

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
MACKEREL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Omni Hotel Corpus Christi, Texas

August 20, 2018

**VOTING MEMBERS**

Tom Frazer.....Florida  
Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama  
Dale Diaz.....Mississippi  
Martha Guyas (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida  
Robin Riechers.....Texas  
John Sanchez.....Florida  
Andy Strelcheck (designee for Roy Crabtree).....NMFS

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

Susan Boggs.....Alabama  
Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi  
Doug Boyd.....Texas  
Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC  
Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana  
Phil Dyskow.....Florida  
Paul Mickle (designee for Joe Spraggins).....Mississippi  
Chris Schieble (designee for Patrick Banks).....Louisiana  
Greg Stunz.....Texas  
Lt Mark Zanowicz.....USCG

**STAFF**

Steven Atran.....Acting Deputy Director  
Zeenatul Basher.....Coral and Habitat Biologist  
John Froeschke.....Fishery Biologist-Statistician  
Morgan Kilgour.....Fishery Biologist  
Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel  
Jessica Matos.....Administrative Assistant  
Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer  
Ryan Rindone.....Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison  
Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager  
Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

**OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

LuiZ Barbieri.....SSC  
Anna Beckwith.....SAFMC  
Eric Brazer.....Shareholders Alliance  
James Bruce.....Magnolia, MS  
Nikki Burch.....Magnolia, MS  
Rick Burris.....MDMR

1 Les Casterline.....TPWD  
2 Susan Gerhart.....NMFS  
3 Kelsey Gibson.....TX  
4 Ken Haddad.....ASA, FL  
5 Sepp Hankebo.....EDF  
6 Chad Hanson.....Pew  
7 Scott Hickman.....Galveston, TX  
8 Peter Hood.....NMFS  
9 Alison Johnson.....Oceana, FL  
10 Lawrence Marino.....LA  
11 Laura Picariello.....Texas Sea Grant  
12 Clay Porch.....SEFSC  
13 Dale Rankin.....Island Moon Newspaper, TX  
14 George Schmahl.....Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary  
15 Matt Streich.....TX

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1  
2  
3 Table of Contents.....3  
4  
5 Table of Motions.....4  
6  
7 Adoption of Agenda and Approval of Minutes.....5  
8  
9 Action Guide and Next Steps.....5  
10  
11 CMP Landings Update.....5  
12  
13 Update of Cobia CPUE Indices and SSC Recommendations.....7  
14  
15 Options: CMP Framework Amendment 7: Modifications to Gulf Cobia  
16 Size and Possession Limits.....16  
17  
18 Adjournment.....31  
19  
20 - - -  
21

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7

TABLE OF MOTIONS

PAGE 30: Motion in Action 1 to select Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 31.

- - -

1 The Mackerel Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened at the Omni Hotel, Corpus Christi,  
3 Texas, Monday afternoon, August 20, 2018, and was called to  
4 order by Chairman Tom Frazer.

5  
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
7 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**  
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN TOM FRAZER:** The first agenda item, I guess, is  
11 Adoption of the Agenda, and so has everybody had a chance to  
12 peek at it? If so, can I get a motion to adopt the agenda?  
13 John Sanchez. Can I get a second for that? Second by Martha  
14 Guyas. Thank you. All right.

15  
16 The next agenda item is Approval of the Minutes, and same thing.  
17 Any objections to the minutes? Can I get a motion to approve  
18 them? Motion by John Sanchez and second by Martha Guyas. All  
19 right. The next agenda item is the Action Item and Next Steps,  
20 and Mr. Ryan Rindone is going to lead us through that.

21  
22 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, sir. We have three items on the  
23 agenda for you guys today. We have an update of the coastal  
24 migratory pelagic species landings, and then we have an update  
25 of the cobia catch per unit effort indices and what the SSC's  
26 recommendations were pertaining to those, and then we have CMP  
27 Framework Amendment 7, which looks at Gulf migratory group cobia  
28 size and possession limits, and we have those size limit and  
29 possession limit analyses for you guys to review.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** All right, and so I guess we'll work through  
32 the landings updates, and is that going to be you, Sue? Great.

33  
34 **CMP LANDINGS UPDATE**  
35

36 **MS. SUSAN GERHART:** Thank you. If we could pull up the landings  
37 update. First, we have the king mackerel commercial landings.  
38 Now, the king mackerel, for most of the zones, the fishing year  
39 is July 1 through June 30, and so, with the exception of the  
40 Northern Zone, what you're seeing here for the 2018/2019 is just  
41 for the past one-and-a-half months.

42  
43 We really don't have landings much except for in the Western  
44 Zone, where 39 percent has been taken. The Southern Zone has  
45 very little landings right now. They generally don't start  
46 seeing landings until into the winter, because the fish are  
47 north at this time.

1 If we scroll down to the next table, this is last year, and so  
2 this is the year that ended June 30 for most zones, except that  
3 the Northern Zone goes until the end of September. However,  
4 they did close back in May, because the quota was met, and you  
5 can see that we went a bit over. The Southern Zone hook-and-  
6 line was quite a bit over. We think that that had to do with  
7 late reporting and such, that we didn't get those reports and so  
8 we didn't shut them down in time to prevent that overage. The  
9 overall ACL is only about 9 percent over, and so that's not bad.

10  
11 The gillnet season, we did not close. They fished for a while  
12 and caught most of the quota, but then the weather was poor and  
13 the fish weren't around, and so those fishermen just chose not  
14 to fish again, and so we never shut them down.

15  
16 Scrolling down again, we have the recreational king mackerel,  
17 again the July through June season, and we do not have that last  
18 wave of data yet. We only have landings through the end of  
19 April from MRIP. We don't have any Texas data at all for 2018  
20 or the end of 2017. Actually, I think we have some of Texas  
21 data for 2017, but not all of it, and you can see that only 28  
22 percent so far was taken, without May and June and the Texas  
23 data in there.

24  
25 If we go down to the next table, this is for Spanish and cobia.  
26 Those both have stock ACLs, and there is no allocation between  
27 commercial and recreational, and so it's one ACL, and we do show  
28 you the landings separately for commercial and recreational  
29 there, so that you can see how they fall out.

30  
31 We had the end of the fishing year for Spanish mackerel at the  
32 end of March, and so you can see that that data -- The  
33 commercial is through mid-August, but the recreational, again,  
34 is only through the end of April, which should cover most of  
35 this fishing season, and we're missing some Texas data here as  
36 well. Very little of the quota was taken, 9 percent, and, of  
37 course, there wasn't a closure.

38  
39 For cobia, we also have -- That's on the calendar year. The  
40 fishing year is the calendar year, and, again, the same caveats.  
41 We have up-to-date on the commercial, but the recreational is  
42 only through April, and there has been 21 percent taken so far  
43 of the ACL. There is also an ACT on cobia, and that's at around  
44 24 percent.

45  
46 Then the last table is the 2017 landings for these two species.  
47 Both of those are complete now, but we're still missing some of  
48 the very late 2017 landings from Texas, the mid-November to

1 December landings from those, and you can see that the landings  
2 that we had were well below the ACL for both of those species  
3 for last year as well, and that's my report.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you very much. Is there any questions  
6 about the report? All right. Seeing none, I guess we'll  
7 continue on with the Update of Cobia of the Cobia CPUE, and who  
8 is the SSC representative? Luiz. Welcome, my friend.

