they run this, and I suspect they're going to still be there a few years from now, and so, to me, that becomes a question of how do we handle that and how do we deal with that, and that's more of kind of a policy issue for us to figure out.

The real uncertainties here aren't going anywhere, but what we do know is we have the fishery-independent index, and it's been going up, and I think we've got some ageing data and all that shows we're starting to see some older fish out there, but we're going to continue to have a lot of these uncertainties, and they are going to continue to pose challenges to us, and I just don't see that situation changing.

DR. BELCHER: To that point, again, it comes to me that you can't shortcut the assessment then. There's just no way that you can -- Again, I know we've changed our framework of how we work with things, whether it's a research track or operational or otherwise, but I think, when we start being unclear as to how we're entering in these kind of gray areas of it, it's not doing us any service.

I just don't feel that we can actually do an update and not be where we were when the SSC looked at this back in 2018, and so, to me, either go the route of a benchmark, and let's put everything in, and let's put everything back on the table and reassess where we're at, and try to see if we can do something better with that, or I just think we're not doing ourselves a service if we shortcut it and just try to get a new output.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree, Carolyn. Clay, did you have your hand up?

DR. PORCH: Thank you. Just to be clear, this is not a simple update, because we're actually looking at some pretty major sources of uncertainty in that selectivity study, and potentially, if we

have refined estimates of discard rates, no matter whether you have a benchmark or a research track, you're not going to fix the issue with the discard estimates. The only way to -- Or landings estimates. The only way you're going to fix that is either somebody ponies up to quadruple the sampling rate for MRIP, which is unlikely to happen, or there would have to be some sort of mandatory unenforced reporting or something, where you can really get the concise estimates you're looking for. I mean, that's just the bottom line.

Recreational fisheries are going to have a lot of uncertainty, and there is millions of people involved, and so it's expensive to monitor them well, and so, having said that, most of the things that we crossed off the list, while time consuming, are unlikely to be that informative. Some of the things, like the extending the chevron survey back in the past, that data has already been reviewed and rejected, and I doubt that decision will change, but you will have a lot of work kind of rehashing stuff, and I won't repeat everything I said, but a lot of the things, like the MyFishCount stuff, that really requires a look outside of an assessment, and we're not going to do a sort of quick review during the assessment process and then stick that data in somehow.

Like I said, I think the major source of uncertainty that would make a difference in the assessment is probably that selectivity information, and that one is one that we said we would have a data workshop focusing on that with external reviewers.

DR. CRABTREE: I mean, that is sort of the point that I wanted to make. One of the biggest uncertainties was the selectivities, and we worked with FWC and funded some research projects, and we have a lot more information and insight into that source of uncertainty, and so it's difficult for me to see how we can just sit where we are for another two or three years without incorporating that information into this and seeing where it leads us, and so my inclination is -- I don't really think we're shortcutting this, but I just think there are uncertainties that we have addressed, and then there are still some uncertainties that are going to be more of a challenge, but let's lay to rest some of the uncertainties that we can address and do the best we can. That just seems, to me, to be the best way to go.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Once again, Chip, if you wouldn't mind getting this to Kelly or something, so they can email it around to all of us, and I will go back to Luiz and talk about this and have some additional comments ready when we get to this discussion in Full Council. Does anybody else have anything else on red snapper, whether it's the scope of work or something else that they want to talk about right now?

MR. BELL: A question. So, typically, in June, MARMAP would give us a report, and I assume we would like that in June, related to -- Then, I guess, we just need to indicate it and let them know that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Myra or Chip, I don't know the timing of that update. Do we normally get that in June, and do you think that's something we could ask Marcel if he could give us an update? Okay. Good point, Mel. Any more discussion on this for right now? Chip, do you have more?

DR. COLLIER: Just to that point. That update is just the chevron trap, and it doesn't include the video part of the index that was used for red snapper, but it can give you some rough indication of what the stock is doing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: That sounds good.

MR. WOODWARD: Just a question, and I'm not familiar with that study, but is the results of the study indicating that the catches in the trap are -- There's a selectivity bias against larger, older fish being caught in that trap, and is that generally what's going on, and so the older fish have been underrepresented in the age structure historically?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that's part of the reason why FWC was doing a different study, and FWC has also got some money recently to do another study this year, and so, yes, and that's part of what I was bringing up, trying to figure out if some of that FWC information, which couldn't be brought in last time, shows something a little bit different than what the chevron trap study is showing, because you're right that that trap is biased. I mean, we could ask FWRI if they want to give us an update on some of their information, if we want to see that as well. Luiz has given us a presentation in the past on that, and so I could ask Luiz if that was something that they would have some data, something new, to show us. Anything else on red snapper? All right.

Thanks for that robust discussion on red snapper. I think it was helpful. I am going to look over here at this end of the table, and, Myra, I think that we're good to move into special management zones in North Carolina and South Carolina, for that amendment.

MS. BROUWER: What I'm going to do, real quick, is give you just a very quick orientation, a little PowerPoint, just to make sure everybody remembers what this is all about, and then we'll get into Attachment 3b, which is the decision document, and there is three attachments related to this amendment. The first one is just a summary of the scoping comments, and we did scoping for this amendment back in October, and the draft amendment is also included, and that's draft, and so, for those of you who are super interested, you can dig through it, but what I'm going to do is give you a quick run-through of what we've been up to with developing this amendment.

This is the amendment that would designate artificial reefs in the EEZ off of North and South Carolina as special management zones and implement fishing gear restrictions within those areas. North Carolina, recall that they requested designation for thirty artificial reef sites off of their coast in the EEZ, and South Carolina requested designation for four artificial reef sites.

You haven't talked about this amendment since September of last year. At that time, you approved inclusion of Actions 1 and 2 and approved the amendment for scoping, and you also selected Alternative 2 under Action 2, which pertains to the South Carolina SMZs, as the preferred. We conducted scoping, as I said, in October. We had hearings via webinar, and we also had three listening stations in North Carolina.

At this meeting, we're going to review those comments, and also modify things, as needed, and the Snapper Grouper AP also has given you some feedback in this amendment, and then you can consider approving it for public hearings at this meeting. We would hold those hearings in April or May of this year, and we would bring that back to you in June, where you would review those public hearing comments and consider the amendment for final approval.

At this meeting, as I said, review comments, review purpose and need, and we have some suggested edits to your purpose and need statement, review the actions and the range of alternatives, and, here again, we have some suggestions for you to consider, and then review the

little bit of analysis that we have put together and consider approving this for public hearings, and so it's pretty straightforward.

Let me pull up the decision document. As I said, that's Attachment 3b. I have already given you the background, and there is only the two actions in this amendment, and I have already gone over the expected timing, and so up on your screen is the purpose and need statement that you reviewed back in September, and then highlighted in yellow is what we are proposing that you consider to adopt

The proposed modification would read: The purpose is to designate artificial reef sites in the Exclusive Economic Zone off of North Carolina and South Carolina as special management zones and restrict fishing gear used within the areas. The need would be to reduce the adverse effects to snapper grouper species and increase fishing opportunities at the artificial reef sites.

