

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

REEF FISH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Webinar

NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 1, 2020

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- 11 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 12 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
- 13 Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi
- 14 Roy Crabtree.....NMFS
- 15 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
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- 17 Phil Dyskow.....Florida
- 18 Tom Frazer.....Florida
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- 22 Bob Shipp.....Alabama
- 23 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 24 Greg Stunz.....Texas
- 25 Ed Swindell.....Louisiana
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5 Clay Porch.....SEFSC

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PAGE 54: Motion in Action 1 to make Alternative 3 the preferred alternative. The motion failed on page 63.

PAGE 72: Motion to add an action to modify the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper, including alternatives for a fifteen-fish bag limit and to eliminate the bag limit, but retain the twenty-fish aggregate bag limit for those reef fish species without a species-specific bag limit. The motion carried on page 74.

PAGE 91: Motion that the council request that NMFS capture IFQ data on 12/31/2020 which details individual accounts and the pounds remaining in those individual accounts at the close of business on 12/31/2020. The motion carried on page 92.

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1 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened via webinar on Monday afternoon,  
3 November 30, 2020, and was called to order by Chairman Martha  
4 Guyas.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN MARTHA GUYAS:** We will bring the Reef Fish Committee to  
11 order. The agenda is at Tab B, Number 1. In the interest of  
12 kind of getting things kicked off with a bang, I would like to  
13 move Item IV, the review of the reef fish and CMP landings, to  
14 the end of our agenda, and so that would mean that we would  
15 basically kick off with Dr. Stunz's presentation of the Great  
16 Red Snapper Count. Are there any other additions or  
17 modifications to this agenda? Hearing none, we will move  
18 forward with the agenda as modified.

19  
20 Then we have Tab B, Number 2, our October 2020 minutes. Are  
21 there any additions or edits or modifications to the minutes? I  
22 am not hearing any edits to the minutes, and so we'll consider  
23 the minutes adopted as written as well, or I guess approved as  
24 written. With that, let's get started with Dr. Stunz's  
25 presentation, if he is ready and on the line. Once his  
26 presentation is pulled up, I will be happy to give him the  
27 floor.

28  
29 **PRESENTATION ON THE GREAT RED SNAPPER COUNT**  
30

31 **DR. GREG STUNZ:** Thanks, Martha. Thanks, everyone, and I'm glad  
32 that I finally get the chance to report back from our team on  
33 the Great Red Snapper Count and what it means to the things that  
34 we have going on at the council, and so, as you all have  
35 referred to it many times as the Great Red Snapper Count, that  
36 was sort of the name that stuck, in terms of -- I don't know  
37 why, but we just kind of went with it, but the real title is  
38 Estimating the Absolute Abundance of Red Snapper in the U.S.  
39 Gulf of Mexico.

40  
41 To give a little bit of background for everyone, in terms of how  
42 did we arrive where we're at today, what's the real problem, or  
43 what was the need, and so there was the congressional  
44 appropriation for this study, but why did it reach that level,  
45 and that was because, if we have an absolute abundance of red  
46 snapper, that leads to the most informed management, or it leads  
47 to much better management, and I'm sure there will be some  
48 questions about that at the end of what does that mean and where

1 do we go, and so I'll explain that a little bit later.

2  
3 Who is involved? Well, the total price tag was \$12 million, and  
4 there was nine-and-a-half million in appropriations, and we had  
5 to come up with the remaining match, in terms of the  
6 investigators associated with the study. That was from twelve  
7 institutions across the Gulf and beyond, and there were twenty-  
8 one, really, red snapper lead scientists that we pulled together  
9 for this study.

10  
11 It was really a who's who, in terms of red snapper researchers  
12 in the Gulf of Mexico, and we spent a lot of time trying to draw  
13 the best people we could to meet the needs of this project, and  
14 I kind of want to start here too to say that this was a very  
15 monumental task to do in a very short period of time, and what  
16 many of said was something that really is very, very difficult,  
17 or even perhaps couldn't be done, but I'm pleased to say that we  
18 did it, and we're very confident in the estimates that we have.

19  
20 To tell you how we did it, because of the diversity of the Gulf  
21 from Brownsville all the way over to Key West, the habitats are  
22 different, and the visibility is different, and the sea states  
23 are often very different, and that requires -- The habitats are  
24 obviously different, and those different habitats required -- In  
25 a perfect world, we would have one method that worked perfect  
26 all across all depths, all regions, all habitats, but,  
27 unfortunately, that just doesn't exist.

28  
29 We had to use a suite of methods to get at the absolute  
30 abundance, and so the first step was actually classifying your  
31 habitats, knowing what you had available. For example, how much  
32 artificial reef habitat is out there in the Gulf of Mexico, and  
33 we were specifically charged with we could not do new mapping,  
34 and we had to use what was available, and, just because of the  
35 expense and time with that, we had to rely on what we know is  
36 out there, and so, as we have improved mapping in the Gulf of  
37 Mexico, these estimates will improve as well.

38  
39 The preferred method of survey, obviously, and most people would  
40 intuitively recognize, is direct visual counts. We can send  
41 cameras down and physically count the fish, but, of course, that  
42 doesn't work all the time, and, when you have low visibility,  
43 you have to rely on other methods, such as acoustics, which is,  
44 essentially, using fancy sound systems to get returns of the  
45 fish that are there.

46  
47 We also used depletion -- which I will explain, and then a  
48 contingent Gulf-wide tagging program that involved both

1 recreational and commercial fishermen, as well as just  
2 constituents in the Gulf, and that was something that the  
3 scientists were wondering about the bang from your buck and the  
4 return on the investment, and it turned out that it was  
5 amazingly productive, and I will tell you about that in just a  
6 minute, and we sure are glad that we did it after all, and so  
7 I'll explain that as we get a little further through.

8  
9 In terms of who were the real senior leadership, I led the  
10 project, through our research program here at the Harte Research  
11 Institute, but each region had a regional lead, and this is just  
12 a small set of the whole team that was involved, and, of course,  
13 of those twenty-one investigators, nearly every one of them have  
14 teams behind them of dozens of people, and so this was a massive  
15 undertaking and a massive effort, but Dr. Jay Rooker at A&M  
16 Galveston led the Texas region, Jim Cowan out of LSU led the  
17 Louisiana region, and you guys will recognize a lot of these  
18 people, because most of them have been or are current members of  
19 our SSC. It was Sean Powers for Alabama and Will Patterson at  
20 Florida and Steve Murawski -- While he's in Florida, he led  
21 efforts throughout the deeper regions of the entire Gulf, with a  
22 system that he had developed.

23  
24 Matt Catalano from Auburn led our tagging component, and we have  
25 a lot of outreach and engagement that we were required to do as  
26 part of this project, and so Marcus Drymon is with Mississippi  
27 State, but he's also with -- We had to have a professional  
28 analytical team, and we're all pretty good with numbers and  
29 statistics, but we had to roll out the professionals for this,  
30 and we wanted to make sure that we got it right. Rob Ahrens,  
31 who as the University of Florida at the time, and who is now in  
32 Hawaii with NOAA, but he still continues to contribute to the  
33 study.

34  
35 Many of you know Lynne Stokes from Southern Methodist, SMU, and  
36 she headed up a lot of the components, and then John Hoenig with  
37 VIMS, and that's the Virginia Institute of Marine Science,  
38 headed up several components, but mainly was involved with the  
39 depletion component of the study.

40  
41 This was the leadership team, and so the institutions that are  
42 involved were pretty much a who's who from around the Gulf of  
43 Mexico, and all the folks affiliated with these institutions are  
44 doing all sorts of fisheries research, including red snapper.

45  
46 This project was guided by five milestones, and I should have  
47 pointed out the many, many people that are listening in and are  
48 on the council call were on the steering committee that guided

1 this project through the various phases, and we were charged  
2 with really five milestones, and that was first, as I mentioned,  
3 what's out there and how can we data mine and determine what  
4 habitats we have available.

5  
6 We were specifically charged with developing new gear for this  
7 study that hopefully can be used in other studies similar to it,  
8 and so that required that you have to also validate and  
9 calibrate your gear among all these different gear types we  
10 used. Of course, the lion's share of our time was spent out on  
11 the water, figuring out how many fish were there and the  
12 sampling piece, and then many, many hours in the analytical  
13 phase, and, really, where we are today, at Step 5, is the final  
14 estimation and the report and briefings, and then our  
15 stakeholder engagement piece to outreach this information back  
16 to the public.

17  
18 I would just say, today, what I'm talking to you about, it's  
19 still preliminary, and they are pretty much final, and I don't  
20 expect it to change too much, but, until we produce our final  
21 report, which will be coming out just here in a few weeks, I am  
22 still sort of reserving the right to move things a little bit,  
23 if we discover things that might be in error or something like  
24 that, but we're pretty close at this point to where we need to  
25 be.

26  
27 The data mining is just what you might expect, and there's a lot  
28 of resources available, where we just go out and map the known  
29 habitats, and unknown, and it's import to know what we don't  
30 know about as well, and sample those areas, and so that took  
31 quite a while to characterize the Gulf of Mexico, but it really  
32 all comes down to this.

33  
34 In terms of our sampling design, what we were charged is to do a  
35 regional in-depth approach, but we were given leeway, in terms  
36 of what that looked like, and, of course, we can expand or  
37 collapse these regions at any point, but what's nice is, if you  
38 look to the ecology of the Gulf of Mexico, it really partitions  
39 out to about four regions, if you looked at sort of an eco-  
40 mapping-type exercise, and those happened to fall out very close  
41 to state boundaries, which is also nice, from management and  
42 jurisdictional type of things, and so we have four regions of  
43 Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama are grouped together,  
44 although we can separate out the fish, as necessary, and then,  
45 of course, Florida.

