GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

MIGRATORY SPECIES COMMITTEE

Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort Miramar Beach, Florida

June 5, 2019

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The Migratory Species Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, Miramar Beach, Florida, Wednesday morning, June 5, 2019, and was called to order by Chairman Greg Stunz.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA
APPROVAL OF MINUTES
ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

CHAIRMAN GREG STUNZ: We will call together the Migratory Species Committee. Just to give this committee and the council in general a little background, this committee doesn't often meet. The last time we met was in January of 2017, but, before that, it was 2009, and so that's quite some time, but, as many know, some of these issues with highly migratory species are becoming more relevant, and so I'm hoping and suspecting that we'll probably meet more on a regular basis, and so, with that, the general idea today is to hear some presentations on some different management and other things going on that relate to the Gulf as it relates to migratory species, but our first item of business today is Adoption of the Agenda.

Has everyone had a chance to look at the agenda? Is there any edits or additions or changes that anyone would like to make to that agenda? Seeing none, would someone like to make a motion to approve the agenda, please?

DR. PAUL MICKLE: So moved.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: So moved by Dr. Mickle and seconded by Mr. Swindell. With that, we'll consider the agenda adopted. The next item of business is Approval of the Minutes. Any comments, edits, suggestions, or changes to the minutes? Seeing none, could I please get a motion to approve the minutes? Moved by Mr. Swindell and seconded by Dr. Mickle. Seeing no discussion on that, we'll consider the minutes approved.

Moving on to the next step is our Action Guide. Dr. Hollensead, would you mind going over the details of today's committee meeting, please?

DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD: Thank you, Dr. Stunz. There is a number of proposed action items coming out of the Highly Migratory Species Division, many of which are in the process of scoping right now and receiving public comment, and so I think the division decided that this would be a good time to also meet with the councils, to keep everyone informed as to what they have going on.

Right now, there are sort of four management items up for consideration. The first is Amendment 13 and 14, and these are currently out for scoping at the moment. In your background materials, there is a scoping schedule, so you can see what times and locations those are being conducted.

Amendment 13 is going to consider changes to the individual bluefin IFQ program. This program has been going on for three years now, and so, since they have three years of information about that program, the division is going to be reviewing that program as it is. Amendment 14 is going to look at specifically the shark fishery, to explore modifying reference points and increase management flexibility for that fishery.

The next item is looking at a draft regulatory amendment to modify the pelagic longline bluefin for area-based and weak-hook management measures, and then, lastly, there's an options paper to explore approaches to conduct research and collect data in those areas closed, specifically looking at HMS species and collecting data on those species.

All of those materials are available as background for you, if you're interested in diving in a little deeper. We will be receiving sort of a summary presentation from a NMFS representative, Ms. Jennifer Cudney, today, and so she'll kind of give you an overview of those things, and you will have the opportunity to ask questions of her about those items.

Lastly, for Other Business, which will sort of be at the end of that presentation, the council has received a letter from the New England Fishery Management Council. Their representative on the ICCAT Advisory Panel is considering sending a letter supporting certain recommendations for the management of bigeye and yellowfin tuna, and it's their feeling that, if there is sort of a unified voice behind that letter from the Atlantic councils that that would give more support to that moving forward to ICCAT, and so, Dr. Stunz, that concludes the action guide, unless there is any questions.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Thank you, Dr. Hollensead, for that briefing. On that letter, if, in the meantime, you have time to review it, and I know, Ms. Beckwith, your council is dealing with this as well, and so, when we get to that point, feel free to jump in from that perspective, and I will explain that a little bit better when we get to it. That will take us to -- By the way, this is Tab N, if everybody is following along with us, and Tab N-4, specifically, for this Agenda Item Number IV. I guess, if

we're ready for the presentations from the HMS staff, we're ready when you are.

SUMMARY PRESENTATION OF HMS PROPOSED ACTIONS

DR. JENNIFER CUDNEY: Thank you, guys, so much for inviting us to come and give a presentation to the council about some of the actions that we have currently ongoing with our division.

As it was mentioned, we've got four things that are happening. One is a DEIS, looking at modification of pelagic longline blueline tuna area-based and weak-hook management measures, and the other three actions are currently in the scoping phase, and so we're doing public hearings on the first one this summer and scoping meetings on the other three, and I will get into more details on the other three as we get into the presentation.