It's a little bit more concise than the previous purpose and need. It doesn't get into too much details of what the fishing gear restrictions would be, and that's all fleshed out in the alternatives, and so I'm going to zoom a little bit more and let you guys look at that and decide whether you want to approve it or come back to it, and we can always do that, and I know sometimes you like to look at your actions and alternatives and then go back to your purpose and need, and so whatever you would like to do.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I am looking around, and it looks like people are glancing at the amendment.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I will be honest with you that I'm not a fan of this amendment, but I suspect my views won't prevail in the end, but, when I look at the need, I have a hard time believing this amendment is about reducing adverse effects to snapper grouper species. It seems what this is is a perceived conflict between recreational fishermen, who believe they paid for these reefs and don't want to see commercial fishing going on out there, and there may be some concerns, and I don't know, that have been expressed by the funding agencies about commercial fishing occurring on these areas, but I read through this, and like spearfishing has some negative impacts, and maybe it takes bigger fish, and I don't know if that's really a negative or not, but it maybe has fewer discards, and so it's just not that clear to me that it's doing it, and, as I look through this, that seems to be the weakest part of the amendment, really, is being clear about why we're doing this and what our purpose really is. Two, assessing is there really any biological impact from this, because, as I look at it, I would say, overall, I doubt there is any real biological impact by this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I had the same question about the words "increase fishing opportunities", since we're going to be limiting some gears and such, but I have a list, and maybe I should actually go to Shep first.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. You raised what I think is an excellent point, and I think we need to work on the record for exactly how this increases fishing opportunities, because, if you use one of the gear types that's not going to be allowed to fish there, obviously it's not increasing your opportunity.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that was my concern.

MR. POLAND: To Roy's comments, I mean, this isn't restricting commercial use of these reefs. This is just restricting gear. As far as the intent, and let me go back to the document, and increasing fishing opportunities, I mean, the rationale set out back in 1984, when this was included in the original Snapper Grouper FMP, was to restrict the use of certain types of gears that might affect abundance at these reef sites, and so gears that could come in and take out a large quantity of fish, thereby reducing access to other users of that reef, because, again, these are artificial reefs, and they're out there to attract fish and provide access to anglers as the states see fit, and so I know Mel has got some comments to that, too.

MR. BELL: Going back to the origin of this, I mean, when you look at how the plan was worded and how these things were allowed for, it was all about the restriction of certain gear types, which the folks who had the reefs permitted felt were not consistent with the purpose of the reef, and the problem, the original problem, that generated this was the use of black sea bass pots on our artificial reefs in South Carolina, where someone could come in with a pot and remove pretty much the entire black sea bass population in one afternoon on a small structure.

What that was doing was the purpose of the reef was to enhance fishing opportunities for anglers over an extended period of time, and, if one individual could come in with a very efficient gear type and remove all the fish fairly quickly, it was just -- It was basically we had kind of wasted our money, in terms of developing the reef for the intent of extending opportunity for a lot of anglers over a long period of time.

Then, later on, we realized that bang sticks were being used in a way that was extremely efficient on these relatively shallow, small structures, and it was the same thing. They were just -- The gear was just so efficient that you could remove all the fish relatively quickly, and so it was never really about -- NOAA GC made it clear to us, way back then, that this could not be about commercial versus recreational, and this had to be about the gear itself, and extremely efficient gears, and so that's why it became restriction of gears, and it was pots and any kind of traps, and it was bottom longlines, eventually bang sticks, trawls, whatever, and the idea was that these reefs were designed to be used by hook-and-line anglers, and as many hook-and-line anglers that could take advantage of that over an extended period of time, or a complete season.

It's always been about restricting the gears that were just deemed to be too efficient for these relatively small sites, and I agree with you that the wording of "increase fishing opportunities" -- There does seem to be a disconnect there, and so perhaps "increase" isn't the word, and it's "optimize" or "improve" or "extend" or something, but that is what you're trying to do, is you're trying to allow these sites that were built for the purpose of enhancing opportunities for hook-and-line anglers, and even spearfishermen, which were deemed to be kind of less efficient than the bang-sticking we saw going on, but it was to allow a lot of people to use the site over an extended period of time, rather than just a few people to come in with very efficient gears and fish the reefs out, and then it was of no value to anybody after that, and so that's the original intent.

It was never meant to be a commercial versus recreational thing, because commercial access is allowed, but it's just you have to use a particular gear type and abide by -- In some cases, abide by the recreational bag limit, and so that's the history, and that's all we're trying to do, and, again, all of South Carolina's artificial reefs in federal waters have been, over the years, approved as special management zones with the same restrictions, and our desire in here was to basically piggyback

with North Carolina, who was wanting to go down this road, and just add the only four remaining new reefs that we had, and so that's how we got where we are.

MR. GRIMES: Three quick things. As far as they can't be targeted recreationally, the restrictions can't be styled or structured around recreational versus commercial, and so -- I mean, I was in high school in the 1980s, and so I wasn't here to be the GC giving that advice, obviously, but we talked about this in my office, and I don't know what the basis for that was, but we allocate fishing privileges between recreational and commercial all the time, and, if we have a legitimate rationale for doing that and we can support that as consistent with the National Standards, we can do that in this instance.

As to the gear efficiency, I am with you, and I follow that up to the point where South Carolina has asked that all harvest would be limited to the recreational bag limit, and that's clearly not a gear restriction, and that's not gear based about the effectiveness of the gear, but it's just about limiting overall harvest, and the recreational guys are already limited to the recreational bag limit, and so it's about reducing the take of one sector, and I'm not saying you can't do that, but you can't say that that's based on concerns about gear, because it's not tied to gear, I wouldn't say.

I think what I understand to be the precedent for a lot of this recent actions by the Mid-Atlantic Council and New Jersey, and I have gone back and dug up the rules for what was done in New Jersey, and that was more directly tied to gear interactions. There were pots -- At least, in the rule itself, they talk about recreational fishermen have been complaining for decades about entangling their gear in commercial traps and lines on these, and so they weren't going to allow that gear there anymore, and that is, to me, a more simplistic and logical approach than some of what we seem to be talking about here. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you.

MR. GRINER: I was just going to say it may be helpful if we went and looked at the action and alternatives and we came back to this and kind of flesh those out and then circle back to this.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. First, I'm going to go to Dewey and then Tony and then Steve.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: I said that I wasn't going to say nothing, but, when it comes to the fishing season gear, my boat uses bandit gear fishing and puts four or five hooks on a rig, and I have seen recreational fishermen with four or five hooks on a rig with electric reels, and so I don't see bandit gear as being such an efficient gear compared to other things, and so I would hope that you wouldn't eliminate bandit gear in that classification, but I think this has got an ulterior motive besides the gear, and so I will leave it at that.

