

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2
3 MIGRATORY SPECIES COMMITTEE

4
5 Hyatt Centric French Quarter New Orleans, Louisiana

6
7 JANUARY 29, 2020

8
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

10 Greg Stunz.....Texas
11 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
12 Roy Crabtree.....NMFS
13 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
14 Paul Mickle (designee for Joe Spraggins).....Mississippi
15 Lance Robinson (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
16 John Sanchez.....Florida
17 Ed Swindell.....Louisiana
18 Troy Williamson.....Texas
19 Lt. Mark Zanowicz.....USCG

20
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32 **STAFF**

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37 Ava Lasseter.....Anthropologist
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40 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
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45
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15
16 - - -
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1 The Migratory Species Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery
2 Management Council convened at the Hyatt Centric French Quarter,
3 New Orleans, Louisiana, Wednesday morning, January 29, 2020, and
4 was called to order by Chairman Greg Stunz.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN GREG STUNZ:** We will call together the Migratory
11 Species Committee meeting. The members of that committee are
12 myself as Chair, Mr. Robinson as Vice Chair, Susan Boggs, Roy
13 Crabtree, J.D. Dugas, John Sanchez, Paul Mickle, Ed Swindell,
14 Lieutenant Zanowicz, and Troy Williamson, and all of those
15 members are present.

16
17 Our first item of business would be Adoption of the Agenda. Are
18 there any edits or additions to the agenda? Seeing none, I
19 would entertain a motion to approve the agenda. It's moved by
20 Mr. Sanchez and seconded by Mr. Robinson. Any objections or any
21 opposition? Then we'll consider the agenda approved.

22
23 The next item of business is Approval of the Minutes, and we
24 last met in June of 2019, and are there any changes to the
25 minutes? Seeing none, I would entertain a motion to approve the
26 minutes. Motion by Mr. Sanchez, and Mr. Robinson seconds. If
27 there's no opposition, the minutes are approved.

28
29 The next item of business is going through our Action Guide and
30 Next Steps, and we have a relatively short agenda. There's an
31 update on some AP meetings on ICCAT from the HMS Division, and
32 then we have a presentation regarding some of the comments we've
33 been hearing at public testimony regarding shark depredation,
34 and so, with that, Dr. Hollensead, do you want to go through our
35 action list?

36
37 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** Yes. Thank you, Dr. Stunz. The first
38 agenda item on the docket today is, in September of 2019, the
39 HMS AP met to discuss a number of management issues, and these
40 discussions range from the progress of several amendments in the
41 scoping process, stock assessment updates for a number of HMS
42 species, and presentations on shark abundance and depredation.

43
44 Also, in that same month, the International Commission for the
45 Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, and so the ICCAT, Advisory
46 Committee also convened. During this meeting, the committee was
47 given an update on recent stock assessments for shortfin mako,
48 white marlin, yellowfin tuna, and bluefin tuna, and so Dr. Stunz

1 has been active in these meetings, in these proceedings, and so
2 he's going to give the committee a verbal update and summary of
3 those proceedings.

4
5 Additionally, there was something that I wanted to draw the
6 committee's attention to, and so this was just received this
7 week, but a U.S. delegation summary report from the 2019 ICCAT
8 Annual Committee is now available, and so that meeting took
9 place in November of last year.

10
11 We have put that up on the briefing book website, just for
12 reference for the committee, if they would like to go into a
13 little bit more detail to those proceedings that Dr. Stunz will
14 touch on today as well.

15
16 Then the second item we have for the committee is, as Dr. Stunz
17 had mentioned recently, we've had a number of concerns raised
18 relative to the increased number of sharks observed on fishing
19 trips and depredation of catch from sharks, and so quite a few
20 of the public testimony comments have been in regard to this.

21
22 In response to that, we have some staff from HMS to come speak
23 to us, specifically Ms. Karyl Brewster-Geisz, and she's going to
24 give us a presentation on recent trends of abundance for several
25 common shark species within the Gulf and also touch on some
26 information regarding shark depredation, and, unless there's any
27 questions about the action guide, that would conclude my
28 overview.

29

30 **SUMMARY REPORTS FROM THE HMS AND ICCAT AP MEETINGS**

31
32 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you. If it's the will of the committee,
33 and if it's okay, I will give just a brief overview of what
34 happened at that advisory committee meeting and sort of the
35 intent of that and how it relates to our group.

36
37 Last fall, there were two meetings in Silver Spring regarding
38 the advisory committee that advises ICCAT, and those two
39 meetings mainly were to deal with this BAYS group. If you
40 remember, we wrote a letter, a joint letter, among several
41 councils dealing with bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack
42 tuna, and, obviously, with yellowfin the most relevant to this
43 council.

44
45 In addition to that meeting, it was to deal with those tuna
46 groups as well as mako sharks, but, to step back just a little
47 bit and give you an idea, we haven't been real active with this
48 group, but, because of the issues developing with sharks, makos,

1 and the tunas, I felt like we probably -- There is a good
2 opportunity here for us to get in our input as it relates to
3 management of these species, which greatly affects a lot of our
4 different regions.

5
6 The main goal of this advisory committee is to advise the ICCAT
7 commissioners on U.S. policies as they develop strategies going
8 into their meetings. Martha was also there, and so, Martha,
9 please feel free to jump in if I'm missing something, as well as
10 several in the audience.

11
12 Obviously, we have representation on that advisory panel, by us
13 being there, and, if there is any issues we would like to take
14 forward to that committee, we certainly now have a direct
15 mechanism to do that. Another just interesting aspect of the
16 committee is, when you kind of look behind the curtain of how
17 these different committees handle some of the same challenges
18 and issues we face, it actually is very interesting.