I do want to point out that there is a difference between the area-based and weak-hook measures and the spatial management and research action, and so one is specifically intended to look at bluefin tuna areas, and so areas that were implemented to reduce dead discards or interactions of bluefin tuna, and the regulatory amendment for spatial management and research, on the other hand, is intended to look at all HMS closed areas, and so I just want to make sure that we get that distinction down first, because there is some overlap in a lot of these measures.

The first one, again that area-based and weak-hook management measures DEIS, this project is intended to evaluate whether certain area-based and weak-hook management measures are still needed to reduce bluefin tuna interactions and to meet our management obligations under Magnuson and ATCA.

We are looking at four different thematic areas under this project, and they include the Northeastern United States Closed Area up off of Jersey, and that was closed in 1999, and there are two gear-restricted areas that we're looking at, and these are the Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area off of North Carolina and the Gulf of Mexico Gear Restricted Area, which is in the north-central Gulf of Mexico.

The Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area is effective from December through April, and the Gulf of Mexico Gear Restricted Areas are effective in April and May, and then, as I mentioned, we're also looking at weak-hook management measures. Weak hooks are required to be used in the Gulf of Mexico year-round.

The objectives of this project are to determine whether or not,

as I said, these measures are still needed. Specifically, we are looking to streamline and simplify Atlantic HMS management by potentially looking at and reducing any regulatory redundancies. We are also interested in looking at -- We have five different area-based alternatives, ranging from no action to elimination of some of these areas.

Some of the options that we considered in this regulatory amendment include looking at performance-based access, modification of current spatial coverage areas, and so changing boundaries of these areas, and then potentially undertaking a review process.

The review process is essentially looking at a formalized evaluation, where we would allow fishing into areas that were previously closed for a three-year period of time and to collect data and then figure out whether or not those areas are still meeting their intended goals. Then, as I said, removing current regulations is also one of the options.

On the far-right side of this table, you will see that we’ve got indications that the preferred alternatives for the Northeastern United States Closed Area and the Gulf of Mexico Gear Restricted Area are to undertake that review process, and the preferred alternative for the Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area is to eliminate it outright.

Regarding the weak hook alternatives, we looked at three different options, or alternatives, in the DEIS, and they include retaining the current regulations, which is a year-round requirement, looking at a seasonal requirement for weak hooks, and so January through June, and this would correspond to when bluefin tuna are present in the Gulf of Mexico in the greatest abundance and when we’re seeing the greatest number of interactions with the pelagic longline fishery, and then outright removal of the weak hook requirement.

For more information, you will need to go to our website, or reach out to me or to Craig Cockrell with the HMS Management Division, and our phone numbers are here. We are planning on putting forward a rule in the next couple of weeks, and so stay tuned for that. We’ll do a rollout, and we’ll reach out to Gulf Council members at that time, and we’ll certainly be open to addressing any questions about this then.

The next initiative is data collection and research to support the spatial fisheries management, and, again, this is one of our scoping actions. With this scoping project, we are looking at

spatial management, which is a range of tools that are designed to control adverse ecological fishing impacts. There are a number of different types of spatially-managed areas, including closed areas, time-area closures, controlled access areas, marine monuments, which we are not looking at in this rule, and gear-restricted areas.

These are all useful for different reasons, such as reducing bycatch, protecting habitat, et cetera, et cetera. However, these closed areas can also potentially reduce data collection through fishery-dependent means, and that is often the most cost-effective way to get information about these areas.

Just as an example, this is a map showing the pelagic longline closed areas and gear-restricted areas that we currently have in effect for that fishery, and so you can see that there's quite a bit of our federal EEZ that is restricted or closed in some form or fashion to just that fleet.

Since we need that fishery-dependent information, the purpose and need of this project is really oriented towards figuring out how to get some data for management, and so, as I said, we need that scientifically-rigorous information and up-to-date research for best management practices in order to ensure that the original goals of the closure are still being met, and so HMS is not -- They don't stay in one spot. They move around, but the areas that we closed for them are static, and so this regular monitoring, or getting information from these areas, is going to ensure that they are situated in the best time and space for those species that were intended to be protected in the first place.