MR. DILERNIA: Shep referenced the actions in New Jersey, and I'm not sure, but we've visited this issue in the Mid-Atlantic, both in the States of Delaware and New Jersey, and a further complicating issue was -- I forget which state was told, but they were told that, unless they took action, they would risk losing their Sportfish Restoration funds, those funds that we use directly - Sportfish Restoration funds is money that comes through the tax on the sale of recreational fishing equipment, and that money then goes back to the states, and the states use it for creating sportfishing opportunities, and I forget which state it was, but the state was advised that, unless they took action to limit the type of commercial activities onboard these reefs, they would risk

losing future funding, because the funding was supporting both commercial and recreational activities. Thank you.

MR. POLAND: To Dewey's comment, in the division's original request letter, the intent was made clear that electric reels would be prohibited on these sites too, and so that was certainly the intent of the division. If that hasn't come through in the draft actions and alternatives, that's certainly something to be modified, but, going back to kind of building the case for this too, I mean, the division also went into some detail about how this would help us with management of endangered species, and this directly addresses some of the feedback that we've received from NOAA PRD as far as reducing derelict gear and excessive monofilament and such on our artificial reef sites, and this is the mechanism that the division has to try to mitigate that concern, and, I mean, that is a precedent, and that is a justification, that's been used not only by us, but by other states.

I know the State of Georgia, in their last programmatic consultation for their artificial reef program, they were asked how they intend to avoid entrapment of marine turtles and such, and their response, which I assume was accepted by NOAA PRD, was that they have taken the steps to restrict those gears or restrict any type of gear that might accumulate on artificial reef sites and interact with these protected species through the mechanism of the SMZs through the council, and so I feel like that justification is there, and it's sound, because it's been used relatively recently.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Mel, and then I'm going to just make a suggestion that maybe we do come back to this purpose and need after we talk about some of the actions, but, Mel, go ahead.

MR. BELL: I was just going to also agree, and we went through the same consultation process with the Corps and PRD, and the fact that all of our artificial reefs in federal waters were designated as special management zones, and we did prohibit these gear types, because there was concern about things on the reef or being caught on the reef that would perhaps entangle turtles, and, I mean, that was deemed of value, I think, by PRD in assessing whether or not to allow us to renew our permit, and so that was a selling point.

The point about limited to recreational harvest, I think the concept there is just everybody that's out there on the reef is just held to an equal -- Everybody out there using the gears that are allowed are on an equal playing field, and, in terms of the invested dollars in the reef and trying to get the maximum benefit out of this reef in a given year, or over its lifespan, just putting people that are there using the gears that we feel are reasonable gears for extraction rates on that reef, everybody is just on the same playing field, and, again, it doesn't exclude a commercial fisherman, because a commercial fisherman can certainly, using handheld hook-and-line, harvest fish if they wanted to within the -- But everybody is on an even playing field.

Of course, the funding stream that has developed our entire program is an entirely recreational funding stream, and that kind of touches on what Tony was talking about. I mean, part of ours is Saltwater Sportfish Restoration funds and we have never been told the same thing, and I know I was thinking -- I was thinking maybe it was Maryland, or I forget which state, but so that's the concept. We want access, accessibility, and we want the reef to be as productive, in terms of benefit to as many people, as possible over as long a period of time as possible, and so it just creates an even playing field, I guess.

DR. CRABTREE: Just a few things. One, and I will let the commercial reps on the council comment, but I doubt that commercial fishermen will go fish anywhere if they're restricted to the recreational bag limit, and I don't think they can make any money, and it's not profitable to do that.

Artificial reefs that have significant relief cause turtle takes, and so, if the concern is reducing takes, we wouldn't be putting these things out to begin with, and I think most of it has to do with monofilament line getting entangled on the reefs and then turtles getting tangled with that, and I suspect the vast majority of that is recreational gear.

Then Kim sent a paper out, earlier today, that was in the *Charleston Post and Courier*, "High Tech Advances in Fishing Gear Threaten Fish Stocks off of South Carolina and Worldwide", and, in it, it talks about a weekend warrior leaving Charleston with gear like that and all the outboard engines, all the gear and the efficiency of the fish locators and all the technology they have, yet we put these artificial reefs out, which basically concentrate fish and make it easier to catch the fish and result in quotas caught sooner and all these other issues.

That's an over kind of arching concern with it, but, if part of this is about the funding source and using sportfish restoration, then I think we ought to be upfront about that, and I don't, and I guess, Mel, you said that they hadn't raised that issue here, and I don't know if they have raised it with other states or with North Carolina, but, if that is part of what is driving some of this, we ought to deal with it. I mean, I used to be funded, when I worked for Florida, by Sportfish Restoration money, and I knew they do look at those kinds of things, and I guess that's all I'm going to say about any of it.

MR. POLAND: As far as North Carolina, the issue with funding sources and issues of Sportfish Restoration monies being in jeopardy, that has not been raised with us, and it wasn't really part of our internal discussions either.

MR. HEMILRIGHT: If it's restricted to a bag limit, then why is somebody going to go set pots there if they can only have a bag limit, and, not only that, but it probably ain't even enforceable, to a certain point, and, I mean, these reefs, I guess, are designated areas, and they are marked off, and so, if somebody goes there to set a sea bass pot, and he's got more than however many sea bass you're allowed, you're illegal right there. I mean, if they're restricted to -- It seems like they're restricted to the recreational harvest limit, and that serves the purpose of protecting your reefs.

MR. POLAND: I am going to suggest that we go on to the actions and alternatives, but, in North Carolina's original request, we did not request that harvest be restricted to the recreational bag limits outside of spearfishing, and so other types of gears, like hook-and-line, handline, and that kind of stuff, and still be able to harvest commercial quantities.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Steve. That was a good segue, and so one of the questions I have raised and one of the issues I have had with it is we have two different requests from the different states, and the IPT has recommended a range of alternatives so that we create the same alternatives for each state, and, if you're going to pick different alternatives off of each state, then you need different rationales, some fact-based reason for picking the different alternative.

I mean, we have a bunch of cases throughout Magnuson's history that says decisions can't just be pure political compromise, and so just saying, well, we're doing one way because that's what North Carolina wanted, or that's what South Carolina wanted, I think raises potential problems with regard to that, and so we ought to find some factual distinction for why we want to do different things in the different zones. Thank you.

MR. BELL: I think the language associated with restricted recreational harvest came from an amendment that dealt with spearfishing somehow, going back in time here, but I don't recall that being -- All we wanted to do, in adding these four sites, new sites, is to just make it match exactly what we had in place, whatever the total number was for the rest of our sites, and I think the language in there was actually related to being held to the recreational bag limit, and that was specifically applicable to spearfishing, and so we may need to just look at that, but I was reading it in here, and it's -- It says what it says, and I don't remember what amendment that was, but it was a separate action that actually -- It had something to do with spearfishing, but it allowed the use of spear guns, but you were restricted to the recreational bag limit.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Are we ready to move on through this amendment? Okay. I'm going to pass it back to Myra to move through the amendment, but we definitely need to come back, I think, to the purpose and need statement.