9  
10 **UPDATE OF COBIA CPUE INDICES AND SSC RECOMMENDATIONS**

11  
12 **DR. LUIZ BARBIERI:** It's me again, Mr. Chairman. I'm glad to be  
13 back. Good afternoon, everybody. I am going to be the SSC  
14 representative for this week, and I will be giving you reports  
15 in the different committees, and then I think, on Wednesday,  
16 there is a comprehensive overview of some of the items that are  
17 not being covered during the committee presentations.

18  
19 Yes, during this last SSC meeting, and this was the August 2  
20 meeting of the Standing, the Mackerel, and the Shrimp and Reef  
21 Fish SSCs, and so we had all those groups together. We had a  
22 presentation on the cobia indices of abundance from the Science  
23 Center, and then we discussed a little bit of the issues that  
24 have to do with the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Framework  
25 Amendment 7 that you're going to be discussing this morning, and  
26 so the SSC looked at some of those options being considered and  
27 provided some recommendations to you going forward.

28  
29 Again, here is the presentation that we received from the  
30 Science Center that covers the indices of abundance for the  
31 recreational sector. This will be MRFSS and MRIP and the  
32 headboat sectors going from 1981 through 2017.

33  
34 What I'm going to try to do is go over some of those issues, but  
35 in a fast and summarized way. If you have more questions, I am  
36 glad to see that Dr. Porch is here, back fresh from vacation and  
37 ready to address any questions that you might have.

38  
39 Those are the time series, the indices of abundance, and then  
40 you have the nominal values there, and the indices are the blue  
41 dots, and you have a range of uncertainty, and you have the  
42 estimated, the standardized, indices for both fleets, the  
43 private recreational fleet, and that would be MRFSS and MRIP  
44 data, on the left, and then, on the right, you have the headboat  
45 fleet over the same time period.

46  
47 For the MRIP, MRFSS and MRIP, the private recreational sector,  
48 you can see that, really, the index shows no real trends. I

1 know that you have been discussing and, in different states  
2 around the Gulf, we have been hearing a lot from stakeholders  
3 concerned about the condition of the cobia stock and the lack of  
4 large, older fish and concerns over abundance and all of that,  
5 but those concerns did not materialize, as far as that  
6 recreational time series of abundance is concerned.

7  
8 Now, for the headboat, which is, of course, the two on the  
9 right, you can see that there was a trend indicating somewhat of  
10 a dip in abundance lately. It's hard to tell whether those  
11 things pan out or not, because you just have one against the  
12 other.

13  
14 The SSC discussed this quite a bit and really didn't feel that  
15 the committee had enough information to interpret much out of  
16 these indices of abundance other than no major indication of a  
17 problem that we could find in these indices. The information  
18 was equivocal, at best.

19  
20 After that overview, then the committee discussed the Coastal  
21 Migratory Pelagic Amendment 7, Draft Amendment 7, and some of  
22 the measures that are going to be presented to you in a little  
23 while and, to give you some advice on how we felt about either  
24 one of those types of measures being applied to reduce fishing  
25 mortality for cobia, the bottom line is that the indices of  
26 abundance are not very informative right now, and the committee  
27 felt like, well, we have, next year, a cobia assessment coming  
28 up which will integrate different types of data that you  
29 generally see, like landings data and the composition, the size  
30 and age composition, and a whole number of other factors that  
31 are more informative, as far as understanding the status of the  
32 stock and understanding how the dynamics of the stock is  
33 actually operating there.

34  
35 The committee felt that, if the council's approach here is to be  
36 proactive in applying a management measure to reduce fishing  
37 mortality and prevent further issues, problems, from developing  
38 until this assessment is done, that, in that case, the committee  
39 felt that the minimum size limit will provide you the best, the  
40 greatest, benefit when you compare that to the bag limit, and so  
41 you're going to see -- I think that will be the next  
42 presentation.

43  
44 Mr. Rindone is going to present you an analysis that looks into  
45 reductions in the bag limit and the size limit, and so the  
46 committee, SSC, evaluated both of those and felt that those were  
47 both, from a technical standpoint, well done. They are  
48 informative, scientifically sound methodologies that were



1 applied, but that, on that bang-for-the-buck type of approach,  
2 the minimum size limit reduction would accomplish more in  
3 reducing fishing mortality than the bag limit itself.

4  
5 The committee went on to discuss, really, whether we wanted to  
6 make a stronger recommendation to you on each one of those  
7 options or which one to adopt, and there was quite a bit of  
8 discussion there, and we tried to stay within the role of the  
9 SSC and evaluate the technical merit of those analyses and make  
10 a recommendation on which analysis will provide you the most, in  
11 terms of reducing fishing mortality, but decided not to pick any  
12 preferable option there from the suite of options presented,  
13 feeling that that would be a role for the council to take. I  
14 think that this completes my presentation, Mr. Chairman, and I  
15 would be glad to address any questions that the committee might  
16 have.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Luiz. I think we've got a number  
19 of questions, and I'll start out with Robin.

20  
21 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** Luiz, you kind of touched on it, but, when  
22 you were first showing the abundance curves, or the CPUE trends,  
23 my question to you then was going to be, but did we look at this  
24 based on size of fish and so forth, and it sounds like, based on  
25 what you just said then after that, it was that, no, you all  
26 just looked at it strictly with these current trends and indices  
27 that you had here. You didn't try to break it down by size of  
28 fish or anything like that?

29  
30 **DR. BARBIERI:** Not in this analysis that was provided by the  
31 Science Center. Mr. Rindone, and I don't know if he did this as  
32 part of an IPT, in developing those options, but there is an  
33 analysis that is a little more detailed that does try and group  
34 things by sizes and in terms of the bag limits and size limits,  
35 for you to see what's there. This analysis here that we  
36 received, in terms of indices of abundance, is all-inclusive of  
37 all sizes.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Mr. Anson.

40  
41 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** A question, I think first for Ryan. Ryan, was  
42 the SSC asked to provide recommendations, I guess, for which  
43 path to go? Luiz had summarized and said that they felt like it  
44 wasn't part of their purview, and so I'm just curious. We seem  
45 to have this show up from time to time on the SSC, and I'm just  
46 wondering if it's coming from us through the council staff to  
47 them, or is it something that's an issue that they keep  
48 rehashing, as far as the management side of the house and the

1 scientific side of the house.

2  
3 **MR. RINDONE:** It's tough to say sometimes, because, when these  
4 discussions -- As these discussions evolve organically at the  
5 meeting, an awful lot of different questions get asked, as I'm  
6 sure you would hope that they do, and staff's direction to the  
7 SSC from the council was to evaluate the analyses that were  
8 done, and, like Dr. Barbieri said, are they sound, are they  
9 appropriate, given what the council's intent is, and sometimes,  
10 even with that, there can be some confusion as to exactly what  
11 the council is asking.