19
20 It made me feel a lot better about the challenges we have, and
21 not to diminish what we're doing, and, I mean, we have some very
22 difficult decisions ahead of us, but, in this case, when you add
23 in migratory species moving through many, many jurisdictions,
24 and different countries involved, and things get complicated
25 very fast, and so it wasn't quite as -- It made me think that,
26 hey, we can really solve some of the problems that we have here.

27
28 In addition, the way that this committee works is, because
29 you're developing U.S. strategies that are confidential, it's a
30 confidential process, and all the documents we receive -- Like,
31 at this meeting, they're given to you right then, and you've got
32 to read them on the spot and make a strategic, on-the-fly
33 decision and then give the documents back, because of the
34 confidential nature, and so it's a little more high pressure and
35 that sort of thing, but it made me feel better, just in general,
36 about, you know, we can really accomplish things around here,
37 when you really look broader at some of other complicating
38 international highly migratory species.

39
40 To give you some ideas of what is complicating things that might
41 be related to us, and even occurring in the Gulf, to some
42 extent, is you've got ghost fleets fishing that we don't even
43 know about, and that's the number-one problem, and you've got
44 other issues of foreign fleets flying vessels of opportunity to,
45 obviously, increase their catches, and there is very strong
46 incentives for non-reporting at all, or severe underreporting,
47 or even overreporting, to make your numbers look better.

48

1 Related to these BAYS species that we've been talking about, the
2 outlooks aren't looking too good. Bigeye tuna, which isn't a
3 huge concern for us, obviously, but yellowfin is, and I will
4 talk about that more in just a second here, but it was generally
5 okay for albacore and skipjack, and more details are in that
6 letter that we joined in on that was in the briefing book from
7 the last meeting, if you're still interested in that.

8
9 The solutions are not very much different on these things than
10 what we might have, in terms of help giving them some levers
11 they could pull to do things. Obviously, just like the
12 fisheries we deal with, observer coverage is a big problem, and
13 increasing that. Electronic monitoring, imposing regulations
14 that really have some teeth in it, but, the way it stands in
15 these international fleets, the incentives are so great that
16 they kind of flaunt rules and compliance and that kind of thing,
17 and so it's very, very, very difficult.

18
19 You have some great compliance by some countries, and some
20 countries you have zero compliance, kind of tragic -- A classic
21 example of tragedy of the commons. You know, you have one
22 group, kind of spoiling it for everyone, that doesn't want to
23 comply, and so it made me feel like, as the Gulf Council here,
24 we're in a pretty good place, because we actually can control
25 some of that, and so our problems are a little more manageable,
26 and so that was some good news coming out that.

27
28 On to some species that we kind of care about, and we're going
29 to hear more about sharks here in just a minute, but the main
30 one we looked at was mako, and that's a pretty pessimistic
31 outlook for mako, pretty bleak, in the sense that new estimates
32 came out about their age at maturity, which was eighteen to
33 twenty-one years, as opposed to the old eight to nine, which
34 greatly, obviously, impacts their ability to recover.

35
36 If you looked at no fishing at all, there's only a 50 percent
37 probability of recovery by 2045, and so that's it, and, of
38 course, there is major non-directed catch in all the longline
39 fleets, and so that's a big deal. There is -- If we had,
40 essentially, none of this fishing, or minimal, at 700 tons of
41 what it is, it's still going to take fifty years, or we're
42 looking at 2070 before we see any recovery, and so that's not
43 great.

44
45 There's a lot of issues, and those fish come in live, and
46 they're obviously of high commercial value for their -- They're
47 one of the few sharks that are desirable to consume, but
48 releasing them, if they're alive at haul-back, they actually do

1 very well, but what happened is that the ICCAT, in their
2 meeting, couldn't come to any agreement on that. There are
3 several proposals, and so they kicked the can down the road of
4 status quo for one more year, and so that's even going to
5 further extend the plight of makos.

6
7 Obviously, that's a big fishery for us here in the Gulf, and so,
8 what that means to us, I don't know. Kind of stand by, and we
9 can take our Gulf concerns to this committee, as necessary,
10 through that advisory panel process.

11
12 The other species of interest to us is white marlin. The big
13 issue there are dead discards in the longline fleet and very
14 little reporting, or no reporting. There's a 400-ton TAC on
15 those species, and that's exceeded every year, and it's making
16 it very difficult to meet any rebuilding schedules, because we
17 consistently exceed that TAC, and there's a lot of unknowns, and
18 back to the observer problem.

19
20 It's the same deal. There's a lot of potential there, because
21 they're alive at haul-back, many times, and the recommendations
22 were to use the circle hooks, but most countries wouldn't agree
23 to use circle hooks, which would improve that live at haul-back
24 status. Anyway, there's still some issues there.

25
26 All of us are familiar with Dr. Calay, who often sits at this
27 table, and she gave a great presentation, as the lead scientist
28 on our yellowfin tuna assessments. There is sort of a little
29 bit of a good story there, but maybe not so good. The
30 assessments aren't as bad as some would have expected in what
31 you hear from that fishery.

32
33 It's not overfished, and it's not undergoing overfishing, but
34 it's right on the cusp on that, and there's a recovery rate
35 looking down to 2033, with a 70 percent probability, but then,
36 for the shoe to fall on that one, we're exceeding our TAC every
37 year by 100 tons on that, and that's been a shift to smaller
38 fish.