MS. BROUWER: Here we are at Action 1, and, as Shep explained, the IPT is recommending a new alternative for this action, which would essentially make the range of alternatives for both actions the same, and, as Shep suggested, this was done for consistency, and so we are also proposing a modification to the language of the action itself, just to clarify, and so Action 1 would read: Designate artificial reefs in the Exclusive Economic Zone off of North Carolina as special management zones.

The no action alternative had a lot of words, and so we pared it down a little bit, and you can see what the edits are. Basically, it would read that there are currently no artificial reef sites in the EEZ off of North Carolina that are designated as SMZs. The allowable gear for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan for the commercial and recreational sectors are handline, rod-and-reel, spear, bandit gear, powerhead, pot, and longline. The last two are commercial sector only. Do not implement new restrictions on fishing gear used to harvest snapper grouper species from artificial reefs in the EEZ off of North Carolina. It's pretty wordy, but it kind of lays out what the allowable gear is for the entire fishery.

Alternative 2, which is the new alternative, would designate thirty artificial reef sites in the EEZ off of North Carolina as SMZs. Within the SMZs, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod-and-reel, and spear. All harvest would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

Then Alternative 3 is similar, except the bit about harvest would only be allowed -- Well, with the same kind of gear, and then all harvest by spear would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit, and so we tried to make them consistent for both actions, and I think we were able to do that, and so you see all the edits. Did you want me to go through and talk about effects, or should we pause here?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Maybe let's pause here, and do you mind scrolling back up a little bit? What do we think about these IPT edits? Are we okay with this?

MR. POLAND: Alternative 3 is the only one that really captures what the Division of Marine Fisheries requested, and so I feel like Alternative 2 expands that a little bit broader than what we originally intended, and, really, we had some internal discussions about spearfishing gear, and we felt that, since spearfishing gear is highly selective, by limiting them to the recreational bag limit, it would really, again, speak to that whole idea of optimizing fishing opportunities under 3, because, again, they are artificial, and they're attractants, and so somebody with spear gear could definitely go down and certainly take quite a number of fish off of these artificial reefs and then reduce access to that resource to other users.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Then help me. What does that mean for the IPT edits? Do you only want to accept partial amounts of the IPT edits, or you don't want to add new Alternative 2? Before you answer, maybe we can go to Shep, and then we'll go to Tim.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. The IPT is not recommending new Alternative 2 as your preferred alternative. We are just providing that as an alternative, because, regardless of what the state discussed and had in mind, and, yes, Alternative 3 is the request from the state, but the council's choice is not limited just to the request from the state, and, since we have two actions that look at doing extremely similar things, we wanted to structure the alternative to show that the council decision is effectively the same in both instances, and so this is just a way of documenting our record, our decision-making process, in a way that will hopefully facilitate explaining and, if need be, defending the actions taken by the council.

MR. GRINER: I would like to make a motion to move the new Alternative 2 to Considered but Rejected.

MS. MCCAWLEY: It's not actually in the document yet, and it wasn't actually pulled in, and so it doesn't exist yet, and that's why I was suggesting, instead, maybe the motion is to accept the IPT's edits to the no action and Alternative 3, but maybe not accept the Alternative 2, and that's just a suggestion, since it's not actually technically in the document yet.

MR. GRINER: I understand. That's fine, too.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so I saw Shep's hand and then Steve and then Tony.

MR. POLAND: Tim was making a motion, and I was seconding it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay, and so then I will let Myra get the motion on the board. It's seconded by Steve. I am going to Shep.

MR. GRIMES: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me try to simplify or restate what I was trying to say earlier, and so, if it is a reasonable alternative that we are considering off of one state, not considering it or listing it in the same decision process off of another state -- Why is it reasonable in South Carolina, but not reasonable in North Carolina, and vice versa? I mean, I would strongly -- I think this is a very good idea on the part of the IPT, and I would encourage folks -- You want

to have the full range of options in front of you for your decision, and that doesn't say anything about which one you pick, and it's your decision to pick one, and you articulate the rationale of why, but I don't understand why you wouldn't want to document that full range for consideration. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I appreciate that, and so is that really the motion, the motion to move new Alternative 2 to the Considered but Rejected appendix, or is the motion to accept the IPT's edits except new Alternative 2? Think about what you want the motion to be, and I am going over to this side of the room, and so think about that.

MR. DILERNIA: I would like to go back to the point that I spoke to earlier about Sportfish Restoration funds, and I did some research on the council website, and I have some information that I think could be helpful to this discussion, if I could just read a little bit from the press release.

In June of 2011, Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife petitioned the council to designate five artificial reef sites as special management zones. The request noted that the Department of Fish and Wildlife had received complaints from hook-and-line anglers regarding the fouling of their fishing gear in commercial pots and lines on ocean reef sites for more than ten years. The Department of Fish and Wildlife also noted that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sportfishing Restoration Program had notified Fish and Wildlife that these gear conflicts are not consistent with the objectives of the Sportfishing Restoration Program, which provides funding for the building and maintenance of the artificial reefs. In order to comply with the goals of the Sportfishing Restoration Program, the Fish and Wildlife Service is requiring that state artificial reef programs be able to limit gear conflicts by state regulations in state waters by SMZs.

The council -- Here's the important part that I would like to get to. The council voted in February of 2013 to recommend that all five of Delaware's permitted artificial reefs be designated as SMZs year-round. The SMZ designation would restrict fishing to hook-and-line and spearfishing only. The council, and notice I did not say prohibit commercial fishing, and the council also recommended that each SMZ include a buffer zone of 500 yards surrounding each reef site to facilitate enforcement.

What the council recommended was that the gear on the reef be restricted and not that commercial fishing on the reef be restricted, and so, interpreting that, a commercial rod-and-reel fisherman could go onto the reef and fish not at the recreational possession limit, but at the commercial possession limit, which is whatever was in effect at the time, and so it restricts the gear type on the reef and not commercial versus recreational fishing. Thank you.

MR. CONKLIN: It seems to me like either ever SMZ in the South Atlantic is going to have to have the same regulations, gear restrictions, whatever, as South Carolina, and either North Carolina is going to have to get onboard with South Carolina and everybody think the same, or we're going to have to take South Carolina out of this and do a whole other one to try and justify it, or South Carolina will have to get onboard with North Carolina, and we'll have to change everything, and so that's what I am hearing, and that's the only way that I see forward.

MR. BELL: I think I know how to de-conflict this. The new language in Action 1 and the new language in Action 2 were designed to provide -- You've got three alternatives there, and they match up, right, and so North Carolina has got three, we've got three, and they match up.

Alternative 2 was added, under Action 1, to match something that was existing in our original draft, and Alternative 3 was added under Action 2 to match North Carolina's, and so what you have, as it exists right now, with the new language, proposed language, added is something that actually works for NEPA, in terms of the numbers and matching alternatives.

All we have to do is accept this, and then, as Steve said, they really, I think, were leaning towards Alternative 3, or that was the original intent, and so then you just wouldn't pick -- We would have the new alternative would be in there, but you wouldn't pick that as your preferred, or we would pick that as a preferred, and then, going to ours, the new alternative, I am pretty certain, actually matches the language of our pre-existing twenty-eight sites, and that's the one that I would recommend, and that would match yours, and so that's how we would get there. If we accept the proposed language changes, it would all match up, and we would select one for Action 1 and one for Action 1, and they would match, and, boom, we're done. It all matches up.