Potential options for this project include continuing, as no action, continuing to authorize closed area research through our current EFP program. We are also looking at other options that include creating a standardized and streamlined EFP process that would essentially authorize or take comment and authorize several different types of activities to occur within the closed areas, and so, if somebody wanted to do some sort of controlled research fishing, then they would be able to apply for that, and, because we already did the analysis on that type of work, we would be able to authorize that in an expedited manner.

Other options include collecting data on closed area catch through an observer program, and so basically, if want in, you apply for observer coverage, or ask for observer coverage, and then you would be able to get in and fish in a closed area.

Other options include a research program, where fishermen would apply to get into the program under a set of controlled fishing conditions, and this is mirrored off of our current shark research fishery, and we also have options that include public-private partnerships and NOAA-based research vessel research, and then the last option that's being considered in this project is performance-based closed area access, and so our gear-restricted areas are currently managed using performance metrics that allow folks in if they meet certain criteria on a year-to-year basis.

The next steps for this project, the public comment period ends on July 31, and there is an issues and options paper, and, as I said, there will be scoping meetings, and I'm going to present a schedule at the end of the presentation that outlines all of the scoping meetings that are coming up, and we will be adding to that for the meetings on the first rule that I mentioned in the presentation. The contact information for our points of contact on this rule are listed on this slide.

The next project is Amendment 13 to our fishery management plan, and this is specific to our bluefin tuna management and is kind of heavily focused on our IBQ program, but we also have other things that we're looking at in here, including management of the purse seine fishery and looking at management of other directed categories with quotas, such as our harpoon fishery, our general category fishery, and our HMS angling fishery.

The purpose for this project is that we recently completed a draft three-year review of our IBQ program, and that is available on our website, or, if you would like to see it in -- I don't know if it's available in your briefing book, and so, if you do need to get that information, we can get it for you, but this draft three-year review basically looked at whether or not the program was meeting the stated objectives of that catch share program, and it also looked at some of the standard components of catch share programs, to see how the IBQ program measured up. We have a lot of information that we were able to use to start to explore next steps for that program.

Now, the purse seine fishery, as I said, is another thing that we're looking at in this project. This fishery has been inactive for several years, and so we're basically looking at whether or not this fishery needs to be discontinued or phased out over an extended period of time.

Then other management options include with looking at recent fishery trends, and there are certain segments of the bluefin

fishery that have been meeting their quota, and then there are others that have not, and so there's an exploration in this project at different allocation schemes between these different groups of fishermen, and I should also mention that looking at the purse seine fishery means that there's a substantial bank of quota that could be distributed to other groups there as well, and so that is also a question that we will get into as we get further along with that project.

Specific options for the IBQ program are looking at the quota shares and allocation method and also whether or not we need share allocation caps for this program or if we want to allow permanent sale of shares, and then a number of other aspects of the IBQ program are discussed in that scoping document.

As I said, regarding the purse seine fishery, we're looking at discontinuing it, the timing of the discontinuation and then how that quota is going to be reallocated, and then the general category quota allocations is also something that is included, along with other quota allocations across the gears and categories.

Also, looking at the angling category trophy areas, we have three different trophy sub-quotas that are split across the angling category by geographic area, and so there is some question about whether or not we want to maintain that split as it currently is. There are a number of other allocation issues that are presented in the scoping document, and then we, finally, are looking at sort of a conglomerate of other things, such as how we have greenstick gear defined in the regulations and some of our other hand-gear fishery regulations.

Again, the public comment period for this project ends on July 31, and we have got the contact information for the points of contact listed on this slide, and they are Thomas Warren and Brad McHale up in our Northeast Regional Office.

Then, finally, Amendment 14 is looking at our ACLs for our shark quotas, and so the purpose of this project is to manage the shark fishery resources in a manner that's consistent with new National Standard 1 Guideline while minimizing negative socioeconomic and ecological impacts on affected fisheries.