46  
47 We broke the continental shelf, and we were required to go out  
48 to a certain depth by the request for proposal, and we grouped

1 that into shallow, mid, and deep depth. Then, of course, what  
2 everyone wants to know is how many fish are associated with what  
3 habitats.

4  
5 Artificial reefs were what was really driving a lot of this  
6 appropriations, and so each region has artificial reefs, and  
7 they're characterized by -- Some are very large, like in the  
8 western Gulf, of oil and gas platforms, and some are very small,  
9 like off of Alabama and Florida, and they're generally much  
10 smaller, discrete structures.

11  
12 Then, of course, we broke that into known natural reefs, and the  
13 natural feature snapper banks is what they typically would be  
14 called, or we would call them, and then one habitat that I  
15 really want to draw your attention to is this uncharacterized  
16 bottom, and, really, we should call it unclassified bottom, and  
17 that's what we were sort of switching to, although we were  
18 charged -- The naming is uncharacterized bottom, but this is not  
19 just mud and sand, which is a large component of it, but it's  
20 anything out there that we don't know what it is, and it's just  
21 unclassified, but, typically, it's reefs and wrecks and things  
22 that just have not been mapped, which is true for most of the  
23 continental shelf of the Gulf of Mexico, unfortunately. It's  
24 also ephemeral features that may come and go, or scouring, and  
25 all that sort of thing, and so that's going to become very  
26 important later in the discussion today.

27  
28 I will talk about the ways that we sampled and then really get  
29 into the numbers that we all want to know. We relied on these  
30 direct visual counts, validation, and calibration, and, to get  
31 at these direct visual counts, if you're looking at the map  
32 here, you can see, wherever there is a dot, there was some type  
33 of survey done, whether it was a cruise track or tagging or ROV  
34 and that sort of thing, and, of course, that generates massive  
35 amounts of data.

36  
37 There's over 1,500 sampling sites and thousands and thousands of  
38 hours, between ROV video and video along transects of that  
39 uncharacterized bottom and acoustic profiles, and there were  
40 some vertical longlines that were set, and our extensive tagging  
41 program, but, as you can see, we covered the Gulf of Mexico  
42 really well.

43  
44 For the direct visual counts, you are probably familiar with  
45 ROVs, and we've heard other presentations here, but they're  
46 remotely-operated vehicles that we can send down, and we drop  
47 them from the surface, ship-side, and they feed back video and  
48 acoustic information about where we are and what we're seeing,

1 and so, essentially, you're putting those down and surveying the  
2 habitats, and there's a lot more to it, and what I don't really  
3 have time to talk about today is all these methods, but I'm kind  
4 of giving you just a general idea of how it works.

5  
6 ROVs are pretty good, but they're not good for that open,  
7 uncharacterized bottom that covers so much area of the Gulf, and  
8 we have to tow arrays across those vast amounts of habitat, and  
9 we used these two gear methodologies on the bottom, and Steve  
10 Murawski, really, initially developed this, and this is called  
11 the C-BASS, and, essentially, it's a tow camera array with all  
12 sorts of sophisticated camera and sonar equipment to measure the  
13 fish abundance. It's towed at a fairly rapid speed, so we can  
14 cover large amounts of areas, where typically the fish are  
15 there, but they're not always in very high densities.

16  
17 We also developed some smaller versions, and Steve Murawski's  
18 has to be towed by an ocean-going vessel and big a-frames and  
19 that sort of thing, and, by the way, we think about \$12 million  
20 is a lot of money, but we're looking at ship time of \$10,000 a  
21 day, and so you can spend that money pretty quick when you have  
22 to deploy and use this sort of gear. We developed other -- The  
23 system on the left can be towed from smaller vessels, and that  
24 allowed us to do a lot more work, in terms of being more  
25 efficient with time and resources.

26  
27 To give you an idea of what features might look like and why we  
28 had to use different methodologies, the two at the top are what  
29 you might see off of Alabama or Florida, and a reef pyramid on  
30 the right that's surrounded by snapper and a few other species,  
31 and on the left are just small, discrete habitats that you  
32 typically can get in one field of view, and it's relatively easy  
33 to count the number of snapper that are around that.

34  
35 As you get out in the western Gulf, you have something like the  
36 bottom right, which is just one leg of an oil-and-gas platform  
37 that's much, much bigger than what you see here, and we have to  
38 have different methodologies to account for the size of those  
39 structures, which you can't see in one field of view, or even  
40 through many transects trying to cover it.

41  
42 To give you an idea of what that might look like on an ROV, we  
43 have to generate a species composition, and hopefully this video  
44 is playing. If it's not, Martha, let me know. This is the  
45 first of several videos, and it's not in the presentations that  
46 you have online, because it was too large, but this gives you an  
47 idea of what it looks like.

48

1 We had to generate the species composition, and I will explain  
2 why later, and that's essentially what's happening here, going  
3 down one leg on an oil-and-gas platform, but that gives you a  
4 general idea of what really good visibility would be. It's not  
5 the best, and it's definitely not the worst, but that's kind of,  
6 generally, what you get in many areas.

7  
8 That's not always the case, and why we can't rely on visual  
9 methods, unfortunately, across the entire Gulf. To give you an  
10 idea, in the western Gulf of Mexico, this video that's playing  
11 on the left here shows -- You obviously can see snapper there,  
12 and this is an ROV video, and I will explain what you're seeing  
13 hanging down there in just a minute, but you see that there's  
14 snapper there, but we don't have high confidence that we're  
15 seeing all the snapper.

16  
17 That creates a problem, compared to maybe out in the eastern  
18 Gulf, in Florida, where you have much more hard coral base sands  
19 and that sort of thing, where you have much higher visibility,  
20 and we have a lot more confidence, and, essentially, what we do  
21 is you drive the ROV up to those things hanging in the distance,  
22 and you can pull back from them, until you lose the visibility,  
23 and you can gauge how far -- Of course, our ROVs are  
24 georeferenced, and we know how much ground we cover in our field  
25 of view, and we can calculate an abundance per area.

26  
27 The problem is what do we do when you can't see, like the video  
28 you just saw on the right, and that's why we developed other  
29 methodologies, specifically what we call hydroacoustics. I will  
30 explain that in just a minute.

31  
32 The other method for sampling the uncharacterized bottom is  
33 using that C-BASS that I discussed, or the TARAS, and, to give  
34 you an idea, we've got -- Out over this uncharacterized bottom,  
35 we have pipelines that are typically buried, but many times  
36 they're not, and they're required to be buried at certain  
37 depths, and some depths they're not, and, in some areas, from  
38 scouring and currents, they become exposed.

39  
40 We can look at the pipelines, and, by the way, there is 42,000  
41 miles of pipeline in the Gulf of Mexico, similar to what you see  
42 on the bottom-right, and that's a habitat that had never really  
43 been sampled before that we felt was an important component and  
44 provided structured habitat on an otherwise generally feature-  
45 less bottom.

46  
47 Then, of course, natural bottom we don't know about, and then  
48 just the general uncharacterized bottom, and the way this works

1 -- I will show you the video of it being towed, and what you  
2 will see here is that -- First, you will see a pipeline, and you  
3 will see some general uncharacterized sort of flat mud bottom,  
4 with very low-relief features, and then you will see some  
5 natural banks, and you will see some snapper and vermilion  
6 snapper and grouper and a variety of other things.

7  
8 This gear is pretty much towed continuously, which generates all  
9 the time needed to go back, and that's some uncharacterized  
10 bottom with a few snapper, and you see -- This is a natural  
11 bottom, and I will stop it here to point out those lasers that  
12 you see, and we can guide them to, or they periodically hit a  
13 fish, and they're at a fixed distance, which allows us to  
14 measure the size of the fish and generate an age composition  
15 from the fish, which is important for assessment purposes.

16  
17 That's essentially a natural bank and what it would look like,  
18 and here's another example of just some open uncharacterized  
19 bottom, which you don't see a lot of snapper, but, typically,  
20 when you come across something, you do find a lot of them.

21  
22 The other method we used was hydroacoustics, and many people  
23 know just the general bottom machine that you have on your boat,  
24 and it's very similar to that, and it generates a sound-  
25 produced, or an acoustic, return, and the fish are in proportion  
26 to their biomass, and we can estimate the abundance using this  
27 method, but you're probably wondering why do we need to do that.

28  
29 To give you an example, this is a cutoff rig on the left, and  
30 this piece on the right was, at one point, attached, and it had  
31 been cut off and converted to an artificial reef and set next to  
32 it. What you see there, and I will show you in a few minutes,  
33 is a school of red snapper that is hanging above that structure,  
34 and, similar, on the figure on the right, in the small little  
35 upside-down kind of banana-shaped things, are the fish.

36  
37 You're probably wondering why do we need bioacoustics, and there  
38 are several reasons. One is, many times, snapper occur in areas  
39 where there is zero visibility, and we just can't see them, and  
40 so somehow we know the snapper are there, from our fisheries  
41 surveys, but we just don't have a way to enumerate them, but, if  
42 you look at the video on the left, and this is a toppled oil-  
43 and-gas platform that's been converted to an artificial reef,  
44 what I wanted to draw your attention there is, if you look below  
45 it, it looks like a fog, or murk, layer, and that's called the  
46 nestling layer, and it's a murky bottom of stirred up sediments  
47 coming up off the bottom.

48

1 We know the fish are in there, because we see them come out of  
2 it and go back into it, but we can't look in there, obviously,  
3 with our visual gear, and so we have to rely on acoustics, or,  
4 as I mentioned earlier, something looks like this, and this is  
5 still decent visibility, and this is some places that snapper  
6 occur, and you see the snapper, and I will stop it there. If  
7 you just look closely, you can see some shadows of snapper in  
8 the background there.