MR. GRINER: That's what the difference between accepting the edits and then turning around and making a motion to move Alternative 2 to the Considered but Rejected and then turn around and move the original preferred Alternative 2 under Action 2 to Considered but Rejected, and then you just end up back where you were, and then you've got a new Alternative 3 that you can select as your preferred, and then, under Action, you've got Alternative 3 that would be there, and then you've gotten rid of -- Then they are perfectly equal. They are exactly the same alternative.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I am going to Steve, and then we're going to take a break.

MR. POLAND: Thank you. **I am going to make a motion to modify -- To accept the IPT's suggested edits for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 and then select Alternative 3 as the preferred. That's a substitute motion. Basically, this would include Alternative 2 in the document as a reasonable alternative, and then we select Alternative 3 as the preferred under Action 1.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We have a motion on the table. Do I have a second? Seconded by Mel. We're going to take a break now. We're not going to vote on this motion. We're going to leave this motion on the table, and we're going to take a break.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

MS. MCCAWLEY: I believe that we have a motion on the board. **The motion is -- Actually, it's a substitute motion to accept the IPT's edits to Alternatives 1 through 3 and select Alternative 3 as preferred under Action 1.** This is a substitute motion. If this motion passes, it will become the main motion, and then we'll have to vote on the main motion. All right. Any more discussion on the substitute motion? **Is there any objection to the substitute motion? The substitute motion passes, and it now becomes the main motion.**

We need to vote again. First, is there any more discussion on what is now the main motion? **Is there any objection to this main motion that will accept that IPT's edits to Alternatives 1 through 3 and select Alternative 3 as the preferred under Action 1? No objections, and the motion passes.**

MS. BROUWER: In terms of the effects analysis, we have very limited information, and the analysis is of a qualitative nature, and we have -- This is basically just a summary of what's

included in the amendment, but there's not a whole lot more in the amendment. There are no surveys or information that would allow us to do a more in-depth analysis, and so, basically, we expect that Alternatives 2 and 3 would impart biological benefits to snapper stocks relative to the no action, since they would prohibit the use of fishing gear that has a high potential to adversely affect resident communities of snapper grouper species. Between the two, Alternative 2 is going to be more restrictive than Alternative 3, and so then that would have the greatest biological benefit of the alternative being considered.

As we mentioned earlier, spearfishing has been shown to sometimes disproportionately remove large individuals from an area, which can have negative biological effects, especially among species like grouper and hogfish that there is alteration in the sex ratio and social structure. Also, spearfishing, however, is a very highly-selective kind of gear, and so that can have positive effects to the biological environment, by resulting in less bycatch.

Another thing that you should be aware of is artificial reefs, under your current management, constitute essential fish habitat, and EFH habitat areas of particular concern, and so they would be under a higher level of protection with that designation, and that, of course, would impart positive biological effects.

In terms of economic effects, and I should also say these are going to be the same for both actions, and so I don't have to go over them again for Action 2, and so, under no action, in the short term, commercial vessels would have the opportunity to generate the highest landings, and thus the highest commercial fishing revenues, from these sites, among the alternatives considered, and there may be long-term costs imposed, if harvesting commercial quantities of snapper grouper species is going to lead to localized depletion of these species.

Alternative 2, as we have already stated, may lead to reduced commercial revenue generated from the sites, or it could potentially results in increased trip costs, if vessels are going to have to be going further to areas where they can utilize their gear. Alternative 3 would have similar economic effects to Alternative 2, but be less restrictive, and so Alternative 2 would have the highest potential cost for the commercial sector and highest potential benefit for the recreational sector, followed by Alternative 3 and Alternative 1.

Then, in terms of social effects, of course, they are very tied to biological benefits and whatever other changes those bring about to the resource, and, also, there is discussion there in terms of there would be an assumption, of course, that there would be compliance with the regulations and some level of enforcement that would render these regulations effective. If those are lacking, the SMZs may not generate the expected biological benefits, which would negatively affect fishermen and communities.

There are also -- I am going to go over these bullets here, and these are IPT recommendations and comments, and we have already touched on some of them, but I just want to make sure that I bring these to your attention. As I have just said, the resolution of what we have available, in terms of data, is not going to be able to inform as to the levels of fishing that are occurring at these sites. We talked about how the document should include as much information as possible that would allow us to provide some characterization of each site, and there are -- There is high-relief -- What I am trying to say? There is really good maps of the sites in North Carolina, and there is a guide

that South Carolina has, and these resources are available online, and so we can certainly include that information via hyperlink in the document, to make sure all that information is captured.

The IPT discussed a little bit about having specific alternatives for each site, and we decided -- I guess we talked that, if the record supports that there is only two reasonable alternatives to the status quo for each of the actions, then it's okay to proceed the way we are proceeding. We have already talked about our recommendation to add an alternative under each action, so that the range is the same for both actions.

Of course, there can be different preferreds under each action, and then, finally, the IPT is suggesting using an evaluation team, instead of the monitoring team, which is what's mentioned in the original process that was established through the Snapper Grouper FMP for designating SMZs, and there was some confusion there as to what monitoring really was, and is this team expected to conduct any kind of monitoring, and the answer, of course, is no, that this team, which originally consisted of a staff each from the Science Center, the Regional Office, and the council, are there mainly to kind of provide a little bit more of an evaluation as to the criteria that are included in the process to designate SMZs, and so we're suggesting -- There was a suggestion that the system management plan workgroup could serve as the evaluation team, if that's what you would like.

I am going to keep going, unless you stop me, and the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel did get a very short briefing on this at the time they met in October, and so you guys hadn't -- We hadn't had any scoping meetings or anything at the time, and there were some comments that are here, and they talked about research and fisheries enhancement programs that have been mostly funded by the North Carolina recreational fishing license, due to state budget cuts, and, in fairness, artificial reefs should then favor recreational angling, by restricting very efficient commercial gear.

There's a couple of bullets about the same topic, and there was one member from North Carolina that was saying that the proposed gear restrictions would likely not directly affect commercial fishermen in the southern portion of North Carolina, since the proposed sites off of there are close to shore. One person inquired as to how enforcement would address a situation in which a commercial vessel, one with bandit gear, would stop to fish perhaps at an artificial reef with rod-and-reel during commercial trips, and this is just stuff that folks are wondering how it's going to be handled.

The AP also inquired as to whether there would be buffer zones specified around the reefs as part of the SMZ designation, and that is an option that's available to states, and then one AP member from Florida pointed out that North Carolina does not have a joint enforcement agreement with NOAA Fisheries, like the rest of the South Atlantic states, and that could potentially limit enforcement off of North Carolina. Then, finally, they suggested that we include a definition of the various types of gear in the document, and so we have yet to put that in there.