We are needing to review the process for setting the ABCs as related to OFL and the ACLs, to determine if changes are needed and whether or not our associated accountability measures need to also be modified. We are looking at whether we need to incorporate additional management flexibility into the process

for setting our ABCs, and we're looking at things like ABC phase-in, quota carryovers, and overfishing determinations, as stated and provided in the recent National Standard 1 Guidelines.

These are some of the objectives that are included in that project. As I said, it's all about the ABC control rules looking at ACLs and looking at how we're determining our acceptable levels for rebuilding success, and we're looking at how to redistribute underutilized quota across the shark fisheries, and then we're looking at how we can increase management flexibility to account for changes in the harvest of sharks by our sectors.

Some examples of some of the things that are included in this scoping document by area are listed on this slide, and so, for ABC control rules, we're looking at four different options, and that includes no action, of course, looking at a standardized option, where you have the same for all sharks or management groups, because we do have some species-specific quotas, and we have some group-specific quotas.

We are looking at a tiered approach, which looks at the relative risk, and so, here, you might have different ABCs based on whether or not that particular stock or species is particularly vulnerable, whether there is information, if it's a data-poor or a data-rich group or stock, et cetera.

Then one of the other things we're looking at under this is whether we need a peer review process for determining the ABC control rule. HMS does not have an SSC, and so this peer review process would mimic some of the functions of an SSC, by giving us a more peer-reviewed -- It would give us a peer review and input into this particular control rule.

For the phase-in of the ABC provisions, we're looking at four different options, and we are considering phase-in on any reductions to the ABC or based on the stock status, and so we are also looking at five different options for TACs and our ACLs, and so this includes actively managing all sector ACLs or establishing a reserve sector ACL, and this is very similar to what we do with our bluefin tuna reserve category, where we put a piece of our bluefin quota in that and then redistribute it out to the other sectors based on a set of redistribution criteria. Then we're also looking at ACLs with and without species linkages.

Carryover ABC provisions, there are five options in the scoping

document for that. We're looking at distributing unused ACL to the relevant sectors or distributing across all sectors and also looking at options for caps on the carryover of unused ACL and if those are needed.

Finally, looking at the overfishing determinations, we are looking at five different options there. We're looking at potential multiyear determinations, and these include annual options or a three-year running average of catch levels used to determine overfishing status.

The next steps for this particular project are, again, we have the same comment period deadline of July 31, and our points of contact on that particular rule are Ian Miller, Guy DuBeck, and Karyl Brewster-Geisz.

This, as I said, I was going to show you a table of our upcoming scoping meetings. What this does not include, again, are the meetings for the rule looking at GRA and weak-hook measures, and so those are going to be folded in, and we have a very busy summer ahead of us. That's it.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: All right. Thank you for those informative presentations. One comment you made about the third-year review that you've done on your bluefin tuna quota program, I didn't see that in our briefing book, and it would be great if -- We're going through some similar reviews and processes with our quota system here for red snapper and other species, and that might be of interest to the council, to see what's working and what's not for your system there, but is there questions from the committee or other council members? Tom, go ahead.

DR. TOM FRAZER: I thought it was a nice presentation. What I wanted to ask is, in the first part of presentation, you talked about kind of evaluating the area closures in the Gulf of Mexico for bluefin tuna, and one of the ways that you were going to figure out, perhaps, if they were effective is by doing, I guess, some sort of a study to -- What I'm seeking actually is clarity in how you would actually evaluate whether or not they were effective or not.

DR. CUDNEY: What we're looking at is these areas are closed right now, and we're looking at converting them into what we're calling monitoring areas, and it would open up the areas to fishing, and we would go ahead and collect the normal fishery-dependent data that we get from our longline fleet, and so that would include logbook data.

The folks have to submit set reports through their VMS, and there are other data streams that we would look at from our IBQ catch share online program, and so, basically, we're in massive information collection mode for those areas for three years, and, in order to establish a sort of safety check, because it's been closed for a while and we don't actually know what would happen in these areas, we would have a threshold that is set for the amount of IBQ that can be used to cover landings and dead discards for bluefin interactions, and so, if that threshold is reached, that's an indication that maybe the area still needs to be closed, and we would then do a sort of in-season action to close that area again.