12  
13 As far as how to rectify that, perhaps if the council had  
14 something very explicit they wanted the SSC to evaluate, but my  
15 only caution in that would be this is a scientific, deliberative  
16 body, and so sometimes those tendrils that spread out reveal  
17 things that we otherwise wouldn't have considered, and so you're  
18 right that it does happen from time to time, but, ultimately,  
19 they stayed within the science.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I have a couple of questions, Luiz. On this  
22 figure right here, when I look back, for example, at the 2017  
23 landings data for the recreational stuff, in Florida, which is  
24 generally the state that captures most or harvests most of the  
25 cobia, right, and they were down significantly, somewhere about  
26 500,000 pounds to two-hundred-and-something, but Alabama was  
27 actually up a little bit, and I believe Texas might have been up  
28 as well, or Louisiana, but what I'm trying to understand is, on  
29 that bottom-left-hand panel of that proportion index, if you're  
30 catching half the fish that you historically might have, this  
31 suggests that, every time that you go out and you're targeting a  
32 cobia, the odds of getting that cobia are about the same as they  
33 were forever. I am just trying to reconcile that, in my mind.  
34 Either there is fewer fishermen or the fishermen are getting  
35 worse, and so did you guys talk about that on the SSC?

36  
37 **DR. BARBIERI:** I don't think we talked about that explicitly in  
38 that sense. This came up, and it has to do with the issue of  
39 targeting, and it has to do with a whole dimension of fishing  
40 that involves, of course, human beings, and there are changes in  
41 behavior, and you have this -- Of course, this is a coastal  
42 migratory pelagic group, and so it's highly dynamic and moving  
43 around, according to a whole number of environmental conditions,  
44 and so it's not one of those stable type of stock abundance that  
45 you see and availability of the stock that you can find them  
46 consistently over time.

47  
48 It's hard to tease out, when you see a combined graph like this

1 over a long time series for this one survey that is so inclusive  
2 of the Gulf of Mexico, the details on a smaller scale, and this  
3 is where this analysis sheds some light, but the SSC really felt  
4 that, until -- Especially for a species like cobia, but until we  
5 can get a stock assessment that can look under the hood at a  
6 whole number of these other data sources and can try and parse  
7 things between the eastern and western and northern Gulf and  
8 evaluate those things, look at the composition, the age and the  
9 sizes that are coming out, those things would be more  
10 informative.

11  
12 In a way, I think that the committee agrees with you that, even  
13 though the trends don't show up there, they are just not very  
14 informative, as presented.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure, and I guess I would -- I appreciate all  
17 of that. I mean, what I am also trying to understand though, if  
18 you go to the bottom-right-hand panel, and so, when you're  
19 looking at the headboat, they're not typically targeting cobia,  
20 and so it's a little more representative sample, I would think,  
21 right, and so that indicates, in fact, that it's actually on the  
22 downward spin a little bit, suggestive of that.

23  
24 I am just trying to reconcile that also in my head, but was  
25 there any discussion in the SSC about the landings actually in  
26 the north? Because they did go up in Alabama, and I think in  
27 Louisiana too, but I would have to go back and look at that, but  
28 the public testimony that we received kind of indicated more  
29 Gulf-wide that there was a problem everywhere, and so maybe I  
30 can ask Kevin and the folks from Louisiana to kind of shed some  
31 light on the cobia landings and what's going on there. Go  
32 ahead, Ryan.

33  
34 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. About the headboat  
35 landings, something that was discussed at the meeting was the  
36 potential for effort shifting within the headboat fleet,  
37 especially in the last five to eight years, with things like  
38 pilot programs and Amendment 40. Headboats that may have  
39 typically drifted may not be doing as much drift fishing. They  
40 may be anchoring up on the reef structure to take advantage of  
41 those opportunities.

42  
43 The extent to which that is or is not happening was purely just  
44 postulated, just as I said it, and we can't really say exactly  
45 what has or hasn't happened yet, but it was presented as a  
46 possible reason for the decrease in effort for the headboat  
47 fleet.

48

1 The other thing that you kind of touched on was the fact that  
2 headboats don't explicitly target cobia, and so they are, in a  
3 sense, a little bit independent of your normal fishery-dependent  
4 data that come in.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** We'll go ahead with Chris and then Kevin.

7  
8 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Just to touch on the landings that you were  
9 talking about a little bit, we ran year-to-date LA Creel  
10 landings prior to coming to this meeting for this year, 2018,  
11 and compared it to year-to-date landings going back through  
12 2014, inception of LA Creel, and there is actually an upward  
13 trend this year over last year, 2017, which was down from 2016,  
14 and so this year is higher than 2016 was, and 2016 was higher  
15 than last year, and so last year seemed to be the anomaly, the  
16 lower year, and a little bump-up this year, but this is year-to-  
17 date through July, fishing year through the end of July, and  
18 anything could change between now and the end of the year, of  
19 course, but it seems that maybe there is some sort of  
20 interannual variation that takes place on a certain half of the  
21 Gulf, perhaps, where you see some years that are a bimodal  
22 distribution and other years you don't.

23  
24 That's one possibility of what we could be seeing, and it could  
25 be just a change in fishing effort with weather, weather-  
26 dependent, just like we see with snapper, too. I mean, we may  
27 have better years than other years, because of angling pressure.  
28 I would tend to say that we agree with the SSC Committee right  
29 now that it seems like a stock assessment is probably the most  
30 important thing before making a major decision.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, Chris. Kevin.

33  
34 **MR. ANSON:** To address your question, just looking really  
35 quickly here at the landings for Alabama, amongst for-hire  
36 vessels and private vessels, or anglers, the trend, by looking  
37 at numbers of fish, is fairly static from 2014 on.

38  
39 There is a slight increase in the numbers of fish, but perhaps  
40 we probably may be focusing or hearing a lot of folks that are  
41 in the for-hire fleet, and not necessarily from the private  
42 guys, because, when you look at the numbers of fish within the  
43 two sectors, the private recs are static, and the for-hire fleet  
44 went down from 2016, from over 2,000 fish begin caught to maybe  
45 a couple hundred, and so there was a dramatic drop-off.

46  
47 As Chris had mentioned and other people have mentioned, there  
48 may be shifts in fishing behavior or patterns, or maybe there is

1 less trips being made for the charter boat guys and some of the  
2 private guys are picking up the effort, and so they're able to  
3 maintain that level of harvest, if you will, for the state, but  
4 certainly there is a drop-off, significant drop-off, but 2016  
5 was also a little bit higher year too for for-hire, and so I  
6 don't know yet.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks. Susan.

9

10 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** I would just like to comment to Ryan  
11 discussing the headboats. I know, in Alabama, the eight  
12 headboats there, it's more of like an incidental catch. It's  
13 not something that's being targeted.

14

15 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you. Luiz.

16

17 **DR. BARBIERI:** Mr. Chairman, just a couple of points. One is  
18 remember that, even when you have a stock assessment for a  
19 species stock like cobia, there will be a fairly high amount of  
20 uncertainty.

21

22 I just participated in SEDAR 58 with the southern group of  
23 cobia, the stock ID process, a series of workshops in  
24 preparation for the SEDAR 58 benchmark assessment there, and, I  
25 mean, the lack of biological information on this species is  
26 tremendous, age composition and size, and even age and size of  
27 sexual maturity are very uncertain.

28

29 If you go back and look at the benchmark assessment, SEDAR 28,  
30 that we had for the Gulf, that was already very uncertain, and  
31 so an analysis like this, of course, which is a lower tier, in  
32 terms of its capabilities, is unlikely to be able to really  
33 capture all of these dynamics that we are talking about, changes  
34 in fish behavior, movements of the fish, depending on all sorts  
35 of parameters, but one other thing that I wanted to say.