The AP approved a motion with respect to Action 1, which is the one that pertains to North Carolina, and they suggested that the council proceed with designating the thirty artificial reefs within the EEZ off of North Carolina as SMZs with the gear restrictions that have been requested, and so limiting spearfishing harvest to the recreational bag limit.

Then I have a summary of the public comments. As I mentioned, there were three listening stations over three days in October, and we didn't get a whole lot of attendance, and you can see there, and I'm not going to go through it, but there were just a handful of folks that showed up. There were a total of four comments that were provided during the webinar and listening stations, and six members of the public attended the webinars.

One commenter had no objection to the designation, and thought it would be useful, and another person said artificial reefs off of North Carolina were built with recreational funding, and it would be helpful to that sector to limit commercial gear on the artificial reefs. One commenter maintained that the artificial reefs are owned by the federal government, and the law which he cited was the National Fishery Enhancement Act of 1984. That requires that the reefs facilitate utilization of the reefs by both sectors, and then, finally, one commercial fisherman stated that he does not utilize any artificial reefs, and so the designation would not affect him, and that is what we obtained from the public, and I am going to stop right here.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Myra. Any questions or comments?

MR. POLAND: I had one question for GC. The gentleman that made the comments referencing the National Fisheries Enhancement Act of 1984, I think he made the same comment on two of the webinars, and he even sent me individual comments on that, and I wanted to just kind of get a sense, from NOAA GC, what that means. Is there any concern there with this moving forward?

MR. GRIMES: Not really, and so I don't have all of this in front of me, and I'm not prepared to go over it, but I did talk to Myra, and she asked about it when we got the comment in, and I looked up the act, and the act is largely focused, I think, towards the Army Corps of Engineers, in permitting and siting of offshore artificial reefs, but it had some language in there about the Secretary of Commerce and developing a plan for all this, and the stuff that was directed to utilizing these reefs was really focused towards the plan, and it clearly doesn't have any direct mechanism making it applicable to fishing regulations, and so not that I'm trying to say it's totally irrelevant, but it didn't seem to provide guidance or any kind of specific requirement for this council, or any council, in deciding about fishing regulations.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Any more questions or comments? Back to you, Myra.

MS. BROUWER: I guess we can move on to Action 2, since you've already selected the preferred alternative for Action 1, and so I'm going to go ahead and scroll down here, and, again, it's the same sort of thing. We have made the three alternatives similar, for comparison, for NEPA purposes, and you had already selected Alternative 2 as your preferred under this action.

MR. BELL: I would move that we adopt the IPT's recommended wording changes for Action 2 and leave preferred Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so we have a motion that Myra is getting up there, and it's seconded by Steve, and so Myra will get it up there, and then we'll talk about it.

MR. GRIMES: While she is typing, I would just like to state one thing. It's actually called National Fishing Enhancement Act and not "Fishery". If you can't find it, that's why. Thank you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you. All right, and so we have a motion here to accept suggested edits to Action 2 in Alternatives 1 through 3 and maintain Alternative 2 as preferred. The motion was seconded, and is there discussion?

MR. BELL: What this would do is basically is basically bring in a comparison with Action 1, and we'll have three actions, and they will be the same, and so you've got your three actions there -- Excuse me. Three alternatives in each action, leaving Alternative 2 as preferred, because that is the actual wording that exists, in terms of the restrictions on our existing SMZ artificial reefs, and so we would not want to create four new reefs with a different restriction than the twenty-eight existing ones, and so Preferred Alternative 2, for us, would basically just be -- Which was our intent, adding four new sites, and these are new reefs that were built since the last time we added some, and this would be the third time, I think, that we have added SMZs to the mix, but Preferred Alternative 2 would be for consistency with existing wording off of South Carolina.

If that doesn't match exactly what North Carolina might have, in starting out this way, I would say that Georgia has SMZ reefs, and we have SMZ reefs, and I think Florida has some, and I'm not sure, but they don't necessarily match from state to state exactly, but this would be necessary for us, to match what we already have in place, and we would want all of ours off of South Carolina to be exactly the same.

In terms of enforceability, we do have a JEA agreement, and our officers do use our artificial reef sites as part of their sort of patrol patterns, and they're used to being out there, and they're used to enforcing what's on the books now, and it would be perfectly consistent for us, and, again, the only -- We're just adding four new sites, and we have had sites in existence since 1985, or however long that is, and we've not had any issues with -- These are not sites that commercial fishermen would want to go to anyway. They would tell you that it's not worth their time or effort, in terms of the commercial thing, but it is -- These are the gear restrictions we have on the current sites, and we want to match that, and so that's why we selected Preferred Alternative 2.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thank you, Mel. Any more discussion? **Is there any objection to this motion? Seeing none, that motion is approved.**

MS. BROUWER: In terms of the effects analysis, it's very similar to what I just went over, and the AP did not have any comments that were specific to the proposed SMZs off of South Carolina, and we received no public comments regarding this action during the scoping hearings. At this point, I think, if you would like, we could go back to the purpose and need and finish those modifications, and then the next step would be for you all to consider approving this for public hearings.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. There is the purpose and need statement that we were talking about earlier. Do we want to make some changes? Mel suggested the words "optimize fishing opportunities", instead of "increase fishing opportunities", and what do folks think about this?

MR. BELL: By just suggesting "optimize", I realize this isn't -- The idea is for the purpose of the reef to be there for as many people to take advantage of it and use it as possible, and that's what you're doing, and, if you allow gear types that are just extremely efficient to come in, then you can't use the reef, or as many people can't enjoy the reef or take advantage of it, and so, if there's

a better word than “optimize”, or a better way to -- Well, it’s all about enhance anyway, and you could use “enhance”.

MR. POLAND: I mean, I feel like any synonym of “optimize” or “maximize” would be sufficient there.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. What do people think?

MR. GRIMES: Well, I like “optimize” better than “increase”, and I think it’s better than “maximize”, because that has the same problem as “increase” does.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right, and so then I think we need a motion to approve these edits.

MR. BELL: Do you want me to read that specifically or just make a motion to approve the edits?

MS. MCCAWLEY: You can just make a motion to approve the edits, as modified.

MR. BELL: **I would move that we approve the edits, as modified, to the purpose and need.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: It’s seconded by Steve. Any more discussion on the purpose and need? **Any objection to these modifications to the purpose and need? Seeing none, that motion is approved.** Would someone like to make a motion to approve this amendment for public hearings?

MR. BELL: **Madam Chair, I move that we approve this Amendment 34 for public hearings.**

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. It’s seconded by Chris. Any more discussion? **Any objection? That motion is approved.**

I think next up is looking at the topics for the AP meeting. Myra has the list of topics on the board for the upcoming April Snapper Grouper AP meeting, and remember we’ve been trying to give the AP some specific direction on what we need feedback on, and so, in looking at that list, and let me see which bullet it is, the fourth bullet down, the vision blueprint, I feel like they already talked about that, and I don’t know that that needs to be on the list. I don’t know if we need feedback on that. I see they’re going to talk about the gag fishery performance report, and so is the meeting three days, or two-and-a-half days? How long is the meeting?