39
40 Similar to the makos, the age at maturity was just revised to
41 eighteen years from eleven, which is going to lead to all these
42 new mortality at age estimate changes, and so probably the next
43 assessment isn't going to look as good, and so we've got some
44 issues with yellowfin tuna. If I had to guess, that's probably
45 the biggest concern for us around this table. If anyone is
46 interested, we can form opinions to take into that advisory
47 panel.

48

1 The last just brief thing here is bluefin tuna is the same kind
2 of story there, but they are still in the middle of models, and
3 that assessment is getting extended, for a variety of reasons.
4 Something to keep an eye on in the Gulf, and you might have
5 heard, is we have always caught bluefin tuna, but they seem to
6 be occurring a little bit more regularly, or maybe there's some
7 targeting going on and that sort of thing, and so that's a
8 concern for some of us around the table.

9
10 Related to just some other miscellaneous items, as I mentioned
11 the last time, Mexico was positively recertified, which is part
12 of the process that goes on during ICCAT, in terms of how they
13 are -- It's certification in terms of how they are managing and
14 complying with regulations, but they were still identified as
15 having big problems with IUU fishing.

16
17 What that means is they can still carry on business as normal,
18 but they're on this bad list, that, if they don't remedy the
19 situation, and there's going to be more consultation with the
20 National Marine Fisheries Service, but the next report for that
21 -- By the way, it mainly stemmed, for us, related to all the
22 lancha fishing coming up from Mexico down in south Texas,
23 although there is some other problems that Mexico has that
24 aren't related to the Gulf.

25
26 That won't be remedied until the next report in 2021, and so
27 we'll have some discussions later today, I'm sure, on the lancha
28 fleet, and so there's not a lot of -- Because there is,
29 obviously, consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service,
30 but they are currently recertified, and so they'll be able to
31 continue their operations.

32
33 All that led up to the ICCAT meeting that occurred in 2019, and,
34 generally, that's the report that Dr. Hollensead was talking
35 about that's in our briefing document, if you want to know more,
36 but the highlights from that were the U.S. was successful in
37 advancing those priorities, especially as it relates to
38 rebuilding marlins, blue and white, and so stay tuned for that.

39
40 There was more protection given especially to the juvenile
41 tunas, which is a big concern, and I won't get into that, but,
42 if you're interested, the juvenile aspect of that fishery is a
43 big concern, and, as I mentioned earlier, they still couldn't
44 resolve these mako issues, which I'm sure we'll be hearing more
45 of.

46
47 Anyway, I don't want to give a whole presentation, but just a
48 verbal update of what's going on with that ICCAT and any role,

1 and so I will open that up for questions or really, maybe, if
2 there's any comments to this committee about how we want to
3 interact with that ICCAT Advisory Panel. Dr. Shipp.

4
5 **DR. BOB SHIPP:** Thanks, Greg. Thanks for the update. Was there
6 any discussion of blackfin tuna at all?

7
8 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** There was a little bit of discussion, but I
9 don't recall, Bob, exactly what that was. I will have to find
10 out and see what's going on with the blackfin.

11
12 **DR. SHIPP:** Yes, because we've been hearing the same story that
13 we've heard with sharks, except the opposite, that blackfin are
14 nothing like they used to be, but it's just anecdotal, and so I
15 was curious.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** I don't recall offhand, Bob, but what I can do
18 is I will review the report and things and try to get back
19 during the report-out during Full Council on blackfin. Chester.

20
21 **MR. CHESTER BREWER:** Thank you, Greg, and thank you for your
22 optimistic note. I served on the AP, this AP, for ten years,
23 and it sort of reminded me of a story that my uncle used to tell
24 about a man who was hitting himself in the head with a hammer.
25 They asked him why he was hitting himself in the head with a
26 hammer, and he said because it feels so good when I stop.

27
28 The one thing that I -- Of course, I'm not on this council, but
29 I am on the South Atlantic, and these are issues that concern
30 both of us, and the one thing that Russ Dunn and I worked on for
31 a long time, and this relates to the BAYS tunas, is the
32 situation in the Gulf of Guinea. Until that situation gets
33 under control, I have fears for those tunas, because they are
34 purse seining those things and longlining those tunas in there
35 mercilessly, and they have been doing it for years.

36
37 You have seen the size of the catch, and, last time I looked at
38 it, I think the average catch, or average size, or weight, was
39 2.2 kilograms, and so they're killing the babies over there, and
40 they're killing yellowfin over there, and those BAYS tuna all
41 swim together, and so, when you're netting up skipjack, you're
42 netting up all the other BAYS tuna, and I would -- Since you've
43 got this great optimism, I would love to see a very strong
44 emphasis put on the Gulf of Guinea and putting some significant
45 restrictions in there.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** To that point, Chester, I wouldn't say it was
48 optimism with the ICCAT process. After seeing that, it was a

1 little more optimism about us here, that we don't face some of
2 those challenges, but, yes, the Guinea problem with the tunas is
3 a big issue, and it's going to -- Obviously, what happens there
4 affects us, because of the migratory nature of these species and
5 others, and so how we deal with that, I don't know, but, as we
6 move forward and we begin to have discussions on what's going on
7 with yellowfin tuna, even though that's not a species we're
8 directly managing, we do have input through that process,
9 through this, and I guess that's my main take-home message for
10 this group, and then, what that looks like in the future, I
11 don't know, and we're just beginning.

12
13 We had been active in that in the past, and then not so much for
14 a while, and now, all of a sudden, we're back in a little bit,
15 and so I guess it's more of a stay-tuned with this group to see
16 where things go with those species that are relevant to the
17 council.