9  
10 However, we just don't feel confident that we're capturing, or  
11 counting, the full number of snapper that are there, and so we  
12 have to rely on bioacoustics. This is an example of gear  
13 calibration, when you can see what's going on, but you can also  
14 generate a profile, and so I'll show you what an echogram, or  
15 that hydroacoustic profile, would look like.

16  
17 On the top, you're looking out from an ROV at a school of  
18 snapper, and broadcasting this video online, across the  
19 internet, causes it to be a little choppy, and that's what you  
20 see going on there, but, essentially, you see the snapper in the  
21 field of view on the top, and, on the bottom, you can see the  
22 cutoff structure from the earlier figure, and those are the  
23 snapper that are above it.

24  
25 We generate hours and hours of these echograms that we go back  
26 and analyze for biomass and areas of low abundance. To give you  
27 an idea of how that occurs, you have a profile that comes back  
28 from our sophisticated sonar systems, and we can use computer  
29 software to clip out the areas of interest, and we can assign,  
30 from our species composition, how many of those are snapper  
31 versus other species, and, from that, we can generate a total  
32 red snapper abundance.

33  
34 That's extremely simplified, from what it takes, but to go from  
35 the left side to the right side requires hours and hours of work  
36 to be able to do that, and so, in theory, it's very simple, but,  
37 in practice, it takes a lot of time.

38  
39 The last method is depletion, and Dr. Sean Powers worked a lot  
40 on depletion studies off of Alabama, and the idea there is that  
41 you can do an ROV survey ahead of time, and you can deplete the  
42 fishery by hook-and-line and removing those fish, and then you  
43 can go back and do another ROV survey, and the ratio of the fish  
44 that were there before, versus after depletion, can give you an  
45 estimate of the abundance of the fish that were there.

46  
47 He was able to generate a very successful abundance estimate  
48 from these depletion studies in some of the areas that he was

1 working on that prevented some of our other gear from working in  
2 some of those areas.

3

4 The last piece that I want to talk about, before we get to the  
5 estimate, is the tagging. Matt Catalano with Auburn led that,  
6 and we tagged fish Gulf-wide. Obviously, we put a lot of hands  
7 on fish, so we could get samples and fin clips for genetic  
8 samples, and this also involved the commercial and for-hire  
9 fisheries, as well as the private recreational fishery, for  
10 primarily relying on tag returns, but also going out and  
11 scientifically tagging these fish, using a variety of those  
12 vessels.

13

14 We put two tags in the fish, and they were high-dollar-reward  
15 tags. We wanted to look at tag shedding rate, and so we also  
16 had to rely that, if someone caught a tagged fish, they would  
17 return it, and so we paid \$250 per tag, or \$500 if you were  
18 lucky enough to capture one with the two tags, and this study  
19 was just amazingly popular, more popular than I could have ever  
20 believed, and it was a great opportunity for engagement with all  
21 sectors of the fishery, and it just turned out to be just a  
22 really win-win, really positive experience.

23

24 To give you an example of how this worked, we had a variety of  
25 tagging locations throughout the Gulf of Mexico, where we tagged  
26 thousands of fish. They were scientifically tagged, because  
27 that's very important, that they were tagged properly and  
28 released and that sort of thing. Interestingly, we used  
29 SeaQualizers, or descending devices, to release every one of the  
30 fish, and, obviously, there is this high-dollar reward of \$250  
31 to \$500 per fish, and we had a lot of social media and other  
32 outreach methods, to let anglers know about these, but it didn't  
33 take long for word to spread, and let me put it that way.

34

35 It wasn't usual for us to make a post or something, and you  
36 would have 275,000 likes and engagement from social media and  
37 that sort of thing. It was picked up by just about every major  
38 newspaper outlet, including the *New York Times*, across the  
39 Associated Press, and it just got a lot of media attention, and  
40 it was quite amazing.

41

42 We relied on the fishery to recover those fish, from primarily  
43 recreational and commercial anglers, who did a great job of  
44 that. We had an astonishing 30 percent return rate. To put  
45 that in perspective, typically, a very, very high return rate on  
46 a mark-and-recapture study like this would be about 6 percent,  
47 and I joked with the team, and, typically, we're good at  
48 budgeting, because we live on grants and that sort of thing, and

1 so I budgeted for a 10 percent return rate, and then I went  
2 ahead and doubled that, because I think, well, just in case, and  
3 we totally blew that budget.

4  
5 In fact, we've paid out more than \$100,000 in reward money so  
6 far, and just not anywhere expecting to get that kind of return  
7 rate, but that's very, very valuable scientific data, and so  
8 we're more than happy to pay for it, to be able to get that kind  
9 of information back, and I will explain some of the implications  
10 of this tagging program later.

11  
12 The take-home message is that it really showed where the  
13 exploitation of this fishery occurred, which was primarily on  
14 artificial reefs, and that will become very important in a  
15 minute, but the other major take-home message from this, outside  
16 of counting snapper, was that catch-and-release works in this  
17 fishery.

18  
19 I mean, we get fish back every day, still to this day, and we're  
20 getting well over 30 percent in each region, and that's very  
21 high survivorship of fish that, typically, most people would  
22 think are not surviving.

23  
24 The last piece of this project is the stakeholder engagement,  
25 and I've showed you, in introducing this project, when we got  
26 started, these small little fun video clips that Dr. Drymon  
27 does, but they're not intended for so much audience like ours,  
28 but the general public, and so we'll be putting one more of  
29 those out, and those have been hugely popular, and hugely  
30 successful, and we'll be doing one more that ties it all  
31 together, in terms of what it means.

32  
33 Along the bottom are -- We also put out fact sheets, which are  
34 hard copies and electronic copies, that can be distributed  
35 through a variety -- Of course, we have a webpage that is  
36 primarily the archive for all of this information and that sort  
37 of thing, and social media is by far where we get the bang for  
38 our buck, in terms of engaging the fishery.

39  
40 That's how we did it, in a nutshell, and there's a lot more to  
41 it, and I'm happy to talk with anyone. Of course, the SSC and  
42 others will carefully vet our methodologies in detail, but I  
43 just wanted to give you a general feel for what it looked like.

44  
45 For the real, I guess, punchline, in terms of what do the  
46 numbers look like, and it's a lot of fish. Before I start  
47 giving you those numbers, I'm going to report each state, and I  
48 will start in Texas going over to Florida, and I have rounded

1 off to really the nearest million of fish, but, in each habitat,  
2 the nearest hundreds of thousands, and, of course, please note  
3 the asterisk down here at the bottom that these are preliminary,  
4 but I don't expect these to change much at all at this point.  
5 Then I will report the number on natural reefs and artificial  
6 reefs and then the uncharacterized bottom.

7  
8 For Texas, the number on artificial reefs is 5.8 million fish,  
9 1.3 on artificial reef, but the uncharacterized bottom is 15.5  
10 million fish in Texas, and you're going to see that that's the  
11 real take-home message, and a very surprising finding that we  
12 were not expecting, was the number of these fish over  
13 uncharacterized bottom.

14  
15 We clearly knew there were fish out there, and we've heard  
16 reports, and, in fact, our own testimony of fish being out  
17 there, but we just didn't know that that was the kind of numbers  
18 that we would uncover, and so you will see that theme throughout  
19 the presentation, but you are roughly around twenty-three  
20 million fish in the region off of Texas.

21  
22 For Louisiana, it's a similar story, about 4.4 million on  
23 natural, and they have a lot more artificial reefs in Louisiana,  
24 and so that number is bigger there, and it's 6.7, but, again,  
25 the same story. It's this unclassified, uncharacterized bottom  
26 which contains the vast majority of fish, where you're looking  
27 at twenty-nine million fish for Louisiana.

28  
29 Mississippi and Alabama, of course, the smallest region that we  
30 have, their natural banks are still holding about 4.3 million  
31 fish. The artificial reef is 1.5 million, and the  
32 uncharacterized bottom there is just about another four million  
33 fish, bringing that Mississippi/Alabama to about very close to  
34 ten million fish in that small region.

35  
36 Then Florida -- Florida, because of its abundance of natural  
37 bottom, and the other regions, particularly Texas and Louisiana,  
38 have very discrete, very large natural bank features, and  
39 there's not a lot of small rubble, although it occurs, but it's  
40 not like it does in Florida, and so they had to adopt a  
41 different approach for their natural bottom, where they scaled  
42 it from no relief to small, middle, and large relief for their  
43 natural bottom, and so it's grouped all together, and their  
44 natural bottom includes that unclassified bottom, and, of  
45 course, we can separate that out, but Florida is very different.

46  
47 There is a lot more structured habitat that you have in Florida,  
48 and that probably explains why we see so many fish there, which

1 is forty-eight million fish over natural and uncharacterized  
2 bottom in Florida, and 130,000 fish on artificial reefs, which  
3 we believe is somewhat of an underestimate, but it's still  
4 bringing that total to about forty-eight million fish in  
5 Florida.

6  
7 Bringing this all together, and rounding it to the nearest  
8 million, you're looking -- These are the regional contributing,  
9 and it's bringing it to what is about 110 million red snapper in  
10 the Gulf of Mexico.

11  
12 We were charged with bringing in the CV, and we were asked to  
13 report our variability around that estimate, using a CV of less  
14 than 30 percent, and we are coming in with 11 percent, which is  
15 surprisingly low, I think to all of us, which is good, and it  
16 means that we've got a nice, precise estimate, and those CVs are  
17 low across the habitats and regions as well, and so we'll report  
18 that by habitat and by region and by depth and that sort of  
19 thing, but I'm giving you the overall punchline here.