36

37 I think this is informative, because, in a couple of days, maybe  
38 tomorrow or maybe Wednesday morning, we're going to be talking  
39 about the interim analysis. This afternoon, I guess Dr. Porch  
40 is going to be presenting something about the revised and  
41 expanded SEDAR process and about the interim analysis.

42

43 Then, I am going to, when I give the full report, I guess  
44 Wednesday morning, talk a little bit about red grouper, and  
45 you're going to be able to see how, perhaps, in situations such  
46 as this, when the council wants a bit more information, but we  
47 are not completely at the stage where we can provide a full  
48 stock assessment, I think that the interim analysis is going to

1 be much more informative.

2  
3 It's going to be able to pull more information than simply  
4 looking at these indices of abundance, and so that's just  
5 something to contextualize that discussion as it takes place  
6 this afternoon and we talk about red grouper later on.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Ms. Bosarge.

9  
10 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** I'm glad you brought that up, because I  
11 mentioned it at the SSC meeting, too. I was trying to be  
12 proactive and think about that stock assessment coming up,  
13 because one of the issues, it seemed like, with the graph on the  
14 bottom left, or both of the left graphs, is, essentially, it's a  
15 predominantly recreational fishery, and so that's your two kind  
16 of recreational groups there, but the issue with that proportion  
17 positive MRFSS thing seemed to be actually trying to figure out  
18 what was a cobia trip and what wasn't and trying to parse that  
19 out of the data, and I just wondered, because it is so heavily  
20 so recreationally influenced, are we going to have issues when  
21 we get into the stock assessment side of the house with that,  
22 and does that mean that we should almost give a little more  
23 credence to the headboat CPUE index? Is there a little less  
24 uncertainty surrounding that? Not to mention that, if it is  
25 mainly a bycatch fishery, you could almost see that as like a  
26 fishery-independent index, to a degree, right, and so --

27  
28 **DR. BARBIERI:** Well, this, to me, brings to memory things that  
29 we have discussed before, you know greater amberjack and the  
30 last assessment and this -- How do we parse out or how do we  
31 look at the different fleets to see which one will have the best  
32 and the most informational content, and cobia is in that same  
33 situation, where, when you are trying to identify that percent  
34 positive and identify which trips actually were targeting cobia,  
35 to identify which ones turned out positive, you run into a lot  
36 of problems.

37  
38 This is where those data workshops and the assessment workshops  
39 can at least try to take measures to ameliorate, because the  
40 assessment analysts can go back, when the panel provides some  
41 input, and try and parse it differently and look at things from  
42 a different perspective, to see if you can gather some more  
43 information than this, and so it is an issue. It will be hard  
44 for us, I think, to overcome with the amount of data that we  
45 have presently.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Go ahead, Dr. Mickle.

48

1 **DR. PAUL MICKLE:** Thank you. Just, with migratory fisheries, it  
2 gets really complicated, just from my state's perspective. When  
3 we have our shootouts, our big cobia seasons, if there's a  
4 migration later in the year, then we miss those landings, and so  
5 that's kind of a false negative, false positive, right, and so  
6 that's Type 2 error, with an inference in a stock assessment, at  
7 least from a local level, and so it would be interesting, and I  
8 think the data could do this, to bring in that temporal aspect,  
9 so that, when these fleets do have seasonality in their efforts,  
10 it can be parsed out to determine that, well, maybe the cohorts  
11 came through, but they were just missed within the efforts,  
12 right, and so, with the headboats, like what Leann was saying, I  
13 don't know if there's an effort variable there, but it's  
14 difficult to parse out.

15  
16 Like Luiz said, it just becomes so difficult when even some of  
17 the life history aspects are not very well documented on this  
18 species and sexual maturity, and it just brings it all -- It's  
19 very difficult to make those inferences, but we've heard the  
20 fishermen come here, and they have fished for thirty-plus years,  
21 and they've never seen anything like this, and so there is some  
22 weight in those statements, and so I'm glad to see this  
23 discussion. Thank you.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I certainly don't want to throw rocks at the  
26 SSC. I think you guys did a great job, and it's a really  
27 difficult set of data to work with, and I understand the  
28 shortcomings, or the limitations. It's not that the data are  
29 bad, but they're just difficult, right, but we are in a bit of a  
30 predicament, or a pickle, with regard to the council, because  
31 we've heard countless public testimony that we've got an issue,  
32 and I think we kind of have this obligation to be responsive to  
33 the stakeholders, right?

34  
35 What I would ask from the SSC, really, in my mind, is, is there  
36 a negative result or consequence of us moving forward with one  
37 of the two action items that we have put in this document?

38  
39 **DR. BARBIERI:** Right, and I think there was a misunderstanding  
40 along the way, perhaps the way that I presented it. The SSC was  
41 not discouraging the council, really, to proceed with any  
42 action. Actually, the SSC tried to take that neutral approach  
43 of not weighing-in one way or the other. This is your  
44 prerogative to move forward whatever regulatory measures that  
45 you feel like moving ahead with.

46  
47 What we wanted to do is two things. One is be transparent about  
48 the uncertainty and let you know that this is a highly-equivocal

1 type of situation and that the analysis that we have in front of  
2 us is not very informative, so that you cannot really look at  
3 that too much for support, because that analysis is quite  
4 equivocal, one side.

5  
6 The other side is this is really a risk assessment. It's a risk  
7 assessment type of thing, and we feel that you can actually  
8 exercise that judgment, given this information that we  
9 presented, and so we were not discouraging and feeling any  
10 disadvantage with you taking action.

11  
12 It's that, if you decide to take action, be aware that the size  
13 limit changes are more likely to reduce fishing mortality to the  
14 degree that you want it reduced than the bag limit and that we  
15 don't really have -- We see a very fuzzy picture of the status  
16 of the stock right now when we look at these graphs, and so  
17 we're letting you know how fuzzy we feel it is and that the  
18 information content is limited.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** All right. I appreciate that. Are there any  
21 more questions for Luiz at this point? If not, I think that's a  
22 good segue into the next agenda item with Ryan. Thanks.

23  
24 **OPTIONS: CMP FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT 7: MODIFICATIONS TO GULF COBIA**  
25 **SIZE AND POSSESSION LIMITS**

26  
27 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay. Let's pull up Tab C, Number 6. This is our  
28 framework action to look at modifying Gulf cobia size and  
29 possession limits, in response to the feedback that you guys  
30 have received from stakeholders over several of the meetings  
31 that we've had.

32  
33 Just to quickly review our purpose and need, the purpose of this  
34 action is to modify the minimum size limit and possession limit  
35 of Gulf cobia in order to reduce harvest. The need is to  
36 respond to concerns of potential overfishing of Gulf cobia until  
37 more information on stock status becomes available. Is there  
38 any desire to revisit that in any way?

39  
40 Seeing no hands shooting up, we'll go right on to Chapter 2. We  
41 incorporated the size and possession limit analyses into the  
42 discussion on these actions, and so we'll touch those in that  
43 order.

44  
45 Action 1 looks at modifying the minimum size limit for Gulf  
46 cobia, and, again, both of these actions apply only to Gulf  
47 cobia within the Gulf Council's jurisdiction, and so, even  
48 though Gulf cobia go all the way up to the Georgia/Florida line



1 as a migratory group, cobia occurring from the Georgia/Florida  
2 line down to the council jurisdictional boundary are apportioned  
3 to the South Atlantic Council for management, and so this would  
4 not apply to that portion of the Gulf cobia stock. The South  
5 Atlantic Council, at some future date, could take commensurate  
6 action, if they thought it appropriate.