18
19 Is there any more questions regarding the ICCAT Advisory Panel?
20 Seeing none, then we'll move into the next item on our agenda,
21 and that is the presentation of shark population abundance and
22 depredation by Ms. Brewster-Geisz.

23

24 **PRESENTATION ON SHARK POPULATION ABUNDANCE TRENDS AND**
25 **DEPREDATION**

26
27 **MS. KARYL BREWSTER-GEISZ:** Thank you. Good morning, everybody.
28 For those of you who do not know me, I am Karyl Brewster-Geisz,
29 and I work for the Highly Migratory Species Management Division
30 up in Silver Spring.

31
32 I am here today, per your request, to talk about shark
33 depredation. Shark depredation is not a new problem. It has
34 been going on for years, and I think, as all of you are aware,
35 it does have negative impacts on other species as well, in terms
36 of quantifying what that mortality is, and it has negative
37 impacts on fishermen and those of us who like to eat fish, in
38 terms of lost revenue and lost seafood and some gear damage
39 across all the fisheries, along with the negative social
40 impacts, in that a lot of recreational anglers may not want to
41 go out fishing for name-your-favorite-fish, because they are
42 going to be concerned that they're not going to get to land it
43 or see any, because of the sharks.

44
45 When I first started with HMS back in the mid-1990s, we never
46 heard reports about shark depredation. We were dealing with
47 overfished species, and we were dealing with pretty strict
48 management and different repercussions of that.

1 Now, we hear about shark depredation on a regular basis, and
2 it's just been growing over the past few years, and we're
3 hearing about it from everywhere, all of our different regions
4 and all of our different fisheries, including HMS fisheries, and
5 so it's not just a Gulf Council issue, but it is an issue up and
6 down the coast and in the Gulf and in the Caribbean.

7
8 Sometimes it makes the news, and other times people just call us
9 to find out what they can do. Both this council and the South
10 Atlantic Council have written to us in recent years to request
11 some sort of solution or action to solve the problem, and part
12 of what I'm here to talk to you about today is the fact that any
13 solution -- It's not just as easy as go out and fish for the
14 sharks. There are problems and concerns when we're talking
15 about managing a resource.

16
17 Some of those challenges that we are looking at right now is we
18 do not have a lot of good data that we can actually look and
19 figure out what is the problem, what are we trying to solve, and
20 I think everybody knows that sharks are predators, and they're
21 going to be eating fish, and so how do we minimize the impact to
22 other fisheries while still allowing for the sharks that need to
23 be rebuilt to rebuild, and so we don't have any consistent or
24 verifiable way of reporting shark depredation at the moment.

25
26 We don't really know the extent of the problem, other than it
27 has apparently been increasing in the past few years, and we
28 don't really know what species are the main culprits. We have a
29 lot of fishermen who are calling us and letting us know it was
30 this species or that species, and occasionally we'll get
31 pictures, like the one that I showed earlier, that you can see
32 the species, and we can get an idea, but is it always that
33 species, or is it a different one? Is there different species
34 in different areas? We just don't know, and some of the species
35 that are being implicated are both overfished with overfishing
36 occurring, and other species are really healthy, like blacktip.

37
38 We have this issue, and we see the challenges, and we want to
39 find some solution, and part of what I would like is to hear
40 from all of you on what you think are possible solutions.

41
42 In order to figure out where we are, sometimes it's helpful to
43 go back into the past and where did we start and how did we get
44 here, and so, for those of you who haven't really paid attention
45 to shark management, it started federally in 1993, and, at that
46 time, the fishery management plan set up three species complexes
47 for thirty-nine species, and these complexes were based not on
48 biology, but on what gears the shark species are caught on.

1
2 So you had small coastal sharks, and those were primarily
3 inshore recreational, along with the gillnet fisheries, and this
4 is the Atlantic sharpnose, bonnethead, blacknose, and we have
5 large coastal sharks, and this is what many of us think of when
6 we think about the shark fishery. This is the main commercial
7 fishery that primarily used bottom longline, and this is
8 sandbar. At the time, it was dusky. That was the prime
9 commercial fishery.

10
11 Then you have the pelagics sharks, and those were the
12 recreational tournaments happening in the mid-Atlantic and on
13 pelagic longline fisheries, and so that's blue sharks, mako,
14 threshers, and so that's how management was established then,
15 and, at the time, large coastal sharks were deemed to be
16 overfished. They were assessed and managed as that complex.

17
18 As time went on, it became obvious that we needed limited
19 access, and so, in 1999, we implemented limited access for those
20 species of sharks, and that is still in place right now, and it
21 split the commercial permit holders into two groups, the
22 directed group, and so the people who could target sharks, and
23 an incidental group, and so those who might be targeting
24 something else, such as your snappers, but were allowed to land
25 a limited number of sharks, and that is still in place today.

26
27 Throughout the 2000s, we started managing sharks more and more
28 on a species basis, and, for that management, we also had more
29 and more species-specific stock assessments, and so it's gotten
30 a lot more complex. We also added three species, back in 2015,
31 and so those were the smooth dogfish, Gulf smoothhound, and
32 Florida smoothhound, and so all of those are sharks, and they
33 are managed in the Shark Management Group, and it's an open-
34 access fishery, and so it's slightly different than the others.

35
36 At that time, with the different species-specific stock
37 assessments, there was the determination that some of these
38 species are actually two stocks, one in the Gulf and one in the
39 Atlantic, and so, for species like Atlantic sharpnose, we have
40 an Atlantic sharpnose stock in the Atlantic, and we have an
41 Atlantic sharpnose stock in the Gulf of Mexico, and they are
42 managed separately and under their own quotas.