In the meantime, our hope is that the fleet is sufficiently incentivized to avoid bluefin tuna and still harvest target species, and so, once we get all of that information over a three-year period of time, we would then compile our report and do an evaluation of it, very similar to what we did with our three-year review for the IBQ program, and then we would take a follow-up action that would basically consider next steps, and so it's sort of a provisional opening. As long as they don't meet that threshold, we would collect the data and do our evaluation and then think about what's happening next.

DR. FRAZER: Great. Thank you. That was very helpful.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: All right. Are there other questions from the committee? Martha.

MS. MARTHA GUYAS: I'm not on the committee, but thank you for recognizing me. As far as the spatial management stuff goes, I think you probably know the State of Florida has had some concerns about opening the east Florida area closure there, and I think we'll be probably sending you a letter to outline some of our concerns with that. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Other committee or council members? Mr. Swindell.

MR. ED SWINDELL: I guess I'm sitting here just wondering what is our council's responsibility in this Highly Migratory Species Committee for this work that's being done on the federal level?

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Well, obviously, they're not a species that we're managing, but there is relevance to fleets and things that are coming out of the Gulf. As far as how that relates to this council, this, ideally, is to inform us what's going on, to influence our decisions and those kinds of things, but, beyond

that, I don't know. Tom, maybe you could comment to that, or perhaps Clay or Roy would like to see how they envision that we interact with the HMS group.

DR. FRAZER: Sure. I mean, the council generally is in a position to have a representative that sits on the HMS Advisory Panel, and the purpose is to -- Although we don't manage those species, those management activities certainly interact with other fisheries that we do manage, and so it's a way for us to exchange information and provide guidance or input where it might be needed.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: I have a question if no one else has a question, and this is regarding your bluefin tuna quota, and I'm not familiar at all with that, and I haven't looked at the report, but I will when we get it, and so I assume this is for non-directed bluefin tuna catch that's occurring during those longline fleets, and is that right?

DR. CUDNEY: You're talking about the IBQ program?

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Yes. Sorry.

DR. CUDNEY: Yes, and so the longline fishery is considered an indirect bycatch type of fishery, and it's not considered a directed fishery at this time, and so it is managed as a bycatch quota.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Okay, and I was just wondering if -- I don't want to put you on the spot, and we have little time here with this committee, but is that program working? I noticed that there are some share and allocation issues, it looks like, and trying to cap that in certain things, but, in general, is the fleet happy with that? What are your major issues, or maybe there aren't, or could you comment on what is the highlights from that report?

DR. CUDNEY: I think the fleet has done a very admirable job of reducing their bluefin interactions. In some places, they have reduced their interactions by as much as 80 percent. The reason that we're looking at removing that Cape Hatteras Gear Restricted Area, for example, is that there used to be a hotspot of bluefin interactions there, and it's not there anymore.

We had implemented that as sort of a stopgap measure, because we recognized that was a potential problem area, but we think that the fleet has been sufficiently incentivized to avoid bluefin through having to be individually accountable and basically pay

for their bluefin interactions on a poundage basis, and they are being very careful with where they're going and how they are pulling their gear.

They are communicating with each other about where they're running into bluefin, and so I would say, to the end, we've been pretty successful in reducing our bluefin interactions and minimizing, to the extent that we can, the bycatch implications on this fishery.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: So the idea is that you have some level of quota, if you incidentally catch a bluefin tuna, and so what happens? Is there enough quota to accomplish that, or what happens if -- At some point you reached that quota, obviously, or you wouldn't be talking about allocations and caps and things like that, I would assume, and so what happens? I mean, it's sort of hard to avoid, I would imagine, and so somebody would catch a bluefin tuna, theoretically, that is out of quota, or how does that work?

DR. CUDNEY: If they catch a bluefin tuna, they have -- We think of it as like a bank account, an online system, where they would physically pay back the weight of that bluefin tuna, based on the quota that they're given at the beginning of the year. If they run out of quota, then they have the option of leasing quota from another individual, and so they're not automatically shut down if they exceed the amount that they are given at the beginning of the year.

The reason that we're looking at reallocation under this is that we have a subset of the fleet that is what we call NOVES ID status, and these are folks that are not actively fishing, but they are still maintaining a valid and active permit, and it's not on a vessel, but it's kind of a permit in limbo, and there is quota that has been allocated to those permits.