7  
8 Action 1 modifies the minimum size limit. We have a few  
9 alternatives here, in addition to doing nothing. Alternative 2  
10 would increase the minimum size limit for both recreational and  
11 commercial fishermen to thirty-six inches fork length.  
12 Alternative 3 is thirty-nine inches fork length, and Alternative  
13 4 is forty-two inches fork length.

14  
15 The size limit analyses that were done were done considering  
16 these specific alternatives, and, if we go down to Figure 2.1.1,  
17 if we scroll down just a bit, this is the annual average weight  
18 of cobia in the Gulf for both sectors. The commercial sector is  
19 in purple, and the rec sector is in black, and so the commercial  
20 sector, if we're just eyeballing it, looks relatively flat, and  
21 the rec sector -- You might say that there's been a slight  
22 decrease over time in the average weight of cobia caught.

23  
24 If we go down to the next figure, Figure 2.1.2, this is the  
25 total discards of cobia in the Gulf by year for the recreational  
26 sector, and that's because discard estimates were only available  
27 for MRIP, and, Dr. Mickle, this, I hope, gets at some of what  
28 you had asked at the previous meeting. You were asking about  
29 time series of discards and how that has changed with time and  
30 with size, et cetera.

31  
32 I regret to say that, for the commercial sector, the landings  
33 are so much lower by comparison. Those data just -- They are  
34 not informative, and, because of the incidental nature of how  
35 cobia are often caught, we don't have the data for this species  
36 like we do many of the other species. There is a lot of fuzzy,  
37 gray areas.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Hold on real quick, Ryan. I think Dale had a  
40 quick question.

41  
42 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** I did read the document, but I don't remember if  
43 it's in there, Ryan. As far as dead discards, do we know the  
44 percent of discards that don't make it?

45  
46 **MR. RINDONE:** 5 percent.

47  
48 **MR. DIAZ:** 5 percent?

1  
2 **MR. RINDONE:** That's per the last stock assessment. That's for  
3 both components combined. They fish generally with the same  
4 gear, and they handle the fish in a similar way, and so the  
5 discard mortality applies to both.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Another real quick -- Dale, go ahead.

8  
9 **MR. DIAZ:** Just to follow-up, it surprises me that it's that  
10 low, because they typically gaff the bigger fish, and so I would  
11 have expected that to be higher, but Leann brought up something,  
12 and this wasn't my question, but, when me and her was talking  
13 earlier, and while we're on the size limits, the females grow  
14 faster than the males, and so what is your -- I mean, what's  
15 your thoughts on if we were to raise the size limit, if that  
16 would be a positive or a negative impact, because we might be  
17 fishing the females a shade harder, and maybe we're doing that  
18 already, but do you think that impacts it in any way?

19  
20 **MR. RINDONE:** The females do grow faster than the males, and  
21 they have a larger size at age than the males do, and so,  
22 theoretically, based just on that, the more you increase the  
23 size limit, and we haven't analyzed this, but, just based on  
24 what we have analyzed, the more you increase the size limit, the  
25 higher the probability you may have, to some degree, of  
26 harvesting females disproportionate to males.

27  
28 If the thinking is that there could be something wrong with  
29 stock productivity in some way, then removing more females may  
30 be counterintuitive to that, to trying to fix that particular  
31 issue. It's not to say that any increase in the minimum size  
32 limit is going to result in that effect, but, the larger you go,  
33 based on the size at age, the more females you may be  
34 harvesting.

35  
36 If we go to Figure 2.1.4, and we'll go back to one of those  
37 other figures to show that, but, if we can go to Figure 2.1.4,  
38 please, there is that growth curve.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** We have a real quick question.

41  
42 **MS. ANNA BECKWITH:** Just to Ryan's point, when we went through  
43 this process, the South Atlantic did take that into  
44 consideration, Dale. You may have even been at those meetings,  
45 but we did note concerns that, as you raise the size limit, and  
46 we have an analysis in there somewhere, and I could probably dig  
47 it out, where, if memory serves, we assumed about 5 percent  
48 greater amount of females per inch, and that might be a range,

1 but I would have to go back and find that, but certainly you  
2 would have more females at the larger size limit, and so we  
3 settled on a thirty-six-inch, because we felt that that was  
4 still achieving without having that be disproportionately more  
5 catch towards the females.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I am going to ask a quick question of Anna as  
8 well. So, when you went to thirty-six inches -- One of the  
9 discussions we had at the council meeting last time was some  
10 problems handling those bigger fish. Have you guys talked about  
11 that, or have you seen any evidence that moving from a thirty-  
12 three to a thirty-six-inch resulted in some type of increased  
13 mortality, for example?

14  
15 **MS. BECKWITH:** We did make it through our first cobia season at  
16 thirty-six, and there were probably some grumblings from the  
17 recreational community, but the charter guys were able to adjust  
18 pretty easily.

19  
20 I was telling J.D. that one of the tricks that I heard some of  
21 the charter folks talk about was just putting a couple of pieces  
22 of tape on the side of the boat, just to have a quick reference,  
23 where they didn't have to pull the fish in, but I think we did  
24 not hear that much pushback from the thirty-six-inch size as we  
25 initially expected to.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you. Sorry, Ryan. Go ahead.

28  
29 **MR. RINDONE:** I was just trying to bring up the sex-specific  
30 length-at-age data that you see on the screen right now, just in  
31 reference to this particular discussion, and so you can see how  
32 the females, in orange, do get larger more quickly than the  
33 males do, and the stock assumed a one-to-one sex ratio, but, to  
34 be fair, we don't have an awful lot of information on that in  
35 the first place.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Ms. Bosarge.

38  
39 **MS. BOSARGE:** I guess the inverse to that argument about if you  
40 raise the size limit you may end up harvesting more females is  
41 that we were told at the last meeting that, generally speaking,  
42 a three-year-old fish is sexually mature.

43  
44 A three-year-old female is going to be above forty inches, and I  
45 don't know what that is exactly, maybe forty-two, something like  
46 that, and so, if you raise that size limit, and I'm not saying  
47 to go to forty-two, but the fact that you're going to actually  
48 let some of those females reproduce, rather than kill them

1 before they ever reproduce, you have to offset that against some  
2 of that death, that 5 percent death, that we know is skewed  
3 toward females, the bigger females, and so, I mean, I guess what  
4 I'm saying is there is some tradeoffs.

5  
6 **MR. RINDONE:** I didn't put the confidence intervals for these  
7 data on this graph, because it would have made it visually  
8 confusing, but they're wide, to say the least, and so, generally  
9 speaking though, you are correct in that, at three years old, a  
10 female cobia can be rather large.

11  
12 The other thing to consider, directly related to what you had  
13 said, was that cobia can spawn multiple times in the same  
14 season, and so there could be multiple opportunities for that  
15 fish to reproduce at a larger size compared to a smaller size,  
16 just by function of time and growth.

17  
18 **MS. BOSARGE:** But they've got to live long enough to make it to  
19 the big size. We can't kill them first.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. We're going to, in the interest of  
22 time, keep on plugging.

23  
24 **MR. RINDONE:** Sure. Figure 2.1.3, this shows the size  
25 distribution of cobia landed in the Gulf from Texas through west  
26 Florida just for 2015 through 2017, and that's all of those  
27 years combined. The red line there shows the minimum size  
28 limit.