20  
21 If you had to look at a regional distribution based on number,  
22 you're looking at about 48 percent in the western Gulf and 52  
23 percent in the eastern Gulf, and so it's about a 50/50 split,  
24 roughly, in terms of abundance, but keep in mind, and I didn't  
25 have time to talk about size and age and that sort of thing, and  
26 I probably should say that these are age-two-plus red snapper  
27 that are part of the exploitable fishery population. We're not  
28 looking at little small new recruits or something like that.

29  
30 These are fish that experience catch-and-release and discard  
31 mortality and retention and all of that, but the larger fish are  
32 still in the western Gulf, and so I think those biomass patterns  
33 that we've been seeing will hold up, but the number pattern is  
34 there's a lot of smaller fish, especially on the Florida shelf,  
35 which makes sense, as they are recolonizing that area.

36  
37 To put that into perspective, the last stock assessment, and  
38 keep in mind that the stock assessment was a couple of years old  
39 before we started this study, or started collecting the data,  
40 and that's a couple of years old now, and so it's a little bit  
41 behind, but that assessment showed that there's about thirty-six  
42 million fish, and so, essentially, we're tripling the federal  
43 estimate, primarily as it's related to fish over that  
44 unclassified bottom, which is a habitat that had not been  
45 assessed until this study.

46  
47 What are the key take-aways? Putting it in a bigger  
48 perspective, and so pick your number of five to eight-pound

1 average size fish, and, at a hundred-million fish, you're  
2 looking at 500 to 800 million pounds of fish in the Gulf of  
3 Mexico, depending on what sizes you choose, and we manage 15.5  
4 million, in terms of allocation, and so there is probably some  
5 room for new management styles and other things, as related to  
6 this increased biomass in numbers of fish that we're  
7 discovering.

8  
9 One important point is that this study -- We had a lot of  
10 criticism in the beginning, I think, that it was going to  
11 replace what we had already done and that sort of thing, and I  
12 just want to make sure to say that none of the investigators  
13 feel this is a competitive kind of here is ours and there is  
14 yours. We're really building on the science and adding to the  
15 knowledge base, in the most non-competitive way we have, to give  
16 us the best science we have, so that, as managers, we can make  
17 the most informed decisions.

18  
19 That tagging study was really important, because it gave us some  
20 really good information about the fishery exploitation pattern,  
21 which it turns out we all know there was a lot of fish on  
22 artificial reefs and natural banks, and there still are, but no  
23 one, I think, quite realized the fish that are on the  
24 uncharacterized bottom.

25  
26 That's not to diminish artificial reef habitats or natural banks  
27 by any means, but it's just I think we missed a lot of fish by  
28 not looking at that unclassified bottom, but the fishery-  
29 dependent way that we collect information from this fishery, and  
30 the exploitation rates, are on the habitats where the fish are  
31 not occurring, and that's very important, from a management  
32 implication story, is that, essentially, you have protected  
33 biomass that's not generally getting fished, for the most part,  
34 and our tagging study bears that out.

35  
36 In addition, this uncharacterized bottom, we just were having  
37 discussions about stock-recruit relationships, and I'm sure  
38 we'll have a lot more, and we never could quite explain why --  
39 We just could never quite explain the stock-recruit  
40 relationship, where, when you have stocks at all-time lows, but  
41 recruitment, or the number of babies, essentially, being  
42 produced is an all-time high, and it's probably because of not  
43 accounting for the fish over the uncharacterized bottom, and so  
44 that at least explains some of the things we're seeing in this  
45 fishery that we couldn't explain until after this study.

46  
47 The other thing has to do with the larger effort recalibration  
48 that's going on, and I mentioned earlier that, when you look at

1 fishery-dependent data, and where it's coming from, it's coming  
2 from natural banks, and especially artificial reefs, and, if you  
3 had to look at the current assessment and our assessment, but  
4 didn't consider uncharacterized bottom, they probably would be  
5 pretty similar, because we're not looking at those fish over  
6 uncharacterized bottom, and I think that will be shown in this  
7 effort recalibration, and that may help to explain things, as  
8 well as how could we support that much effort if the biomass  
9 wasn't certainly bigger than that old assessment was reporting.

10  
11 That astonishing 30 percent tag return gives us a lot of  
12 information, and it was a huge success piece of this story, and  
13 it showed that other measures we're considering, such as  
14 descending devices, can really work and that you can catch-and-  
15 release reef fish.

16  
17 We had a tremendous amount of angler buy-in with that, and it  
18 continues today. As you all well know, we're considering  
19 things, and there is clearly direct ramifications there for  
20 stuff that will be in front of us, as well as the DESCEND Act,  
21 which is making its way through Capitol Hill right now.

22  
23 This is kind of just the beginning. We've been meeting closely  
24 to brief the Science Center and others about where we are with  
25 it and that sort of thing, and that will require many, many more  
26 meetings with our team and their assessment teams, to really  
27 begin to make sense of the data and talk about what we have and  
28 their needs, so they can best incorporate this into the  
29 assessment process.

30  
31 Our kind of role here ends, and we provide the estimate, and  
32 then the assessment piece kicks in with those data, but there's  
33 a lot of gray area in the middle there, where exchanges have to  
34 occur, and our team is more than willing to work with Dr. Porch  
35 and Shannon and all of their teams at the Science Center to make  
36 that happen.

37  
38 Also, because we have that strong affiliation with our research  
39 team and the SSC, and also council affiliation, we can make that  
40 direct integration into management really seamlessly, compared  
41 to many other studies, which often get criticized for not making  
42 that management and policy leap, and I can assure you that won't  
43 happen here.

44  
45 Finally, stay tuned. We have not issued any press releases, and  
46 we're not yet, but we will here very soon, and that will kick  
47 off with an engagement, to let the fishery know what it really  
48 means and the overall findings and that sort of thing, and so

1 that's what will happen later this fall and winter.

2  
3 With that, I will stop here, Martha, but I just really need to  
4 thank, obviously, Congress for appropriating this money. If you  
5 don't know, NOAA Sea Grant oversaw it, and there was a  
6 contribution from NOAA Fisheries, as well as Sea Grant, to make  
7 that happen through those congressional appropriations, and so  
8 we really appreciate those agencies.

9  
10 Sea Grant, and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant specifically,  
11 was the one that oversaw it, as well as the steering committee,  
12 which is a lot of names that everyone around here would  
13 recognize, in terms of guiding this, and, principally, Clay  
14 Porch and others, in helping with the design and that sort of  
15 thing, but I want to draw particular attention to LaDon Swann,  
16 who many of you know, and his team, Loretta and Devaney, and the  
17 administrative load to manage something like this -- I couldn't  
18 have underestimated it more than I did.

19  
20 It was enormous, but it worked out great, and LaDon couldn't  
21 have been a better program manager, and largely, because of him  
22 and his team and the steering committee, we could focus on the  
23 science and get the work done on that end, versus dealing with  
24 budgets and numbers and that sort of thing. Anyway, I will stop  
25 there, Martha, and I know that was a lot, and it was a lot of  
26 ground to cover, and there's really a lot more, and I am happy  
27 to answer questions.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Greg. I see some hands  
30 going up. John Sanchez has had his hand up for a bit.

31  
32 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Good morning, Greg. That was a very cool  
33 presentation, and thank you for that. I know you put a lot of  
34 time and energy and work into that. A couple of questions, out  
35 of curiosity. Is there a component to look at an estimate of  
36 effort, perhaps even by region, in the Great Snapper Count?

37  
38 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes, John, and that was not the original intent of  
39 it, but it grew out of that tagging study, and it was one of the  
40 reasons that I said we got a lot of things out of that tagging  
41 study that weren't anticipated, and we'll have -- There's an  
42 entire section that I didn't have time to talk about today, in  
43 terms of looking at particularly private recreational effort  
44 that will include for-hire as a component of that, and Matt  
45 Catalano is leading that piece of it, and that will be a  
46 component of the final report. I'm happy to come back and talk  
47 to the council again specifically on that, but there's a good  
48 story to tell there.

1  
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Good. I look forward to that, and hopefully it  
3 shows some regional aspects to it. One more question. Were the  
4 fish that were tagged fish that were captured, were they  
5 released to be recaptured, or kind of what happened there?  
6

7 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes, that was the intent, and it's called a mark-  
8 and-recapture, or sometimes a capture, mark-recapture study, and  
9 the idea is that you mark a number of fish with a tag, and you  
10 let them go do their thing, and then you go back, and the  
11 proportion you catch is in proportion to the abundance, but it  
12 also tells you about effort and all sorts of other things,  
13 including discard mortality. They were put out within -- We  
14 wanted them recaptured, and we wanted them reported.  
15

16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, and, again, very, very cool stuff.  
17 It's a very good study, and I look forward to being able to  
18 elaborate on these additional components of it. Thank you.  
19

20 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Next, I have Dr. Frazer.  
21

22 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** I would just like to say, Greg, congratulations  
23 to you and your team on that work. It's a tremendous amount of  
24 effort, I know, and I'm glad to see it finally coming to an end  
25 and bearing some fruit, but I do want to just follow-up on John  
26 Sanchez's question a little bit, with regard to the tagging data  
27 and the mark-recapture stuff, and I'm sure that Matt Catalano  
28 did a great job there.  
29

30 30 percent, like you said, is really high, and it provides a lot  
31 of insight into what's going on, but my question, really, is did  
32 you -- I mean, you pretty much categorized the fish by habitat  
33 type, right, or kind of allocated them to habitat, and so did  
34 you do a lot of that tagging on the uncharacterized bottom, or  
35 was it all pretty much restricted to the high-relief habitats  
36 and artificial reefs?  
37

38 **DR. STUNZ:** No, and that's a great question, Tom. No, that was  
39 restricted primarily to artificial reefs and some natural  
40 habitat, and, now that we have the value of hindsight, which we  
41 didn't going into this study -- We suspected we would find some  
42 fish on the uncharacterized bottom, and it certainly makes sense  
43 that -- It's such a vast area, and, if you find small amounts of  
44 fish, that number expands greatly, and that's exactly what  
45 happened here, but we -- Because they are located over areas you  
46 don't know, you can't really go target them.  
47

48 Now, we can go back and target them, because now we know where

1 those areas are, but we were very much in the discovery phase,  
2 and so we did not have the ability, and so we attempted to do  
3 depletion studies over that uncharacterized bottom, but you just  
4 can't randomly -- I am getting way in the science weeds now, but  
5 you have to randomize where you go out there, and, if you  
6 randomize where you go, it's such a vast area, most of the time,  
7 you're going to places where there are no fish, or almost all  
8 the time, and so trying to -- We are not estimating the  
9 abundance from the tagging study, and don't get me wrong.