Our original intent with this program was to distribute this quota to the folks that need it, and we're seeing underutilization of that quota, and so we're looking at redistribution, because we want to see if there are other ways that we can distribute out that quota to the folks that specifically need it.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Okay. The last question, I guess, is, since it's underutilized, the redistribution is not causing any issues within the fishery then?

DR. CUDNEY: We have not had a longline fleet category overage

since we implemented the program. Prior to this, it was a problem, and Brad and Tom and the other folks in the Northeast shop, Sarah McLaughlin, would have to put out rules that were basically pulling quota from other categories to cover the bluefin overages, but it's not a -- The longline fleet is not impacting the other categories in the way that we saw prior to the implementation of this management program.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Thank you. Any other questions regarding HMS? Clay.

DR. CLAY PORCH: Thank you, Chair. I had just a comment that one of the reasons we need to start working more closely with HMS is, of course, sharks, since they are responsible for managing sharks, and the whole concept of ecosystem-based management, and, as we saw yesterday, we hear a lot from fishermen complaining that sharks are becoming increasingly common, and they are suffering depredation on both coasts, and so I think it behooves both the South Atlantic and Gulf Council to engage in that dialogue and figure out what does optimal yield when you have these kind of mixed species fisheries, especially when you have predators out there.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Good point, Dr. Porch. Thank you. Mr. Swindell.

MR. SWINDELL: Is there any foreign fishery interaction that you're having with the bluefin tuna and sharks, anything allowed within the U.S. zone at this time, or are you aware of any problem with foreign fishing?

DR. CUDNEY: We don't provide quota to cover any sort of foreign fishing under a chartering arrangement. I myself am not specifically aware of issues with the foreign fleets and bluefin interactions in our waters, but that doesn't mean that they don't exist, and so I can take your name and check in with Brad and some of our folks, to see if that is an issue.

MR. SWINDELL: It's just that, at times, there have been interactions with foreign fleets coming in and out of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the United States, and I'm just wondering if there is any there, or has any of that been allowed or this particular resource to be done, and I haven't heard of any, and I was just wondering if it was anywhere on the east coast or in the Gulf, and so thank you.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Lieutenant Zanowicz.

LT. MARK ZANOWICZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a comment to that from the Coast Guard side. We do see interactions with the Mexican lanchas harvesting shark in south Texas, in addition to red snapper, which they primarily target, and so that's just a comment on that. We do see interactions with those, and I know Katie Moore is our representative on the HMS Advisory Panel, and she presents on that to them, and so, typically, my presentations focus more on red snapper, because that's what the Gulf Council manages, but we do see interactions with the HMS species as well.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Thank you. Other questions? Well, if there is no other questions, thank you for that information and presentations, and then we'll go ahead and move forward into our next item of business, Item Number V, and that has to do with this BAYS workgroup letter.

By the way, BAYS stands for bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack, if you're wondering. Some of us had to review that before the letter, but, anyway, that letter is in your packet, and we're preparing that draft, and I think Tom has probably the best background, in terms of how this arrived, with this sort of joint letter coming from several councils regarding some issues with these species, and I know, Anna, your council is dealing with this as well, and so feel free to jump in, but, Tom, do you mind maybe giving us a little background on how we arrived at this letter?

OTHER BUSINESS
DRAFT BAYS SPECIES WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION LETTER

DR. FRAZER: I mean, I'm certainly going to invite both Anna and Martha to talk about this, because there was a recent ICCAT meeting in Miami, and both of them were able to attend, but the issue really has to do with some of the fishing activities that negatively impact, I guess indirectly, right, things like yellowfin tuna, and so that's the nature of the issue, and so, Anna, if you want to go ahead and speak to what transpired in the Miami meeting, that would be great.

MS. ANNA BECKWITH: Yes, I will be happy to. I actually led the discussion for the workgroup, for the breakout group, on BAYS. I think there was a specific question within -- The background of this letter is that the Northeast Council actually was unable to attend this meeting, and the Northeast Council -- Their constituents have major concerns with yellowfin and bigeye and such, and so it was requested to the Northeast Council that they somehow support what came out of the BAYS working group to

present at the upcoming ICCAT meeting, and so that's where the sort of background of the letter came out.