29  
30 From a percent of fish landed perspective, you can see that a  
31 fair amount of -- The large proportion of fish that are  
32 interacted with by fishermen are of legal size or larger, and,  
33 generally speaking, the commercial sector and the for-hire  
34 sector interact with larger cobia than the private angling  
35 sector or the headboat sector, or headboat component or what  
36 have you, headboat fleet.

37  
38 If we look at the Table 2.1.2, you guys can see the estimated  
39 percent reduction in the landings for the actions proposed in  
40 Alternative 1, and so remember Alternative 2 raises the minimum  
41 size limit to thirty-six inches fork length. Alternative 3 is  
42 thirty-nine inches, and Alternative 4 is forty-two inches, and  
43 you can see those percent reduction in landings by sector over  
44 there to the right, and, again, it's important to remember that  
45 this particular species harvest is dominated, better than 90  
46 percent, by the recreational sector.

47  
48 That is the size limit analysis, and you guys do not currently

1 have any preferred alternatives or anything for this action.  
2 Did you have any questions or anything like that before we move  
3 on?

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I think I would just prefer to move to the  
6 next action item, actually. Go ahead, Andy. Sorry.

7  
8 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I heard Anna talk about the South Atlantic  
9 size limit of thirty-six inches, and are all the Gulf states  
10 currently at a thirty-three-inch size limit?

11  
12 **MR. RINDONE:** Or equivalent, yes.

13  
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Okay, and then I want to put this on the table  
15 for consideration. I realize the bag limit doesn't get us much,  
16 but, based on past experiences and analysts, typically, when we  
17 estimate a size limit reduction, we don't ever realize it,  
18 because those fish quickly grow into that new size limit and  
19 ultimately get caught up a few years down the road, and so,  
20 typically, we realize the size limit reduction in harvest in the  
21 first or maybe second year, but as those fish -- If they  
22 respond, they will grow into that size limit, and the net effect  
23 is going to not be as great as what we estimate here, and so I  
24 do want to talk about possibly considering a closed season as  
25 part of the alternatives later.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure. Ms. Bosarge.

28  
29 **MS. BOSARGE:** Luiz stated that the one thing that the SSC did  
30 kind of give us some guidance on was that we would probably get  
31 the most bang for our buck with a size limit change, and I'm not  
32 sure what the rationale for that was. I guess part of it is  
33 that we're not catching the quota anyway, and so, if you change  
34 the bag limit -- I mean, you're not catching the quota, but, if  
35 you change that size limit and maybe let a few of those fish  
36 reproduce again before you kill them, you may actually see some  
37 sort of conservation benefits there, and so I just hope that  
38 we'll continue to -- Not anything extreme with a change in size  
39 limit, but, I mean, I really do feel like we might could make  
40 some headway there.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure. I think we're going to revisit this at  
43 Full Council, and I think we're going to run into a time  
44 constraint, but, Andy, I have a real quick question. With  
45 regard to a closed season option, are you trying to target like  
46 the spawning season in particular, and they have a protracted  
47 spawning season, and so I don't know what you might be thinking.

48

1 **MR. STRELCHECK:** My recollection is they spawn April through  
2 September, with a peak in the summer months, and so I guess I  
3 would want to look at the data to determine what would be the  
4 most valuable from a spawning season benefit but also when  
5 they're being landed and when would potentially be the shortest  
6 season that we would have to impose to get some net reduction.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. Great. Thanks. Go ahead, Ryan.

9  
10 **MR. RINDONE:** All right, and so we'll move on to Action 2 then.  
11 Action 2 looks at modifying the possession limit for Gulf cobia,  
12 and again, this is just in the Gulf Council's jurisdictional  
13 area, and you guys currently have the two preferred alternatives  
14 here.

15  
16 Preferred Alternative 2 would decrease the per-person daily  
17 possession limit to one fish per day. Alternative 3 would  
18 create a commercial and recreational daily vessel limit, and you  
19 guys currently prefer Option 3a, which would set that daily  
20 vessel limit at two fish.

21  
22 If we go down to Figure 2.2.1, you can see that the number of  
23 cobia landed per angler per trip is, generally speaking, less  
24 than one. This lends itself to the incidental nature of  
25 interaction with cobia by commercial and recreational anglers.

26  
27 If we go down to the next figure, 2.2.2, you see the number of  
28 cobia per vessel per trip, and the preponderance for all fleets  
29 is one cobia harvested per vessel per trip on trips that listed  
30 cobia as the primary or secondary species that was targeted,  
31 and, again, both of those figures use data combined for 2015 to  
32 2017.

33  
34 If we go down to Table 2.2.1, you can see the percent reduction  
35 in landings, per the alternatives that are proposed for Action  
36 2, and these percent reductions are estimated to be much smaller  
37 than those for the minimum size limit. Hence, what the SSC had  
38 discussed with you guys. I am just breezing here, because I  
39 know we're on a time constraint, and so you all stop me if you  
40 want to.

41  
42 The next three tables show the estimated percent reduction when  
43 combined with an increase in the minimum size limit. Table  
44 2.2.2 there shows thirty-six inches, and 2.2.3 is thirty-nine  
45 inches, and 2.3.4 is forty-two inches. Intuitively enough, the  
46 larger the minimum size limit, combined with a reduction in the  
47 possession limit, the greater the predicted reduction in  
48 harvest, and that's what we have for Action 2, Mr. Chair.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Ryan. Is there any questions at  
3 this point for Ryan? I have a couple. With regard to timing,  
4 clearly there is some discussion that is going to need to take  
5 place, and, again, at the Full Council, but where are we in this  
6 document, exactly?

7  
8 **MR. RINDONE:** Well, it's a framework, and we're in what we'll  
9 call the draft phase right now. We have preferred alternatives  
10 for Alternative 2, which are commensurate with those that are  
11 currently in place for the State of Florida on the west coast,  
12 and you guys don't have anything for any change in the minimum  
13 size limit. If you guys don't want to change the minimum size  
14 limit, you guys can always recommend to remove that from the  
15 document, and that will certainly streamline it a bit.

16  
17 If you guys want to consider a change in the season, then a  
18 motion that says let's add an alternative to look at that and  
19 give us, I guess, some parameters to examine. I know Dr.  
20 Strelcheck had mentioned looking at the landings and when the  
21 landings come in and looking at that compared to the spawning  
22 season to try and get an idea of what might be best and the  
23 percent reduction in fishing mortality that we might see for  
24 that, and so it's up to you guys.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure. I think what we'll do is give this a  
27 little bit of thought and give you some better direction at Full  
28 Council. Go ahead, Dale. Do you have a question?

29  
30 **MR. DIAZ:** I am just thinking here as you're talking. You know,  
31 at the last meeting, I was the one that threw out the preferred  
32 for the possession limit, and there is a lot of information  
33 that's been brought here today that we didn't have at the last  
34 meeting, and mainly the SSC is saying the biggest bang for the  
35 buck is in the size limit, and then Ryan has got the percentages  
36 that we can get based on what we're looking at.

37  
38 We've got good information. The Louisiana landings are slightly  
39 up over 2016 for sure, right, in 2017, and I hate for us to wait  
40 until Full Council and pick a preferred if somebody feels  
41 strongly about something on the size limit, or even changing the  
42 possession limit, because we've got public testimony that we're  
43 going to have on Wednesday, and so, if we don't throw something  
44 out there that we think we might do, then we're liable not to  
45 get much comment from the people that's going to show up.