10  
11 We are estimating the abundance from the other methods, but we  
12 do -- The hindsight being 20/20 now, we wish we would have spent  
13 a lot more time on that uncharacterized bottom. In the future,  
14 that's definitely going to be a recommendation, and we get very  
15 good age composition out there, as well as begin to look at what  
16 are they really holding on and how are they using that area and  
17 that sort of thing.

18  
19 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Greg.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Next, I have Kevin.

22  
23 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That was a good  
24 presentation, Dr. Stunz. I appreciate it. I appreciate all the  
25 work you did, and all the other researchers and collaborators.  
26 It's interesting to see all this information, and it's certainly  
27 interesting to see the results. There's lots of stuff in here,  
28 and I look forward to future presentations that you or other  
29 researchers provide us, because there's a lot of information in  
30 the study, and it's very worthwhile for what we're trying to do  
31 with managing this fishery.

32  
33 One of the questions that has come up relative to another topic  
34 that's on today's agenda and that's been at several of our  
35 meetings here recently is the recalibration issue, and one of  
36 the things that's been stressed, or requested, is that we have  
37 the data given to the Science Center, so that that information  
38 can be included in the interim analysis, and one of those pieces  
39 of data, the piece of data that's needed, is the age  
40 composition, including the abundance from this uncharacterized  
41 bottom, water bottom, and is that something that you will have  
42 available very, very soon, or maybe you've already given it to  
43 Dr. Porch and others at the Science Center?

44  
45 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes to all of the above, and we'll have more that  
46 we're providing to them, but, Kevin, let me say one thing too,  
47 and keep in mind that we're building the airplane as we're  
48 flying it here, I guess, so to speak, and we don't want to get

1 out front of where we're at. We still, obviously, need this to  
2 go through the SSC and that sort of thing, and that will be  
3 done, and I've been meeting with council staff to sort of see  
4 how that might occur, to bring it to this committee and that  
5 sort of thing.

6  
7 There is some steps to go along the way, but, also, the  
8 management needs are so great, and everybody is trying to get in  
9 front of it as well, and so we're working hard to get everyone  
10 what they need in as timely of a manner as they can.

11  
12 To answer your question specifically, we were not -- We were  
13 asked specifically not to age the fish, because that takes so  
14 much time and so much effort, and to focus our efforts on  
15 enumerating the fish. We have really good size composition of  
16 the fish that are out there that we can generate reasonable age  
17 compositions from that, and so we did not focus on ageing the  
18 fish.

19  
20 Now, do we need more information on that unclassified bottom?  
21 That's yes, and we tend to think there are larger, bigger fish  
22 out there, but we need to know that, and so probably some  
23 additional future studies, through different programs, should  
24 characterize the age composition on those unclassified bottoms  
25 much better.

26  
27 **MR. ANSON:** Can I ask one more question, Madam Chair?

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.

30  
31 **MR. ANSON:** So this uncharacterized bottom, Dr. Stunz, you  
32 indicated that it wasn't the snapper banks, or those areas where  
33 there is known fish, and are frequented by fishermen, and so are  
34 we talking about -- I mean, we're talking about a relatively  
35 small area of this rocky hardbottom, and what would you say  
36 would be an average size of that?

37  
38 **DR. STUNZ:** Sorry, Kevin, but I'm not quite following your  
39 question. The average -- The size of the fish or the size of  
40 the habitat?

41  
42 **MR. ANSON:** The habitat.

43  
44 **DR. STUNZ:** The unclassified bottom, let's just say, in Texas  
45 and Louisiana, is roughly 50,000 to 60,000 square kilometers,  
46 and so let's just say 100,000 square kilometers in the western  
47 Gulf, and that's an approximation only to that number, but  
48 roughly that's the kind of area of uncharacterized bottom, and

1 is that what you're asking?

2  
3 **MR. ANSON:** No, and I meant the -- I mean, you talked about,  
4 basically, two habitats within the uncharacterized bottom, and  
5 you have the open, sandy mud bottom and then you have these  
6 interspersed, rocky hard bottom areas, coral areas, maybe, in  
7 some certain portions of the Gulf, and is that -- Am I  
8 describing that, so far, correctly?

9  
10 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes, and, Kevin, it's everything. It could be  
11 artificial reefs, and it could be artificial reefs that are  
12 shipwrecks and scouring from currents, or it could be natural,  
13 and it's just things -- We have very limited mapping of the  
14 continental shelf of the Gulf of Mexico, and so, if it was not  
15 known and described in certain -- Well, we scoured every  
16 database, every reliable database, I should say, and that's part  
17 of our known features.

18  
19 Everything else was grouped into this uncharacterized bottom.  
20 Now, an exercise that the team would still need to do, or  
21 someone at this point, is to go back where we discovered fish  
22 and see what it was that they were holding on, and we have not  
23 done that. It's just grouped into that category at this point.  
24 It's sort of a catch-all category that includes a lot, and so I  
25 guess I don't want to give the impression to folks that there is  
26 snapper evenly dispersed over a bunch of flat, mud bottom, and  
27 that's probably not the case. They are much more -- They are  
28 obviously reef fish, and they're typically holding on some type  
29 of structural feature.

30  
31 **MR. ANSON:** All right. Thank you.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Next, I have Clay.

34  
35 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to reiterate  
36 that this study is really unprecedented. What these guys have  
37 accomplished is nothing short of amazing. There have been other  
38 studies that have gotten estimates of absolute abundance in much  
39 smaller areas, usually using one type of gear that somehow they  
40 have managed to calibrate, but, given the complexities of the  
41 Gulf, and the basically three different ways they had to cross-  
42 calibrate to get estimates for red snapper in the entire Gulf of  
43 Mexico, it really is unprecedented.

44  
45 Interestingly, when you break those down by the high-relief  
46 habitats in that uncharacterized spot, the assessment did a  
47 remarkably good job of estimating the number of fish in the  
48 areas where the fishery operates, but, as Greg pointed out, the

1 big news is how many fish are actually outside the area where  
2 most of the fishery operates, and we suspected they were there,  
3 and we would hear it from some of the high-liner fishermen, like  
4 Donnie Waters or Wayne Werner, and from our own surveys.

5  
6 I think, as you all know, for the better part of thirty years,  
7 we have had a longline survey that was out there on that  
8 uncharacterized bottom. In fact, we used to get criticized a  
9 lot for that, and, you know, why are you fishing for red snapper  
10 out there, and we always found some, and the density was low.

11  
12 The thing is we didn't have a way to calibrate the abundance  
13 from our longline survey on that uncharacterized low-relief  
14 bottom with the abundance on the high relief, and so we just had  
15 a relative density trend, but we didn't have an absolute  
16 abundance, and that's where this study is truly groundbreaking,  
17 because now we actually know that the majority of fish are out  
18 there on that low-relief bottom.

19  
20 This has been huge, and it's really exciting for us, and it's  
21 one of the reasons -- Because we suspected that there were fish  
22 out there in large numbers, and low density, but across a huge  
23 area, that, when we wrote the RFP for this, we insisted that the  
24 successful applicant cover that uncharacterized bottom, and you  
25 see the results of it.

26  
27 I guess I would add that, because we've been doing that longline  
28 survey out there, I think we do have some age composition data,  
29 and probably not as much as we would like, but hundreds of fish  
30 around a similar timeframe that we can use to try and figure out  
31 the age composition and match up with those total abundance in  
32 the uncharacterized bottom that Greg showed you, and, along  
33 those lines, what our plan is, it's to develop a strategy for an  
34 interim ABC advice and present that to the January council  
35 meeting.

36  
37 Greg has delivered a lot of information to us, as he indicated,  
38 and there's some more to come, and we'll work with he and the  
39 rest of the Great Red Snapper Team to try and figure out the  
40 best way to approach developing a new ABC, and we'll present  
41 that to the council in January, and then, in the subsequent  
42 months, we'll flesh out all the details, and so there's a lot of  
43 work to be done, but I think we can have it done in time for  
44 maybe a late March or early April SSC review.

45  
46 Then the last thing that I wanted to bring up is, as great as  
47 this survey is, basically, it cost my entire survey budget for  
48 the year to sample one species in one place in one year, and so

1 I wonder if, Greg, you could maybe chime in a little bit, in  
2 terms of how we could get a little more bang for the buck in  
3 looking at more species, and you know where I'm going with this,  
4 and one of the things the Center is doing is trying to figure  
5 out if there's a way we can apply this approach more cost-  
6 effectively to multiple species and basically reinvent our  
7 entire survey enterprise. I will leave it at that.