43
44 We're now up to forty-two species and forty-five stocks, and,
45 for most of this time period, from 1993 to 2015, the quotas,
46 commercial quotas, were taken, particularly for large coastals,
47 really, really quickly, and we're talking a couple of weeks, in
48 some cases, and a couple of months, in other cases, and

1 sometimes we managed to close the fishery in time, and we were
2 right at a high-ninety percentage, and other times we missed the
3 mark and we blew over. That happens, and so we moved. After
4 2015, things started changing, and this corresponds with what we
5 are hearing about shark depredation.

6
7 As I said, we started doing species-specific stock assessments,
8 and so these are some of the recent stock assessments for our
9 large coastal shark species, and Gulf blacktip is right up at
10 the top, and that's that light-blue line. It's perfectly
11 healthy, and it is way above the maximum sustainable yield line
12 at one, which is the dashed line, and everything is great with
13 that stock, and we can land a lot more than what people have
14 been landing.

15
16 The other species, as you can see, are all down below maximum
17 sustainable yield. Sandbar sharks are overfished, but they are
18 on track for their rebuilding, and they're actually slightly
19 ahead, and so they will be rebuilt later on in the 2000s, and I
20 don't think any of us will be alive when that happens.

21
22 The same with dusky sharks. They are overfished, with
23 overfishing occurring. This is a species that has been
24 prohibited since the year 2000, and it still is undergoing
25 overfishing, and we are currently in litigation about whether or
26 not we took enough action to reduce mortality. They will be
27 rebuilt in the year 2107.

28
29 Then you have scalloped hammerhead, and scalloped hammerhead is
30 overfished. While here in the Gulf of Mexico and up the coast
31 it is just overfished, from the Caribbean south, that population
32 is listed under ESA as threatened, and so there are some large
33 issues to deal with in terms of biomass of large coastal sharks.

34
35 This slide is the slide of the small coastal sharks, and we've
36 had a lot more assessments of them, and you will see differences
37 in these, whereas, for these species, they are going down, and
38 then they are going up, and so not too many of the small coastal
39 sharks were overfished, and this slide also has the smoothhound
40 shark, which is not a small coastal. It is separate, but it's
41 perfectly healthy as well, and, in the Gulf of Mexico, there is
42 no fishery for the smoothhound complex. The one species here
43 that is overfished is the blacknose shark, and, in the Gulf of
44 Mexico, blacknose is prohibited.

45
46 I have said, in recent years, we have heard more and more about
47 shark depredation, and we have also seen a change in the quotas,
48 in that the commercial quotas for large coastal sharks have not

1 been taken, and this was a huge shift, and so, here, there's a
2 lot of acronyms on this slide, and WGOM stands for western Gulf
3 of Mexico, and that is for the group that is basically
4 Louisiana, and it's anywhere to the west of 88 degrees
5 longitude, and then EGOM is east Gulf of Mexico.

6
7 Within those two groups, we manage both blacktip, the aggregated
8 large coastal, which is that large coastal complex with a bunch
9 of species taken out, and then hammerheads, the smooth, great,
10 and scalloped, and, as you can see, the quotas have not been
11 taken. They have been down in the 70 percent level, or lower.

12
13 The Gulf of Mexico as a whole, we manage the small coastals, and
14 that's that non-blacknose small coastals, and that has always
15 been low. The small coastal quotas have never been reached.
16 It's always been the large coastal. Then you can look down, and
17 all of the quotas are low. If this had been 2015, they would
18 all be up in the nineties, except for, as I said, the small
19 coastals and the smoothhounds.

20
21 While we don't have a specific solution for depredation, we are
22 looking at a lot of changes for management, to try to figure out
23 what is going on, why isn't the quota being taken, and then, of
24 course, working in what can we do about the fishery as a whole
25 and the depredation issue.

26
27 Starting in 2020, our shark specifications, we have actually
28 started the year with much higher retention limits than we have
29 in the past, and we're also looking at different ways of how we
30 internally are monitoring when we're going to open and close and
31 when we're going to change retention limits.

32
33 Amendment 14, we did scoping on that last summer, and that is
34 basically our ABC control rule action, where we're looking at
35 how we establish the shark quotas overall once we get an
36 assessment or if we don't have an assessment, and so that
37 proposed rule should be out later this year.

38
39 We are also looking at an action which we're calling spatial
40 management and data collection. If you remember, we have a lot
41 of closed areas, one off the east coast of Florida, Charleston
42 Bump, Desoto Canyon, and there's also some areas that we have
43 backstopped the councils on, like Madison-Swanson and Steamboat
44 Lumps, and we are looking at how, now that these areas are
45 closed, do we start getting data, so we can determine are these
46 still the right areas to be closed, or are adjustments needed,
47 and so this a proposed rule that we're also working on for later
48 in the year.

1
2 We are currently working on an Atlantic blacktip assessment, and
3 we finished the Gulf of Mexico blacktip assessment a couple of
4 years ago. As I said, it's still great, and Atlantic blacktip
5 has not been assessed since the year 2006, and so we're looking
6 forward to what that assessment will tell us, and then, starting
7 after that, we are doing all of the hammerheads, smooth,
8 scalloped, and great. They will be assessed as different
9 species, but the assessment is looking at the complex as a whole
10 and how do you assess these species.

11
12 This is great timing, because, under the last scalloped
13 hammerhead assessment, if you remember, they were overfished,
14 and they were scheduled to be done with rebuilding by 2023, and
15 so hopefully this assessment will be done by that point and we
16 can declare a victory on scalloped hammerhead.