46  
47 I am just a little hesitant to wait until Full Council to do  
48 stuff, for that public testimony component only, and so thank

1 you, and I'm not sure that I want to throw out a motion just  
2 yet. I'm stewing on it.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Leann said we could work really late during  
5 Full Council if I wanted. Go ahead, Robin.

6  
7 **MR. RIECHERS:** Well, I mean, it kind of begs the question of, if  
8 we're going to entertain closures, then we're really going to  
9 have to go back and work on the document more, and so I think  
10 that really is the question, Dale. If you're going to entertain  
11 those in any way, then whether we have a preferred at this  
12 moment in time really is not going to change the outcome of when  
13 this document will come for final, and so I am not saying we  
14 are, but certainly Andy suggested that he wanted to at least  
15 entertain that.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Yes, and I appreciate that, and I would like  
18 to talk to Andy a little bit more and have some discussion about  
19 what that option might look like, based on the biology of the  
20 fish a little bit, and so, at least for me, I am happy to sit a  
21 little bit and wait, and I appreciate your comments, Dale, and,  
22 again, I would reiterate it. If somebody feels strongly about a  
23 size preference, then now would be the time. Go ahead, Martha.

24  
25 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** I think I said this at the last meeting, but  
26 our commission considered this issue, and I think they finalized  
27 it in December, and they decided to leave the size limit alone  
28 for the time being, wanting to get that assessment and get more  
29 information.

30  
31 They considered raising it, I think to thirty-eight, and then  
32 ended up walking away from it, because of testimony from the  
33 public about different ways that different people were fishing  
34 for cobia in different areas, and so they felt like -- The short  
35 story is they felt like they didn't have the information they  
36 really needed to make that change, but everybody seemed to be  
37 able to be onboard with reducing the size limit, or, excuse me,  
38 the bag limit and the vessel limit.

39  
40 That was how they chose to address it, and so, in terms of what  
41 the commission is going to do here, they will keep the size  
42 limit they have, I think until we have the assessment, and so  
43 this probably would not be a situation where we would change in  
44 state waters to go along with whatever the council does if the  
45 council makes a change in the size limit, and so I will just put  
46 that out there.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you. John Sanchez and then Leann.



1  
2 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you. I am thinking, the more I hear  
3 the discussion of all, I am leaning toward bag limit is the way  
4 to go, only because the size limit -- I kind of heard some  
5 rationale that made a lot of sense to me that, one, if we raise  
6 the size limit, we're getting into the ones that produce more  
7 fecund -- That are breeders. Two, any reduction that we're  
8 going to realize there is going to be temporary as they start to  
9 take those fish out of the population in subsequent years, and  
10 so it seems like bag limit, to me, would be more of a way to do  
11 it.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, John. Leann, go ahead.

14  
15 **MS. BOSARGE:** I was just going to say, if you all are  
16 entertaining the idea of a possible closed season during  
17 spawning or peak landings or whatever your preference may be,  
18 probably now would be a good time to let's have at least that  
19 discussion and put a motion on the board, if you want that  
20 action item added in there, and let's vote that part up or down.

21  
22 Then, if you want to pick preferreds at Full Council, we can, if  
23 you want to wait until you get that analysis, and fine, but I  
24 think we probably should have that motion and get that  
25 discussion out of the way during committee, if you want this  
26 document to come back with an action item that looks at seasonal  
27 closures.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I just want to make sure, if we do that, if we  
30 make a motion to put an option in there that would consider a  
31 seasonal closure, then there is certainly no need to pick a  
32 preferred today, because we're going to see that whole document  
33 again, right? Okay. Then I would be happy to entertain that  
34 motion, if somebody would like to make it. Robin.

35  
36 **MR. RIECHERS:** Well, I think it goes back to the problem you  
37 were suggesting that you wanted to talk with Andy some more  
38 about, and it's pretty hard for any of us to identify, other  
39 than in a generic sense, when those closures might make the most  
40 sense, but, really, this is the kind of thing we typically look  
41 at a calendar of fecundity and as well as the catches, and we  
42 try to make those kind of combinations at that point. Doing it  
43 sitting here blindly I think is probably a disservice to the  
44 fish as well as the fishery, in some respects.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure, and I guess what I was suggesting is  
47 that we would just put it as an item in the document. It would  
48 have to go back to staff to figure out all the alternatives,

1 but, Carrie, you had a quick question?

2  
3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
4 was just going to point out, on page 27 of the document, it  
5 talks about the seasonal aspects of reproduction, and this was  
6 based on the work that Nancy Brown-Peterson et al. did in 2001,  
7 and it talks about they form large aggregations and they spawn  
8 during daylight hours in the Gulf from April through September,  
9 and then it goes into the peaks, with the increased gonad  
10 production in March and the peak in July and decline and level  
11 off thereafter, sometime in September, and so, if you are  
12 looking at a seasonal closure, at least you know when the peak  
13 is.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you. John Sanchez.

16  
17 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Just a comment. To think that, as we were getting  
18 into cobia not too long ago, and it was moving rather quickly, I  
19 had hoped that, oh my god, we could actually do something  
20 quickly.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** To that point, I think we're trying to be very  
23 responsive to the tremendous amount of public testimony that we  
24 heard on this issue, but it's complicated, and I'm going to make  
25 sure that we try to get it right. Sue.

26  
27 **MS. GERHART:** Adding this new action doesn't necessarily mean  
28 that you could not take final action in October. If staff looks  
29 and comes up with alternatives and does the analyses and you are  
30 okay with those alternatives and want one of those alternatives,  
31 then you could go ahead. It's just if you wanted something that  
32 wasn't analyzed that there would be an issue with doing that.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. We're going to wrap this up pretty soon  
35 here, but does somebody at this time want to make a motion to  
36 direct staff to develop a second action item that is related to  
37 a closure, or a third, excuse me? Andy.

38  
39 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Since I raised it, I will make the motion to  
40 include a new action in the amendment that evaluates seasonal  
41 closures for cobia. I think we can leave it at that.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. We have a motion on the board. Is  
44 there a second? Going once, going twice, and no second for the  
45 motion. I will second the motion, for discussion. Can somebody  
46 enlighten me as to why they may not feel strongly about  
47 entertaining this motion? Dale.

48

1 **MR. DIAZ:** I don't really feel strongly about not entertaining  
2 the motion, but I'm just trying to think about how this fishery  
3 is prosecuted in the area that I'm in, and there are several  
4 long-standing cobia tournaments that are in the late April and  
5 May timeframe, which tends to be the peak spawning time, and I'm  
6 just wondering how unpopular it would be to try to implement  
7 this in my area, and so that's what is giving me pause, but I'm  
8 trying to also think about what is best for the stock and what  
9 we should do, and, right now, I'm just not excited about the  
10 seasonal closures.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you. Mr. Anson.

13  
14 **MR. ANSON:** I will echo a lot of what Dale just said. I am not  
15 too fond of doing some analysis on seasonal closures, although  
16 it could provide us some benefits, as much as managing the  
17 species, and I'm just uncertain, until we know I guess, I'm  
18 uncertain as to what the magic or the best time is for setting a  
19 seasonal closure.