Specifically, someone mentioned to me that there was a question on Number 5 on the letter of sort of where the group came to that recommendation that the United States should consider advocating for an eastern Atlantic skipjack TAC based on 2018 catches, and so I can speak to that specifically as well, which is Number 5 is really tied to Number 3.

The last stock assessment was done in 2014, and it found that skipjack tuna was neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing, but this is really an attempt to cap effort until the 2020 stock assessment can occur. Skipjack tuna are caught on FADs, in association with yellowfin tuna and with bigeye, which are really the two species of concern. Right now, we're exceeding our catch on yellowfin tuna, and there is some pretty significant stock concerns for bigeye, which are particularly important to our pelagic longline fishery.

This is just an attempt to hold the line on effort, which has been increasing. The Standing Committee on Research and Statistics had actually recommended that effort and catch did not exceed the 2012/2013 catch levels, but that has increased by over 10 percent, and so I think the intent is just to sort of hold the line while we try and negotiate some indirect efforts to conserve yellowfin tuna and bigeye while maintaining skipjack from growing, and so there has been some effort to control FADs. It's a wonderfully complicated process, and I'm sure that, if I'm missed something, Clay can probably speak to that as well, but that's the basic idea behind this recommendation.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Thank you, Anna. Before we open it up for some discussion, just to get some clarification, Dr. Hollensead and Carrie, maybe some guidance from this committee, and, obviously, you want us to look at this letter and comment on it, but if there's any -- Since we don't deal with these issues often, if there is things that this committee may not be aware of, or you would like to see from a staff perspective in this letter, let us know. I'm looking for mainly a little guidance of where you all would like to see us go with that, and so feel free to comment on that. If there's other questions from the committee about this letter, now is the time. Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the intent is to send this letter to Chris Oliver, and I would suggest that we add a little bit more information in Item 5, just to put it in context, because I'm not sure how closely

everyone is following these issues, just to provide a little bit more, if we could, and we can try to capture that with the South Atlantic Council and then get that back to the New England Council, who has proposed this, and so that would be my suggestion.

Then, if there's anything else in the letter, and we're sending this on behalf of the council, that you have concerns with or would like to discuss, I think now would be the appropriate time, to make sure that the council is comfortable with this. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: I agree with that, Carrie, to just flesh that Number 5 out a little bit better, and that's certainly needed, and so I don't know. Do you need a motion coming from this committee to do that, or do we just want to let you guys do that? Also, I don't know what the timeline is for this either, in terms of review. Do we just give you some authority to do that, or how do you prefer to proceed? Anna.

MS. BECKWITH: My suggestion to the New England Council was to have this letter signed and ready for our ICCAT meeting in October, which means sort of this is our chance for the Gulf Council and next week for the South Atlantic Council to sign onto this. By the time we get to our October meeting for IAC, we are sort of setting the agenda that we will take to ICCAT, and so any delay past that sort of doesn't provide the intended effect.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Okay. Good. It appears there is a little timing too, Tom, and I don't know who is our South Atlantic rep going out there, but maybe they can provide some feedback.

DR. FRAZER: Martha.

CHAIRMAN STUNZ: Martha will be. Okay. Good. Anyway, I guess -- I don't know if maybe, Clay, or Roy, are you all fine with this, or do you see any issues from your offices that we would need to add to this letter? Let us know, and, Carrie, I think you might have had your -- Did you have one more comment? Tom.

DR. FRAZER: I mean, I'm not sure who is going to draft the language to kind of provide a little more clarification for that Item Number 5. Would that be the Northeast guys?

MS. BECKWITH: I suspect so, but I'm sure that they would be open to suggestions, and Martha and I can certainly draft a sentence or two as a suggestion and provide that to them, since

1 we were part of the IAC as well.
2
3 **DR. FRAZER:** That would be great.
4
5 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Any other comments to the letter? Then
6 we'll move on, and we're in Other Business, but that also brings
7 us to any other business that isn't on the agenda. Is there any
8 other business that needs to come before this committee? Seeing
9 none, that concludes the business for this committee.
10
11 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 5, 2019.)
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