MS. BROUWER: The meeting would start at 1:30 on a Wednesday and conclude by noon on Friday, and so it’s really two full days.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. I see that Myra has put some estimated times for the amount of time the discussion would take up there, and then, in addition, and so there’s some presentations down there at the bottom, HMS, ecosystem status report, electronic reporting requirement for for-hire vessels, and then there were some additional topics submitted by the AP Chair and the Vice Chair, some of which I think would be lengthy discussions.

I don’t know if we can fit maybe one or two of these into this meeting, and some of these I still have questions about, like the bottom one, the discussion on gear efficiency and classifying certain gear as commercial for deepwater species. I’m really not sure what the ask is here, and so I’m

wondering if maybe it could be clarified by the AP at the meeting, that maybe they could talk about it under Other Business, to flesh out exactly what the request would be. My other question would be on safe handling of protected resources. Is this like turtles and sawfish? I am not sure what this is either, and do you know, Myra?

MS. BROUWER: I believe they just wanted maybe an update on what's changed, but my recollection is that they commented when Amendment 42 was being developed, and perhaps it's just a question of giving them an update. I normally give an update at the beginning of the meeting for the various amendments, and so it could be handled that way, and I'm not quite sure if they wanted something more in-depth.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. That sounds good.

MR. BELL: Uncertainty in data and science, that's kind of a wide-open topic, and was that kind of going back to MRIP as well or --

MS. MCCAWLEY: The topics on uncertainty in data and science, and the MRIP topic, I don't know, and, I mean, I feel like these are MREP topics, and I just am a little -- I don't know what the purpose of having the AP discuss them is going to get us. The update on recent regulatory changes, did you mean to put that one on safe handling and protected resources and not enforcement?

I think I would also ask, on the enforcement one, just for them to clarify what it is they're looking for, and so maybe, for some of these topics, the Chair and Vice Chair could seek some clarification, maybe under Other Business, for what the AP would like to see in the future, because, yes, I see the topics, and I'm not sure what they are needing or wanting, and so it's hard for us to comment on or know who all to bring in to give them presentations, and so I don't know if you want to add anything here, Myra, or if you think they have enough on the top part of this for this two days' worth of meetings.

MS. BROUWER: Well, I guess what just occurred to me is one thing we could do is allow the AP to have a short discussion, perhaps at the end of their meeting, during which they can talk about potential topics that they would like to see, and, that way, you would have actual rationale or discussion on the record, and so we could handle it that way. As far as what we put together up here, I wasn't sure what your intent is, in terms of getting feedback from the AP for adding, removing, or reclassifying species as ecosystem components, and I'm not sure if it's premature to bring that to the AP, and so I had a question about that.

Then the presentations, I put question-marks on all of them, because the electronic reporting requirements that just are coming online in September, they may want a refresher, but, then again, I'm not sure if the AP meeting is the appropriate time to do that, and so, hence, the question-mark, and then I know the AP -- At every meeting, the topic of sharks comes up, and so I thought that might be something that they would really appreciate, is getting the presentation that we're going to get this week on shark depredation, and then Todd Kellison had requested some time during the AP meeting to talk about the ecosystem status report, and I know that the Habitat AP already got that, and so, again, a question for you all of do you want your Snapper Grouper AP to also -- I don't know if Todd actually wants specific feedback from the AP for that report.

MS. MCCAWLEY: To try to answer some of your questions, the adding, removing, and reclassifying species, it sounds like that might be a little bit premature for their April meeting, that maybe that actually goes to their fall meeting. Then, on the presentations, I like the idea of the HMS presentation and the Todd Kellison presentation, but I am wondering if that electronic reporting -- Is it premature? I mean, I'm just not sure if this is just a reminder.

MR. BELL: They have already had the technical explanation of how it works, and so like, yesterday, we had the briefing, and it's kind of like the classroom thing, but, if they've already had that, then I don't know that that would help them any.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Maybe that one is just letting them ask questions about the timing and other things about outreach or other ideas like that, and I don't think they need to go over all that again, I don't think.

MR. DEVICTOR: On the for-hire reporting, hopefully we'll be conducting some outreach sessions also up in that area, and so they could go attend those, if they want.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Love that. Okay. Any other things that we're wanting the AP to talk about or look into? Once again, their meeting is April.

MR. BELL: Really, Regulatory Amendment 34 is the only thing kind of in the queue, where we would really -- There's nothing else that -- Okay. That's what -- The first thing you want to look at is what do they need to weigh-in on, related to where we are, our schedule of working through amendments, but, if that's it, that's it.

MR. CONKLIN: Is this going to fill up their two days, do you think? I think I heard some chatter about trying to keep them busy, and they are coming a long ways, and I didn't know if maybe there was like some of that stuff at the bottom of our Executive Finance schedule that we're not working on, but we might want them to weigh-in on, like some stuff that -- I don't know. I'm not sure how many commercial guys are on there right now, but it sure would be nice to have a little bit help with the almaco assessment, separating the almaco out of the jacks complex, and then the electronic commercial reporting, which is 2020, and we're dealing more with that. Then there's a couple other things that I didn't know if --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Is there another fishery performance report they could work on, other than just gag?

MS. BROUWER: I think they would be scheduled to do I believe snowy grouper in the fall, and, after that, I think they were just going to work on an update, maybe, for black sea bass, and I'm trying to -- It's kind of hard to keep up with the timing of stock assessments.

MR. POLAND: That was going to be my suggestion, if there was another fishery performance report that we could task them with, because I agree with Chris that this is kind of stretching it for two days.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I agree, and so maybe what I heard was maybe they could do the snowy grouper fishery performance report, and then the other thing that Chris mentioned -- So it sounds like maybe going over -- I know how you give them updates on what the council is working on,

and so maybe going over the priorities that we talk about at Executive Finance, maybe reviewing that with them and show them what the timing of the various amendments is, and I feel like they ask about that anyway, and so I think going over that priority Excel list would be good. Chris, did you have another idea, and then Steve.

MR. CONKLIN: I mean, I would be interested in polling them, like Brian does us, and give them a homework assignment and see how they rank the workload of things pertaining to snapper grouper compared to what we do, because there's a lot of stuff on there that --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that's true, and I feel like they keep asking about the recreational reporting and the permits, state permit or federal permit, and I feel like they keep asking for that to come to the top, and so talking to them about ranking those priorities.

MR. POLAND: I was just going to say, as far as the fishery performance reports, instead of snowy grouper, or in addition, and it just really depends, but is there another species, maybe one of our unassessed species, that they've never done a fishery performance report for that we feel like we would be interested in hearing, and I don't have one right now in the front of my mind, but I don't know which species we have fishery performance reports for in snapper grouper, off the top of my head.

MS. BROUWER: We have done quite a few of them, but you're right that it's for all the assessed species, because the FPRs are kind of usually tied to the SEDAR schedule. Another option is if you wanted to maybe ask them to comment on the six species that the SSC has recommended for ecosystem component designation, and we could get maybe some feedback from the AP on those.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I like that idea.