8  
9 **DR. STUNZ:** Clay, obviously, a couple of things there. Yes, as  
10 you know, and just to make sure that all the council folks know,  
11 when you have an estimate of absolute abundance, versus an  
12 indices of abundance, you can do a lot -- I don't know if  
13 "sophisticated" is the right word, but alternative and other  
14 options for assessment that potentially could lead to a much-  
15 improved assessment of the species, and that's what this  
16 generates here.

17  
18 Now, in addition, on the video, we capture all the species that  
19 are there, including amberjack and including triggerfish,  
20 vermilion snapper, and many of the species that we care about.  
21 Of course, for this study, we just had time to process just for  
22 red snapper, in terms of analysis and that kind of thing, and so  
23 there is -- You are getting a lot more bang for your buck than  
24 we can report here, in terms of just the amount of time we had  
25 to assess that.

26  
27 Also, we were charged with the tagging component, the outreach  
28 component, and we were charged with developing new gear, and the  
29 pieces of gear you saw there were several hundred thousand  
30 dollars apiece, and, yes, they were good for that study, but  
31 they're good for many, many years after that, and so there's a  
32 lot, I guess, of upfront costs.

33  
34 We developed gear that can be towed off of much smaller vessels,  
35 and so you're not talking about oceanographic-type vessels that  
36 are needed for some of the gear, and so the point being that we  
37 kind of laid the groundwork and the methodologies, which used a  
38 lot of those resources, and it's probably not -- Well, I know  
39 it's not that expensive to continue smaller, directed studies,  
40 where you're getting at this absolute abundance. I would  
41 encourage -- Because of the value of having absolutely  
42 abundance, I would encourage smaller, cheaper studies, which  
43 would not have near the level of price tag.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Greg, and thanks, Clay, for  
46 the update on essentially that interim ABC advice coming in  
47 January. Let me see. Next on the list, I have Ed Swindell.

48

1 **MR. ED SWINDELL:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You've done quite an  
2 extensive study, and this is something else to look at, and to  
3 get more information, and what I was wondering is -- Did you  
4 collect any data at all on the relative size of between the  
5 three sections of area that you looked at?

6  
7 **DR. STUNZ:** Ed, we do have size information, among all the  
8 different habitats as well as the region and by depth.

9  
10 **MR. SWINDELL:** Okay. The other question is, when you were in  
11 Louisiana, did you look at just the bottom around the artificial  
12 reefs of the oil wells, or did you go up any and the strata as  
13 you're going up the reef, up the rig site?

14  
15 **DR. STUNZ:** Ed, do you mean on an individual structure itself?

16  
17 **MR. SWINDELL:** Just generally, and did you find that the red  
18 snapper are just at the bottom, or are they up and well along  
19 the rig itself?

20  
21 **DR. STUNZ:** No, they occur all up and down the rig itself, the  
22 reef. Now, they are a demersal fish, which means they're  
23 typically associated with the bottom, and, in most  
24 circumstances, the highest abundance is near the bottom, but we  
25 sampled from the top all the way to the bottom, and we generate  
26 what we call a species composition, or a species comp, of the  
27 proportion of red snapper and other species at every ten-meter  
28 increment from the top to the bottom.

29  
30 **MR. SWINDELL:** Okay, and so you did keep track of other species  
31 of fish that you saw?

32  
33 **DR. STUNZ:** Absolutely. They are not analyzed for this study  
34 yet, but we do have all of those.

35  
36 **MR. SWINDELL:** That's what I wanted to know. Thank you for your  
37 time.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Kevin.

40  
41 **MR. ANSON:** It was good to hear Dr. Porch describe that the  
42 Science Center is looking at utilizing some of that longline  
43 data, to try to fill in some of the holes, if you will, or add  
44 to the data that is going to be coming from the Great Red  
45 Snapper Count for the uncharacterized bottom.

46  
47 One of my concerns was that it would not be available, or it  
48 could not be done, and, therefore, over time, as Dr. Stunz

1 alluded to, there appears to be quite a lot of fishing effort,  
2 particularly on the recreational side, on artificial reefs, and  
3 I am of the opinion that that was part of the reason why the  
4 assessment comes back with relatively low numbers and,  
5 particularly in the eastern Gulf, a lower biomass, because a lot  
6 of the age comp comes from fishery-dependent size, and a lot of  
7 that fishing, that harvest, occurs on artificial reefs, and so  
8 it will be good that we can try to tease that out or have that  
9 information available, not only as it matches up with the Great  
10 Red Snapper Count, but, also, going forward, that we're able to  
11 somehow track or be able to monitor those fish in the  
12 uncharacterized areas.

13  
14 Then, just going back to another comment that Dr. Porch had, in  
15 Alabama, we have had our habitat-based assessment, and that's  
16 what we've attempted to do, is to try to look at multiple  
17 species, because it is expensive to conduct these surveys, year-  
18 in-and-year-out, and so we've looked at trying to incorporate an  
19 abundance estimate, or develop an abundance estimate, for other  
20 species, and there is some potential there.

21  
22 Then, lastly, looking forward, since these things, and it might  
23 be hard to come up with ten-plus-million dollars every four or  
24 five years, is that we need to be looking at ways whereby we can  
25 trim down, maybe, and do just a segment, or a portion, of the  
26 sampling, and that may be what Dr. Stunz was alluding to in his  
27 last comments, is that we look at one portion, or one survey,  
28 within suite of surveys that were used in this particular study  
29 and do that maybe on a region basis and then expand out for the  
30 rest of the Gulf, based on that, and do that intermittently.

31  
32 That's just some thoughts that I have on it as we go forward,  
33 because I just would hate for these fish to be lost again, or we  
34 have to find them again, with some more money. Thank you.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Kevin. I'm going to go to  
37 Susan, and then I'm going to jump in the queue, and then we'll  
38 go back to our list.

39  
40 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Dr. Stunz,  
41 for bringing this to us today. I will start by saying we did  
42 catch one of your tagged fish, but, when we called in, it was no  
43 longer available, the funding or whatever, but we did have one  
44 of your tags lost during Hurricane Sally, but I was just  
45 curious. The tagged fish that were tagged, and then were they  
46 recaptured in the same area that they were tagged, or were you  
47 finding them in different areas?

48

1 **DR. STUNZ:** Susan, to your first point, yes, eventually, we ran  
2 out of money. In fact, I have to commend Clay Porch for helping  
3 us come up with additional reward money, and so not to  
4 disenfranchise anglers that were kind enough to return them,  
5 but, eventually, at the first of the year, we said, okay, we've  
6 got to end it, and so we still offered smaller rewards, like t-  
7 shirts and stuff, and so I will get you a t-shirt, Susan.

8  
9 To answer your question about -- Yes, in general, they were  
10 caught on the same spots they were tagged, or they might have  
11 moved to another really nearby spot, and Matt Catalano and some  
12 others, Dr. Curtis, who many of you know, are analyzing that  
13 very thing now and looking at movement rates and that sort of  
14 thing, but, in general, they stayed put.

15  
16 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, and I look forward to getting my t-shirt.

17  
18 **DR. STUNZ:** Okay.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Greg, what -- How did you define an age-two  
21 fish?

22  
23 **DR. STUNZ:** Well, Martha, do you have -- If you knew the hours  
24 of discussion that our team has gone through to answer that  
25 question, but that is a known, but elusive, question to answer.  
26 The short answer is it depends.

27  
28 Many times, the fish aren't -- The day they turn two years old,  
29 they don't magically turn a certain size, and there are some  
30 age-two that are small, and there are some age-two that are  
31 really large, and so it just depends, and so we have analytical  
32 methods to deal with that.

33  
34 The short of it is 254 millimeters. Now, that is a very -- I  
35 probably should have pointed out, in this study, that we took  
36 every conservative turn possible, because we were very, very  
37 concerned about coming in with an overestimate, and the  
38 management implications of being wrong could be much greater  
39 than coming in less kind of thing, and so we probably left a lot  
40 of fish on the table, especially in Florida, because we set that  
41 age-two size higher than some of us might have liked or what we  
42 thought or what -- You know, we know most of them, by 200  
43 millimeters, are age-two.

44  
45 Then we had some discussion of, well, does it really matter if  
46 they're age-two, because that's just an arbitrary day, if you're  
47 two years old, or are they part of the exploited population that  
48 can be caught, can experience discard mortality, and they're not

1 new recruits kind of thing.

2  
3 Well, we ended up looking at a whole bunch of data and spending  
4 a whole lot of time to come up with that number, and that cost  
5 Florida, and especially Alabama, some fish, because we excluded  
6 probably a lot of fish that were age-two, but we wanted to err  
7 on the side of caution.

8  
9 That wasn't the case in the western Gulf, where typically fish  
10 there that have recruited to these habitats are much bigger, and  
11 it's just not a problem, but, as you all in Florida are  
12 experiencing colonization of fish, and there's available  
13 habitats -- Typically, older, larger snapper exclude the smaller  
14 ones, but, if you have open habitat, that is not the case, and  
15 I'm speculating now, but, ecologically speaking, that's what we  
16 think is happening, and so, yes, that's a very difficult to  
17 question, because the size of an age-two can be so variable.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks. I was kind of wondering if that was  
20 part of the driver for the low number on artificial reefs in  
21 Florida, or if there's other issues there. I mean, it sounds  
22 like maybe yes, but --

23  
24 **DR. STUNZ:** That is definitely part of the problem there,  
25 Martha, because there's a lot of smaller fish, and you can move  
26 a lot of fish by moving that number just ten millimeters on  
27 either side of 250. These are some of the things that the SSC  
28 will have to vet and learn about our assumptions, but I want to  
29 make sure that I am very clear to everyone that we took every  
30 possible conservative turn we could, and so this is very much an  
31 underestimate of what's out there.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Greg, for indulging me on  
34 those. I'm going to go next to Dale Diaz.