17
18 Biological opinions, these are things that are issued under
19 Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and I mentioned that
20 scalloped hammerhead is listed as threatened under the ESA from
21 the Caribbean south, and so the Caribbean includes Puerto Rico
22 and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and so that is in HMS, but oceanic
23 whitetip shark is also listed as threatened, and that is one
24 population worldwide, and so it used to be fairly common here in
25 the Gulf of Mexico, and so we need to figure out what to do and
26 how to implement that.

27
28 Then, internally, we have started a process that we're calling
29 the Shark Fishery Review, or SHARE. This is where we are taking
30 a look at the health of the fishery itself, and so this isn't a
31 stock assessment. This is looking at the entire fishery.

32
33 This is looking and asking questions like, when we increase the
34 retention limit, or decrease the retention limit, when we close
35 the fishery, are we actually having the impact we are expecting
36 to have, or are things different? How many permit holders do we
37 still have? Are they increasing, or are they decreasing, or are
38 they the same permit holders from the year to year? It's all of
39 that, and we're looking at it in the last seven or eight years
40 or so, and so hopefully we'll have something to share by our
41 September advisory panel meeting, but I did have, on the next
42 slide, a couple of graphs to show now.

43
44 These are permit holders, and these are active permit holders,
45 and so people who have reported landing a shark. The top two
46 graphs are any shark, other than smoothhound sharks, and the
47 bottom two graphs are large coastals only. On the left-hand
48 side, you have the Gulf of Mexico, and, on the right, you have

1 the Atlantic, and, as you can see, there is a lot more state-
2 water fishery permit holders than there are federal permit
3 holders.

4
5 The number of permits increase and decrease, depending upon
6 where you are, and the other thing to note is we are looking at
7 the landings. While there are a lot fewer federal permit
8 holders, the landings coming in from the federal permit holders
9 is a lot more than what is coming in from the state-water
10 fishermen, and so this is just a preview of some of the things
11 we're looking at.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Karyl, I do have a question regarding that, if
14 you don't mind.

15
16 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** Sure.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Go ahead, Ms. Bosarge.

19
20 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** On that last slide, I was just wondering.
21 You said that you've seen a big shift in how quickly the quota
22 is being met, or not met at all, in 2015, and I'm only seeing a
23 snippet of your data, and so it's hard for me to interpret, but
24 that graph only goes back to 2014, as far as active vessels in
25 that fishery, and we're on the left-hand side, the Gulf is, and
26 so we're talking about twenty or thirty people, or vessels, and
27 that's all that fishery is, and I just wondered -- Before 2014,
28 did we have more vessels? Are we seeing a steady decline and
29 tapering off in this fishery?

30
31 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** It's hard to say. Part of the reason why
32 we're starting in 2014 is because, in 2013, we implemented our
33 electronic dealer reporting, and so, at that point, we started
34 getting all the data, including the data from the states and the
35 state-water fishermen, so we can actually calculate it.

36
37 Going back before 2014, we still had limited access. If you
38 look through our SAFE reports, the number of people who hold
39 permits has declined slightly, but not a lot, but whether or not
40 the active permit holders has changed -- I would guess, before
41 then, it's probably about the same, but I don't have a real good
42 answer for you.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Karyl, and you can go ahead.

45
46 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** Okay. Questions that we're trying to ask
47 all the fishermen who come to us with concerns about shark
48 depredation are if there are different fishing techniques or

1 strategies that they have noticed that seem to attract sharks,
2 in terms of sitting on the hook versus trolling versus pelagic
3 longlines, to try to get some sense of what's going on out there
4 and if there are specific locations and seasons where
5 depredation are more frequent. Again, that might help us
6 pinpoint what species are the culprits that we need to think
7 about.

8
9 Then what are some of the best practices that we would have to
10 quantify the ecological and socioeconomic impact for the fishery
11 and for other fisheries? These are overarching questions that
12 we have.

13
14 To help us with the species identification, there are some
15 genetic methods that have been introduced to help quantify it,
16 and this is where they take some of the DNA that's left behind
17 from a shark bite and use that to quantify, and so it's not an
18 instantaneous -- That you look at a bitten-up fish and you know
19 what bit it. It is going back to the lab and figuring that out.

20
21 Sort of, in summary, we are definitely aware that this is an
22 issue, and it appears to be increasing, and we are having
23 trouble quantifying what the extent of the issue is, and we need
24 a lot more data, whether that's through observers or logbooks,
25 or maybe electronic monitoring, and we just need the data, and
26 so we have identified depredation as a research priority, and
27 so, those of you who submit applications through the BREP
28 program, for example, depredation was listed, and so all of
29 those pre-proposals were due last week, I think, and so I'm
30 looking forward to seeing if any came in about how to research
31 depredation.

32
33 The other thing to consider is we do manage sharks under the
34 Magnuson Act, and so we have the same limitations as the
35 council. Overfished stocks must be rebuilt, and we have a lot
36 of shark species that are overfished, and overfishing needs to
37 be prohibited, or prevented, and we have that issue with a lot
38 of shark species, and overfishing happens a lot.

39
40 We need to find ways to work within all of these legal
41 constraints, including ESA, to minimize conflicts between sharks
42 and other fisheries and trying to figure out how to ensure that
43 optimum yield is met for all species. That is pretty much where
44 I'm at, and we're aware of the issues, and I am definitely open
45 to suggestions and thoughts and any of your questions that you
46 might have. Thank you.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Karyl. We really appreciate that

1 very informative presentation, and, as you probably know, and
2 maybe even heard last night during the question-and-answer,
3 we've got a lot of public testimony recently concerning what
4 even seems to be elevated depredation issues going on, and so
5 this is very much of interest to this council, but I'm sure
6 there are some questions. Bob, I saw your hand up.