20  
21 It may be outside of those typical cobia tournaments, and so  
22 John said earlier that we thought we would kind of push this  
23 through pretty quickly and kind of get it set up for next  
24 season, because there seemed to be a lot of desire amongst at  
25 least the eastern Gulf to do that, and this just kind of would  
26 slow that down, and I understand Sue's comments, but I just am a  
27 little uneasy going into October with a new action item and  
28 making it final.

29  
30 That's not to say that we would go with a seasonal closure, but  
31 it's just going through the effort and everything and then  
32 having that discussion and final action in order to meet that  
33 timeline to have something in place for 2019.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure. I appreciate that. Dr. Mickle.

36  
37 **DR. MICKLE:** Thank you. I appreciate you recognizing me. I'm  
38 not on the committee, and I don't really like when council  
39 members not on committees talk after motions, but I'm doing it,  
40 and so I guess I don't like myself, but, with Nancy's paper -- I  
41 am going to have to go back and look at Nancy's paper to see how  
42 robust the data is.

43  
44 It may be heavily, I'm assuming, on the eastern side of the  
45 Gulf. The samples from her histological statements that were  
46 read into this document may not be a representation of Gulf-wide  
47 reproductive timing, and so we definitely need to at least check  
48 on that and have that on the record.

1  
2 Also, we're kind of heading down the road of the amberjacks.  
3 With the seasonal closure issues, you start getting into  
4 differences temporally between the fleets in east and west, and  
5 Dale spoke for our central area as well, and so these things get  
6 really complicated when we start talking about closures, and so  
7 I won't provide an opinion, as I'm not on the committee. Thank  
8 you.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I'm going to go with John and then Martha and  
11 then Robin.

12  
13 **MR. SANCHEZ:** For all the concerns we just discussed, I will say  
14 a big no thank-you.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, John.

17  
18 **MS. GUYAS:** Ditto all of those things, and I think it's not just  
19 the differences in terms of how and when the fleets are  
20 operating, but it's really when the fish are there, because this  
21 is one of those pulse fisheries where they're moving around and  
22 popping up in different places at different times, and so a  
23 seasonal closure is likely going to impact some parts of the  
24 Gulf more than others, and so we'll just have to be very mindful  
25 of that.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you. Robin.

28  
29 **MR. RIECHERS:** Well, I will even kind of take it a more 10,000  
30 or 30,000-foot level, is that we have started this document  
31 because we heard from fishermen, and, now that we've seen the  
32 evidence of that, the evidence we're seeing doesn't necessarily  
33 corroborate what we've seen on the ground, at least across the  
34 entire Gulf.

35  
36 When you think about it from that perspective, we are going to  
37 see some of those regional differences, quite likely, as we've  
38 already seen in testimony. In addition to that, we're kind of  
39 down to a decision about possibly a bag limit, which frankly  
40 doesn't change anything, or at least we've heard some of that  
41 discussion, and so, without the size limit or some of these  
42 other things, we may be doing something, but just to make  
43 ourselves feel good, as opposed to really doing something in the  
44 fishery.

45  
46 With that, like I said, I was hesitant to add anything until we  
47 actually know if we're really going to go forward with something  
48 or do we -- Now, after seeing the data brought to us, and not

1 that the data of people's testimony is not important, but,  
2 seeing what we actually know about the fishery and the landings  
3 and those indexes, are we ready to move now, or are we ready to  
4 wait on an assessment?

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, Robin. Leann.

7  
8 **MS. BOSARGE:** I am not going to speak to the motion, but just to  
9 that point, so we saw two different -- An index for MRFSS and an  
10 index for headboat. One was flat and one was negative, and so  
11 read from that what you will. There was nothing positive out  
12 there, right?

13  
14 Then, if you look at landings, since it's predominantly a  
15 recreational fishery, the landings peaked in 1997 at 2.9 million  
16 pounds, and so that's almost three-million. Last year, we  
17 landed 889,000 in the Gulf area, not including that east  
18 Florida, and so, I mean, we're down. There is no doubt we're  
19 down, and landings have been down for quite some time.

20  
21 The max landings we've gotten since 2001, which is eighteen  
22 years or so, was 1.2 million, and that's still not even half of  
23 your peak landings, and so, I mean, I don't think that there is  
24 any doubt, between that and the public testimony that we had,  
25 that there may be a need for action here.

26  
27 I'm just throwing that out there as like that 30,000-foot view  
28 of what's happening with cobia, and so I hope that eventually we  
29 will look at picking a preferred on that size limit. We may  
30 want to hear some public testimony, and maybe it will guide us,  
31 but I am like you. If we just do the bag limit, we didn't do  
32 too much, and so I think we need to look at at least both of  
33 those.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I am going to take maybe one or two more  
36 questions and then we're going to move on. Andy.

37  
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I'm not going to ask a question. **I'm**  
39 **going to suggest that, if you agree, I will withdraw the motion**  
40 **from consideration, after thinking about it.** Our next  
41 assessment will be in 2019, and we'll have the size limit  
42 increase for 2019, maybe into 2020 at that point, and we can  
43 always come back and reevaluate management measures based on  
44 that.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. **Motion withdrawn.** I think what we're  
47 going to do is -- Go ahead, Dale.

48

1 **MR. DIAZ:** I am going to put a motion out there and just see  
2 where it goes. **For Action 1, I would like to make Alternative 2**  
3 **the preferred alternative, and that would be increase the**  
4 **recreational and commercial minimum size limit of Gulf cobia to**  
5 **thirty-six inches fork length in the Gulf Council's**  
6 **jurisdictional area.**

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** We have a motion on the board. Is there a  
9 second for that motion? Second by Kevin Anson. Is there any  
10 discussion on the motion?

11  
12 **MR. DIAZ:** One reason I made the motion is I want us to have the  
13 discussion, and I would like to have something to go out for  
14 public testimony also, but I really don't think, based on the  
15 information that Ryan has provided today, that the bag limit  
16 does that much for us. Most folks land one or less anyway, and  
17 so it's not going to do that much.

18  
19 I guess one thing gives me pause. All five states are at  
20 thirty-three, and so, if we go forward with this, really, I  
21 don't know if the states are going to follow through, and it's a  
22 lot of effort for the states, but, out of the information we've  
23 looked at today, I feel like this is probably the most logical  
24 move.

25  
26 It's not drastic, but I don't think the information makes us  
27 take drastic measures, and I just think it's a reasonable thing  
28 for us to at least consider, based on the public testimony that  
29 we've had in the past, and so thank you.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Ryan, to that point?

32  
33 **MR. RINDONE:** Just a reminder that 60 to 70 percent of cobia  
34 caught in the Gulf are caught in federal waters.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you. Carrie.

37  
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just  
39 wanted to bring something up about the schedule and this  
40 possible change, which we're going to talk about in the next  
41 committee, but my understanding, from the cobia update  
42 assessment that we're going to talk about here coming up, is the  
43 terminal year of data would be 2017, and so any management  
44 changes now would not be taken into effect in that stock  
45 assessment.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you as well for that. Okay. Is there  
48 any further discussion about the motion? **Seeing none, is there**

1 anybody opposed to this motion? Two opposed. All in favor of  
2 the motion, four. The motion carries four to two.

3  
4 All right, and so I think we're good to go, and we will revisit  
5 this in Full Council, unless there is any other business to  
6 consider. All right. Seeing none --

7  
8 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 20, 2018.)

9  
10 - - -