35  
36 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Dr. Stunz.  
37 This was a great presentation, and I enjoyed that more than most  
38 movies I've seen lately. I have a question for Dr. Porch, and I  
39 had a conversation with Dr. Simmons a few days ago, and so my  
40 question is are there issues with the current status  
41 determination criteria that we have for red snapper that would  
42 need to be addressed by the council in order to utilize the  
43 results of the Great Red Snapper Count?

44  
45 **DR. PORCH:** I mean, there is the general conceptual issue that  
46 Dr. Frazer, I think, brought up at the last council meeting, and  
47 Dr. Stunz alluded to earlier, that we thought that this was a  
48 smaller, highly-resilient population, in the sense that, despite

1 being fished down to something like 4 percent, it was able to  
2 rebound quickly, but that it turns out is, instead, this was a  
3 much larger population, and so the recovery rate was quick in  
4 the high-relief areas, but probably because there was such a big  
5 cryptic biomass out there replenishing it.

6  
7 What that means is that the stock is not as productive, in the  
8 sense that probably the SPR that's associated with the MSY,  
9 which we don't know the MSY, but the SPR associated with that is  
10 probably higher than the 26 percent that we've been using, and  
11 it might be more in line with what expectations were from the  
12 various national recommendations, which were somewhere like 40  
13 percent.

14  
15 Having said that, that's something that the SSC has to take up,  
16 and we're not going to make any specific recommendations in that  
17 regard, but probably the reference point will need to be  
18 changed, and it should be looked at, at least, during the next  
19 assessment.

20  
21 Having said that, the SSC is charged with coming up with an ABC,  
22 and so we can give them the method, and we can give them the  
23 calculations, but they will need to decide whether they are  
24 going to calculate the ABC based on something like a percentage  
25 reduction from an OFL that's based on F 26 percent and the  
26 current abundance coming from the Great Red Snapper Count or  
27 some other metric.

28  
29 I'm not prepared to say what the best approach is yet, until we  
30 really get into the nuts-and-bolts of all the data, but that's  
31 the plan that we'll give you in January. By then, we'll have  
32 had a chance to really look at all the details and think about  
33 what the best course is forward, and then, in the months after  
34 that, we will stitch everything together and come up with the  
35 actual numbers, and then the SSC will be able to weigh-in on it.

36  
37 **MR. DIAZ:** Thank you, Dr. Porch.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Next, I've got Leann.

40  
41 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Greg, amazing study  
42 and great work, and I enjoyed your presentation. I just had one  
43 quick question. I was wondering, on your data mining, when you  
44 were looking at the different habitat types and mapping the  
45 Gulf, were you able to get any information from BSEE and BOEM,  
46 which manage the oil industry, because of all the industries,  
47 outside of fishing, I would say that they probably have the most  
48 habitat information that is actually documented, outside of the

1 scientific community and the fishing world, and so would BOEM  
2 release any of that information to you?

3  
4 **DR. STUNZ:** Leann, yes, and that's a good point, and we did have  
5 some discussions with them, because, typically, we're interested  
6 in surface features, and they are interested in the stuff that's  
7 below the surface, and so part of their data is integrated into  
8 other datasets that -- In other words, it had been integrated  
9 into federal datasets that we could use.

10  
11 However, they do have a lot more very fine-scale information  
12 that would be very, very beneficial, and it might explain this  
13 uncharacterized bottom and what they are holding on and all  
14 those sorts of things, and we have been in discussions with  
15 them, but that's an exercise that needs to occur.

16  
17 In general, we need much better maps, and anyone's estimate will  
18 be improved by much better maps than we currently have, and  
19 that's just a limitation of what is out there, Leann, but, yes,  
20 I wish we had much better maps than we did, and there is stuff  
21 still that's out there that we don't have access to that  
22 probably could be released and utilized for similar studies.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Next, I have Robin.

25  
26 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** Thank you, Martha. First of all, Greg,  
27 thanks to you and the team across the Gulf that pulled this  
28 together, to the Science Center for their assistance and their  
29 role, and also LaDon and his team. This is great work, and we  
30 certainly appreciate seeing the end result of it here.

31  
32 Getting at Martha's question just a little bit, and Kevin kind  
33 of alluded to it as well, and I just want to make sure, for the  
34 record, that we have it on record, but you did indicate though  
35 that, while we didn't age fish, we do have a relative size by  
36 habitat type that you were looking at, as well as, obviously,  
37 kind of regionally, those breakdowns as well, and did I hear  
38 that correctly? You were answering Kevin, I believe.

39  
40 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes, and we have a lot more size information than we  
41 have physical age information, where we were taking a tissue,  
42 like an otolith, from the fish and put a discrete age on that  
43 fish. The issue, Robin, as you probably know, but others may  
44 not, is that -- It gets back to Martha's problem, but the age of  
45 a fish can vary greatly, depending on the length, and, in other  
46 words, length is not always the best indicator of age.

47  
48 The other side is that you have to catch and kill a lot of fish,

1 and then the ageing is a very drawn-out process to do, and we  
2 were specifically asked not to do any direct ageing, and so we  
3 provided lengths, and we have very good age-length keys, are  
4 what they're called, and they allow us, from the length, to  
5 convert age, in a really accurate manner, if we've aged enough  
6 fish from other studies.

7  
8 That is the way that I'm sure the Science Center will get at  
9 age, but we specifically could not age fish as part of this  
10 study. Now, we have it from other studies, and all the team  
11 that are associated with this study are ageing snapper pretty  
12 routinely, and so we had that kind of information from the same  
13 time periods that we could provide, but it technically was not a  
14 direct component of this.

15  
16 I also -- While I'm on that, I want to say one other thing,  
17 Robin, that's related to this, too. You know, this was a huge  
18 team effort, and I'm presenting this, but, I mean, these guys  
19 and girls and others that were associated with this study were  
20 top-notch and it wasn't me, necessarily, that was just pulling  
21 this off, and I was just sort of herding all the cats, so to  
22 speak, but there is a lot of good folks that did a lot of good  
23 work, and I want to make sure that I have clearly acknowledged  
24 all the regional groups that are contributing to this.

25  
26 **MR. RIECHERS:** Can I follow-up there, Martha?

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.

29  
30 **MR. RIECHERS:** Greg, I certainly understand the issue on  
31 lengths, and I appreciate you also, and I was trying to do that  
32 as well, recognizing the entire set of the team that went across  
33 the Gulf to do this, but this also ties in.

34  
35 Dave, and, of course, the Southeast Science Center, knows this,  
36 and Clay and others, but the other ageing that we do, obviously,  
37 isn't going to be exact for those fish in this study, but it  
38 should give us some reasonable -- Kind of, as you're talking  
39 about, reasonable age groupings, for management purposes, that  
40 should be able to help us in keeping some of these differences  
41 out, if in fact there are differences across the Gulf, as Kevin  
42 was alluding to, based on where fish are being captured from and  
43 so forth. I think there's enough information that some data  
44 mining can help us there, in some respects.

45  
46 **DR. STUNZ:** Definitely.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Tom.

1  
2 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Martha. I just want to follow-up a little  
3 bit, I guess, on Robin's question, and, Greg, I know you guys  
4 weren't tasked to age the fish, but you did generate length  
5 frequency distributions by habitat, and, I mean, are you at  
6 liberty to say whether or not that those length frequency  
7 distributions were fairly truncated on that high-relief habitat,  
8 relative to the uncharacterized?

9  
10 **DR. STUNZ:** No, and I think that -- So, yes, there is probably  
11 larger, bigger fish over that open, uncharacterized bottom, in  
12 general, but it's not like there's just all really small fish on  
13 artificial reef. You have the full-size distribution among all  
14 of these habitats.

15  
16 Now, how it looks on that uncharacterized bottom -- Tom, you've  
17 got to remember that we're pulling a towed gear, and it's pretty  
18 fast, and it's seven knots across open bottom, and you hope that  
19 the lasers hit them, so you can get a size measurement, and we  
20 have a lot of that hindsight that I was talking about, or  
21 lessons learned, and we really need to go back and really  
22 characterize that uncharacterized bottom, but I don't think  
23 you're going to, all of a sudden, just find a lot of small,  
24 little fish out there. Typically, the smaller fish that we see  
25 are on natural banks and artificial reefs, but you have large  
26 ones as well mixed in with them.

27  
28 **DR. FRAZER:** The reason I wasn't sure that you would be able to  
29 answer it fully -- I appreciate the comment that you made  
30 earlier that you tried to take every precaution in this report  
31 and be conservative, right, and, again, there's a couple of  
32 things that have been raised already in this discussion that I  
33 think kind of merit a cautious approach as well from a  
34 management side of things, like potentially as it relates to  
35 underestimating the production of the stock and things like  
36 that, and so I just wanted to try to get those things on the  
37 table now, so we can kind of temper, perhaps, some of our  
38 expectations moving forward.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Clay.

41  
42 **DR. PORCH:** Just to be clear, the RFP didn't specifically  
43 prohibit getting age data. I think what happened is the  
44 priority was getting the absolute abundance estimates, and, if  
45 it would have detracted from the ability to do that, by  
46 concentrating on collecting age data, then clearly you would  
47 want to prioritize actually getting the actual total abundance  
48 estimates.

1  
2 Having said that, there is a fair amount of age data from our  
3 offshore longline survey, which we've been doing for a long  
4 time, and including in the years that this study was conducted,  
5 and so what I think we can do is match up the age composition  
6 from our longline survey in similar areas and then compare the  
7 length composition, because it's possible that the length  
8 composition seen from the visual surveys is a little different  
9 from what we're catching on the longline hooks, and, that way,  
10 we can adjust the -- We can basically come up with an adjusted  
11 age composition, and so I think it's doable, but it's just a  
12 question of whether, between our survey and the Alabama longline  
13 survey and others, that we have enough data to basically come up  
14 with a good age-length key for the uncharacterized bottom, but I  
15 think we'll have something useful.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Kevin.