MR. BELL: If we think we're maxed out, that's great, and I was just going back to their additional topics, and I know that like you mentioned the MRIP thing, and that could be extremely long, and I don't know who would do this, but, I mean, have they ever had sort of everything you wanted to know about MRIP but were afraid to ask in two hours, and I think they need two hours, but, if you don't, we're fine, because we spent two-and-a-half days learning about it.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Right. Well, I think, also, I feel like they bring up a lot of things during Other Business, and so trying to flesh out what they would like to do and learn about at future meetings in Other Business could take some time.

MR. CONKLIN: I would be interested to get some feedback, and I'm not sure when it goes into effect, on the charter boat reporting and seeing where they are, the operators and where they are with that, and how it's going. I don't know if that pertains specifically to the Snapper Grouper -- What AP we would tackle that with, but --

MS. BROUWER: Sorry, Chris, but I think I missed what you said. Are you talking about the for-hire?

MR. CONKLIN: I am looking at you and not talking into the microphone, and I apologize. I was just wondering if we could get some feedback from them on the charter boat electronic reporting and how they're doing with that, or when do they do that?

MS. MCCAWLEY: So maybe their fall meeting?

MR. CONKLIN: Yes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Good call. All right. Anything else for the AP? I feel like we've filled up their time now. All right.

MS. RHODES: We're just going to give you a brief overview of what's going on in the realm of the best practices campaign, just a little bit informal, just staff letting you know what's been going on and what's going to be coming up shortly. It's going to be pretty busy, and we've got a lot of exciting things on the table, and we just wanted to make sure that you were all briefed on them and, if you wanted additional information about how you could participate, just reach out to me and the rest of the ABO team, and that's what we call ourselves, Always Be Outreaching.

We're a pretty deep team, and we're really lucky, here at the South Atlantic Council, because we have Allie Iberle, BeBe Harrison, Julia Byrd, and myself, and we all work together as part of the outreach team, but we're even more lucky that we have tech staff who are super eager to be a part of this, and so it's not just one group of individuals who are out there reaching out to folks and communicating, but we've got a lot of depth, and I will show you some examples of that, featuring Christina and Spud putting on quite a show at the Miami Boat Show.

I just wanted to give you an update, and so what we've been doing is we're still actively promoting the best practices tutorial that was put together with the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, and that is wildly popular, and it seems to be performing well with people, and we're rather proud of it ourselves and to have it posted on our website.

Then I actually was fortunate enough to go out with the Nature Conservancy in Georgia to St. Marys, to fish with Captain Warren Huttman, and they were working on a best practices article, and they needed some photographic support, and so we were lucky enough to get some additional imagery, which we desperately needed, and we don't really have that many barotrauma images, and so we've added to that archive, so that we can show people what exactly we're talking about, whether it be the stomach protruding from the mouth or anal prolapse, and we're getting more photographs of that, so we can display it to people and engage more frequently.

Then, following that, or, actually, before that, BeBe Harrison has been actively involved in not only promoting MyFishCount, but also spreading the word about best fishing practices, and she followed the George Poveromo series around to a couple of different states, and she was in Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina, and I believe there might have been one in Georgia as well, and she was actively there, and she had a booth set up, and she was participating and spreading the word about what's going on out of our shop, and so that has been really helpful to us. George Poveromo has a major following, both at these in-person events, but also on television, and so, the more that we can engage these people, that's even better.

Just to give you a little show of what Christina and Spud were up to, and so this is our Facebook page, in case you haven't been on it recently, and this came out recently, and so we've been sharing lots of articles that are promoting research about these different best practices barotrauma-related topics.

I won't make you guys watch the whole thing, but I definitely encourage you to go watch it yourselves, and Christina puts on a good show, and they do a really, really good job, and this one is focusing on the fishery conservation apps that we have, MyFishCount, SAFMC Release, and then Christina and Spud were also participating and engaging folks about best practices and descending devices.

This is a really incredible opportunity for us, and Spud is so deeply involved in all of this, and with Yamaha in particular, that we've been able to coordinate a lot of these efforts, with his help, and that's been hugely beneficial to all of us, and so we're spreading the word, and it's happening, which is really exciting, and it's happening organically, which is nice too, and we're not having to pay additional money for sending out advertisements relative to this, and this is all happening based on what you guys are doing, what our staff is doing, and what members of the community are doing, which is really nice.

In addition to that, there has been quite an impressive push coming out of south Florida, and this is another person who carries a lot of clout. That is Nick Stanczyk. For those of you that don't know him, he's quite an impressive swordfish angler, and he's based out of Bud 'n Mary's Marina, and he has a rather prolific following, as you can see, and this video has reached over 30,000 individuals, something that we're likely not going to be able to do naturally from the South Atlantic Council's social media accounts, and they are showing a large snowy grouper being caught out of season, and they use a descending device and show people how it can properly be used to descend a fish, and so lots of cool things going on.

We had nothing to do with this, and it just came about, and so the movement is happening around us, which is really nice to see, and I expect that that's going to continue to happen from these influencer types, the people who actually have the clout in the community that, oftentimes, as staff, we don't really necessarily have, and we don't have that pull.

Back to some of the things that we've got going on, we've got some really cool opportunities that are coming up, one courtesy of Anna's suggestion, and so we have worked out a situation with Fly Navarro, who also has a profound following on social media accounts, and we are going to do a video series with him highlighting best fishing practices and the different kinds of tools that are readily available for people, and so that's actually going to start happening in late May, and we're going to have him up in Charleston and go on a fishing trip.

Then the Nature Conservancy is working on some learning exchanges focusing on the Grays Reef area, but they are also going to be focusing quite a bit on barotrauma and best practices and all the different kinds of mitigation tools that are available to people and what we can do together to try to promote these best practices on the water.

In addition to that, the Nature Conservancy is also putting on their own fishing trip with the South Carolina DNR, and they're going to be going out and bringing some anglers with them to show them how to use these descending devices and putting together more of this visual imagery for all of us to be able to use, and so there's a lot of coordinated efforts going on between South Carolina DNR, the Nature Conservancy, our office, lots of different folks, Georgia DNR, and it's exciting, because we're all working together to promote the same unified message on these issues.

Then, shortly after that, we'll have ICAST, and our focus is going to be on best fishing practices, as well as MyFishCount, and we're going to have two booths, and so we're definitely going to be pushing all those messages out to the public there and to those tackle manufacturers, tackle shops, and any of the recreational anglers who are present for that. Then we also are going to have our Information & Education Advisory Panel really heavily involved in some of the review of this campaign, putting us in touch with other influencers, other people who have the clout in the community, and so I really just wanted to give you a fast, motor-mouth update on this, and, if you have any suggestions for other people that we need to reach out, just let me know, and, if you have any questions, I am happy to answer them now.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Cameron. Does anyone have any questions or comments? Thanks for that update. Do we have any other business to come before the Snapper Grouper Committee? All right. Then we're going to adjourn the Snapper Grouper Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 4, 2020.)

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Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By:
Amanda Thomas
April 9, 2020

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