7
8 **DR. SHIPP:** Karyl, that was a great presentation. We operate
9 out of Dauphin Island, that area, and Marcos Drymon, who is
10 sited there, has been working with us. Over the past decade,
11 and this is anecdotal, but, at the fishing rodeos, as well at
12 the research done offshore with ROVs, there has been a
13 tremendous increase in the number of sandbar sharks, and I
14 noticed, on your graph early on, it looked like sandbars were
15 starting to come back, as the other ridgebacks are not. The
16 question is what is the process eventually to remove them from
17 the protected status, so that the industry can start targeting
18 sharks, like sandbars, that are showing abundance?

19
20 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** Thank you. That is a great question, and
21 so sandbar sharks are currently not allowed to be landed unless
22 you are participating in the shark research fishery. In the
23 shark research fishery, we issue about five permits a year, and
24 it's 100 percent observer coverage for those fishermen, and we
25 have been getting great science from that fishery.

26
27 As part of Amendment 14, as I mentioned before, we are re-
28 looking at how do we set the quotas, how do we take the stock
29 assessment and take into account the management uncertainty,
30 take into account the scientific uncertainty, and set up the
31 quotas commercially and recreationally, so we can manage it.

32
33 The stock assessment we had for sandbar indicated, as I said,
34 that they were slightly ahead of rebuilding, and so we are
35 looking at that, and we're looking at Amendment 14 and trying to
36 see how it would all work. If we take sandbar off, as you said,
37 protected status, or remove it so you can land it, how many can
38 people land? Is it worth it?

39
40 Last time we looked at this, it would come out to about seven,
41 eight, ten sandbars per person per year, which is why we
42 maintained it in the research fishery, but, under Amendment 14,
43 and the actions that will come after that, we're going to be
44 looking at it again, to see if we can have a sustainable
45 commercial shark fishery and maintain the rebuilding of that
46 stock.

47
48 **DR. SHIPP:** Just as a caveat, to follow-up, a lot of our

1 underwater research has been terminated because of the
2 prevalence of sandbars. They are a very threatening species.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

5
6 **MS. BOSARGE:** I am trying to understand your slide where you had
7 the percentages of the quota that's been landed, and, as I said
8 before, I'm only seeing a piece of your data here. Is that an
9 attribute of the health of the stock, because the sharks aren't
10 as abundant as they should be, and they're not in a healthy
11 condition? If you go back to where you have the percentages, is
12 that due to the health of the stock, or is that due to the
13 continual tapering off of the directed fishery, commercially,
14 for some of these Gulf of Mexico stocks? Then I have a follow-
15 up after that.

16
17 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** That is a good question, and I don't have a
18 good answer. Some of these species, they should be able to land
19 a lot more than what they are landing, like the blacktip. There
20 is no reason why they can't land a lot more than what they are,
21 and so decrease in how much has been caught is not due to the
22 status of the stock.

23
24 There are other issues at play, in terms of, last year,
25 Louisiana, for instance, which is one of the primary states,
26 particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, for landing sharks, and
27 those fishermen were not able to go shark fishing, because of
28 other state laws, primarily from Texas, in terms of not allowing
29 fins to go through, and so I think some of it has to do with
30 other regulations and not necessarily regulations that HMS has
31 control over. It also has to do with just whether or not people
32 see sharks as being a profitable species to go fishing for.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Did you have a follow-up, Leann?

35
36 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and this one might be for you, and I'm not
37 sure. On the AP that funnels information to HMS for some of
38 these Gulf of Mexico shark species, what does our commercial
39 directed fishery representation look like on that AP? I am
40 wondering what kind of input they are actually getting from us
41 from our directed commercial fishermen, which I understand are
42 few and far between at this point, but do we have any
43 representation from the Gulf directed shark fishermen?

44
45 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** We do. We have one directed shark
46 fisherman on our advisory panel, and so our advisory panel -- We
47 try to have equal representation commercial and recreational,
48 and then we have some environmentalists, along with some

1 academics.

2
3 All of the states are allowed to send somebody, along with all
4 the councils are allowed to send somebody as well, and so, every
5 meeting, we have somewhere between fifty and sixty people, and
6 we try to have representation from the different fisheries and
7 the different regions on the panel, and we do -- We try very
8 hard to find somebody who is a shark fisherman from the Gulf of
9 Mexico, but it is getting increasingly difficult.

10
11 **MS. BOSARGE:** I would think that would get more and more
12 difficult, simply because, number one, it's a very small number
13 of individuals, and, as those restrictions have gotten greater
14 and greater, even just the permit restrictions, and, I mean,
15 it's under a moratorium, but that's a permit that you actually
16 have to go to school for, and you have to take a class and
17 understand how to identify all the different sharks, and, if you
18 know anything about commercial fishermen, we don't really like
19 to go to school. That's not -- We're not book people, and we
20 don't like that environment, and we like to be out on the water
21 doing our own thing with our hands.

22
23 What scares me is that, because it is such a small group of
24 fishermen, we are already seeing, in all of our other commercial
25 industries, that graying of the fleet, and that there's this
26 generational gap there, where we're not seeing a lot of those
27 younger fishermen come up into the fishery, and this is not
28 something that you go get a college degree and then you can go
29 out and do it.

30
31 This is on-the-job training, where you spend years and years and
32 years on a boat, learning from your father or another fisherman,
33 or your mother sometimes, and it's few and far between, and so,
34 as those restrictions have gotten harder and harder, and those
35 directed fishermen are maybe not out there doing that anymore,
36 you are losing that transfer of knowledge, and I just --

37
38 I worry about the restrictions on that fishery, and I hope that
39 you will try and reach out more to our directed fishery in the
40 Gulf, since there's only one on your AP, especially when you go
41 through your assessment process, and I know it's hard to get
42 fishermen to come to a stock assessment meeting, and I can't
43 blame them.

44
45 Sometimes it's rough, but I think their input is very important,
46 and we have actually used some electronic means of reaching out
47 to our fishermen before a stock assessment here in the Gulf,
48 through the SEDAR process, to get their input by either calling

1 them or sending them a survey via email. I hope that maybe you
2 will look into some of that and really try and engage those men
3 on the water that have that knowledge that would be very useful
4 to you.

5

6 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Kevin.

7

8 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Along that, I guess, Dave, these are species
9 that we don't typically deal with at the state level, but I'm
10 just wondering, because of the interest from the fishing
11 community, if there is any way of trying to incorporate at least
12 a presentation with some of the expectations and the data needs
13 that HMS folks have that could be incorporated with various
14 states, and maybe it could be brought up as topic during the
15 Data Committee, and at least start the conversation.

16

17 Certainly, if the states have an understanding as to maybe what
18 type of information they're looking for, those types of
19 questions could be incorporated into the state surveys,
20 potentially, or at least have the discussion within that group,
21 to make sure they understand that it's a need, and not just from
22 the council, but to make sure that's being communicated to the
23 folks that are on the ground and doing surveys, and maybe there
24 would be some thoughts in trying to gather some more robust data
25 through that avenue.

26

27 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Well, and our FIN Committee is meeting in
28 March, and I can certainly talk to Greg Bray, the coordinator,
29 to see if we can't get something on the agenda.

30

31 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Go ahead, Kevin.

32

33 **MR. ANSON:** Working with Karyl and other folks to make sure that
34 you provide some information to that group in advance would be
35 helpful, too. Thank you.

36

37 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Dr. Mickle.

38

39 **DR. PAUL MICKLE:** Thank you for the presentation. My question
40 is kind of just maybe for folks in the audience, as well as
41 myself, is understanding -- I am unfamiliar with the stock
42 assessments for most species of sharks that have been done.

43

44 With ecosystem-based management getting more and more of a push,
45 have you all gone down some of those early roads in looking at
46 some of these species, as far as maybe some simple things to
47 look at, such as condition?

48

1 We know that the fishermen and the folks keep coming to us and
2 bringing up more and more depredation encounters and things like
3 that, and is it from increased effort, or is it a certain
4 species, and maybe shifting from selective to opportunistic --
5 Are there condition issues of certain species themselves, where
6 the food webs may be shifting and altering a behavioral
7 opportunistic, or a selected opportunistic, and maybe that's why
8 -- Those are some fairly simple questions that maybe EBFM could
9 start to have that seed and those first steps, as more and more
10 stock assessment efforts are maybe going down that road, and
11 have you all looked at that, or potential avenues of that?
12 Thank you.

13

14 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** We haven't looked at that at the stock
15 assessments themselves, but we are looking at different things
16 like that within the division, and we certainly will probably be
17 reaching out to Clay to talk about more of the ideas that you
18 have raised.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

21

22 **MS. BOSARGE:** I saw some gentlemen in the audience that I don't
23 normally see, and I thought that I recognized one of them from,
24 gosh, probably ten years ago, at a class I went to, of all
25 things, and I thought he was a shark fisherman, the way he's
26 been listening to what you said, and so, anyway, I said, is
27 there anything that you want me to ask, and he said, yes, ask
28 her how many shark fishermen they have left on the west coast of
29 Florida for some of these species that they're not landing, and
30 he said it's about three or four, and that's all they have left.

31

32 My point is that he's here, and so it's important to him,
33 because he's from Florida, obviously, or he fishes over there,
34 and he came all the way to Louisiana to hear you talk, and so I
35 would encourage you to -- He's here, and you're here, and I hope
36 that you all will talk and trade information, and hopefully you
37 can -- If he's willing to participate, hopefully you can involve
38 him some, if just on the telephone. Thank you.

39

40 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** Definitely, and so I'm not sure who is in
41 the audience for that, but I will be sure to reach out.

42

43 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Leann. Is there any other questions
44 regarding the shark presentation? Seeing none, Karyl, thank you
45 very much, and I know you're very busy with your branch and all
46 the other activities that you're working on, and so we
47 appreciate you taking the time to come down here to talk to us
48 about this sort of developing issue we've got going on.

1 **MS. BREWSTER-GEISZ:** Thank you, all. It's been a pleasure.
2

3 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** All right. Moving on into the rest of the
4 agenda, it brings us a little bit to Other Business, but, just
5 really quickly, to step back to that ICCAT AP meeting, I know
6 Martha was there, and I'm sorry, Martha, and I didn't recognize
7 you or give you an opportunity, if there was anything I missed
8 or anything you would like to add to that.
9

10 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** No, I think you did a great summarizing it.
11

12 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you. Bob, I did look in the last report
13 regarding blackfin, just briefly, and there wasn't, but I will
14 follow-up with what the status and plans for that are regarding
15 blackfin.
16

17 **DR. SHIPP:** Sorry. I didn't hear what you said.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** I reviewed the last report briefly for
20 blackfin, if there was anything that has come up recently from
21 that, and there has not, but I will follow-up with more detail
22 at Full Council. Moving on, that brings us to Other Business.
23 Is there any other business that needs to come before this
24 committee? Seeing none, that concludes the business for this
25 committee.
26

27 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 29, 2020.)
28

29 - - -
30