18  
19 **MR. ANSON:** To follow-up a little bit about the longline  
20 information, Dr. Porch, do you think you have enough information  
21 to develop some sort of an index? Has the survey been conducted  
22 similarly over the years, that you would be able to kind of use  
23 that to look at CPUE information from the earlier time series  
24 and compare to the current time series for, again, just checking  
25 to see if the population, or the abundance, of those fish in  
26 those open bottoms changes over time?

27  
28 **DR. PORCH:** Yes, we should be able to. We've been using it as  
29 an index of abundance in our stock assessments, but it's just  
30 that we didn't have a way to gauge the density that we were  
31 seeing from the longline survey with the other sources of  
32 information, and so we had no way to tell whether the number of  
33 fish in the uncharacterized area was bigger or smaller than in  
34 the high-relief areas, and now we do, and so we could apply the  
35 relative index then to get an idea of how the total abundance  
36 has changed over time in the uncharacterized areas, and so I  
37 imagine that's something that they will look at closely in the  
38 research track assessment that is coming up.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Leann, did you just put your hand up?

41  
42 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, ma'am. Just a quick comment. It sounds  
43 like, when the SSC does take a look at the Great Red Snapper  
44 Count, and I'm thinking about the timing, they will probably --  
45 I am guessing they're probably going to be looking at that  
46 during the same meeting that they'll be looking at the interim  
47 data that Clay's shop is going to produce, because the final  
48 report, Greg said, won't be out for another couple of weeks, and

1 so we're talking about probably January-ish before we see it,  
2 and Dr. Porch was talking about maybe March they would have some  
3 -- I mean, in January, they would have some interim data, but  
4 then it would go to the SSC maybe in March or April, and so,  
5 anyway, at whatever point that the SSC gets this whole package  
6 of information, I hope that we can dedicate just about an entire  
7 day to them parsing through this and really taking a look at  
8 some of the questions that we're going through here.

9  
10 I just want to make sure that we allocate them sufficient time,  
11 and more than sufficient time, so that we get a good, solid  
12 answer on any questions that we may have, in order to start  
13 using this for management. Thanks.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann. Good point. I think that's the  
16 last of our hands. It looks like it. I just want to say thanks  
17 to Greg, again. This was all really exciting work, and I know a  
18 number of us are really excited to read the final report, when  
19 it's ready, and talk about this more. Let's move on to our next  
20 item, which is the Draft Framework Action for Adjusting State  
21 Recreational Red Snapper Catch Limits. It looks like we've got  
22 Mr. Rindone and Dr. Froeschke on this item, and so, whoever is  
23 going to start, if you'll start with the action guide and then  
24 go through the presentation.

25  
26 **DRAFT FRAMEWORK ACTION: ADJUST STATE RECREATIONAL RED SNAPPER**  
27 **CATCH LIMITS**

28  
29 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Sure, Martha. You guys are going to get a  
30 presentation from me on the catch limits and their differences  
31 for Gulf red snapper, and this was requested at the previous  
32 meeting, and we have added a table in the draft framework action  
33 that you guys saw the last time, but that's really the only  
34 change that's been made, generally speaking, to that document,  
35 is just doing a little bit better job, we hope, of  
36 characterizing the differences between the catch limits for red  
37 snapper.

38  
39 This framework action is being considered to account for  
40 discrepancies between the data currencies currently used to  
41 monitor recreational red snapper landings and effort from  
42 private vessels, and so you guys should consider the options  
43 presented and recommend modifications, as appropriate. Madam  
44 Chair.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I don't see any hands, and so I think we're  
47 ready for the presentation, if you are.

48

1 **MR. RINDONE:** We'll put the presentation up, and we have the  
2 document in there as background, and I wasn't planning to go  
3 through the whole thing again, because, again, the only change  
4 was made was a table that I will call your attention to after we  
5 go through this presentation, but we'll start here.

6  
7 Again, at the last council meeting, you guys had requested a  
8 breakdown of how these catch limits differ from one another for  
9 red snapper, and so hopefully this presentation will shed some  
10 light on that.

11  
12 Red snapper catch limits, they're clear as mud. Starting with  
13 Reef Fish Amendment 40, which created the for-hire and private  
14 vessel components of the recreational sector, we then moved to a  
15 framework action to adjust the red snapper ACLs, which increased  
16 our catch limits in response to SEDAR 52.

17  
18 Then, after that, we had a framework action to adjust the for-  
19 hire red snapper ACT buffer, and there were actually two of  
20 these, and there was one that did it just for a year, reducing  
21 it from 20 percent to 9 percent, and then there was another one  
22 that followed that made that reduction permanent.

23  
24 Then, most recently, we have Reef Fish Amendment 50A, which  
25 determined state allocations for private vessels and removed the  
26 use of ACTs for that private vessel ACL by state, and so the use  
27 of an ACT is left up to each state, and, at present, no state is  
28 using an ACT.

29  
30 Okay, and so how do all these things shake out proportionally,  
31 and so when we're talking about going from the overfishing limit  
32 to the acceptable biological catch to the annual catch limits?  
33 Our current OFL is 15.5 million pounds whole weight, and this is  
34 reduced to 15.1 million pounds whole weight for the ABC, and  
35 this is under a constant catch scenario based on the SSC's  
36 recommendations from SEDAR 52, and these are the catch limits  
37 that we will have until the council changes them. Please  
38 interrupt me if anybody has a question or anything like that,  
39 and I will stop.

40  
41 Of that 15.1 million-pound stock ABC, 7.701 million pounds is  
42 allocated towards the commercial sector and its ACL, or its  
43 quota, since it's done under the red snapper individual fishing  
44 quota program, and then 7.399 million pounds goes to the  
45 recreational sector's ACL.

46  
47 In this circumstance, the recreational and commercial ACLs equal  
48 the ABC, and so ABC is equal to ACL here, and there is no buffer

1 between the ABC and the sum of the sector ACLs.

2  
3 Again, the ACL for the commercial sector is also called the  
4 quota, because the commercial sector is managed under the IFQ  
5 program, and the ACL for the recreational sector is divided,  
6 using Amendment 40, between the private vessels and the for-hire  
7 vessels.

8  
9 57.7 percent of the recreational ACL goes to the private vessel  
10 component, and 42.3 percent to the federal for-hire component,  
11 from Amendment 40, and so you can see the weights that result in  
12 the division of the recreational sector's ACL there on the  
13 right. Hopefully I picked colors that show up differently, so  
14 you guys can tell the differences.

15  
16 The for-hire ACL, as we mentioned before, is reduced by 9  
17 percent to the for-hire annual catch target, and this is from  
18 one of our previous framework actions, and so the federal for-  
19 hire ACT is 9 percent below the federal for-hire ACL.

20  
21 Of the private angling ACL, that 4.69 million pounds whole  
22 weight, Amendment 50 divided that into the state-specific ACLs,  
23 and the states may choose to use an ACT, if it aids in their  
24 management, but they're not required to do so. There is still a  
25 20 percent reduction from the ACL to the ACT that is on the  
26 books, but Amendment 50 has rendered this more or less moot at  
27 this point, because of the way that that amendment restructured  
28 how we managed this component of the recreational sector.

29  
30 Here you can see the values in pounds whole weight that are  
31 portioned to each of the states, and so they're state-specific  
32 ACLs. Sorry, Mississippi, but I had to fiddle with that one a  
33 little bit to make it legible, and you can see the state  
34 allocations, in terms of their percentage of the private vessel  
35 ACL, there. The sum of the state ACLs add up to the total  
36 private vessel ACL, again illustrating the point that there is  
37 no ACT that is currently used for this component of the  
38 recreational sector. That's what I have. Any questions on  
39 that?

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Let me give it a minute. I don't see any hands  
42 going up.

43  
44 **MR. RINDONE:** Okay. Well, if we want to bounce real quick over  
45 to the document, I will tell you guys where you can find the  
46 fancy-smancy table we put in there for you. This is now Table  
47 1.1.1, which is on page 3 of the document. Here, you can see  
48 how we've tried to characterize all of this for you guys, in

1 hopes that this makes it a little bit easier to understand. Of  
2 course, we're welcoming any feedback that you might have.

3  
4 Try as I might to find a way to incorporate all of those pretty  
5 little colored boxes into one figure, it just came out as noisy  
6 and incomprehensible, and so I apologize that I wasn't able to  
7 directly translate that into the document without it being a  
8 whole bunch of slides, but hopefully this makes it a little bit  
9 more clear as to what the apportionments and reductions actually  
10 are, and thank you to the IPT for their feedback on this. There  
11 was a lot of back-and-forth on this that was valuable. Madam  
12 Chair, barring that, I don't have anything else for you on this,  
13 unless the committee has some recommendations.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. I guess we'll pause there for questions  
16 and discussion about Ryan's presentation, this table, or  
17 anything that you all might want to discuss in the document  
18 itself. We haven't gone through the actions here, since they  
19 haven't changed since our last meeting, but, if there are  
20 questions or comments, we can certainly entertain those now,  
21 but, just following up on Greg's presentation and our  
22 discussion, of course, we'll probably have a more productive  
23 discussion about this once we can see a little bit better what's  
24 coming ahead for us, in terms of red snapper. Dr. Simmons.

25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I  
27 just wanted to summarize where our understanding is of the  
28 timing of when the Great Red Snapper Count would be available  
29 for the actual SSC review and those results would go to the  
30 council and the council would be able to act on those.

31  
32 We've had some planning calls, and, right now, I think, as Dr.  
33 Porch mentioned, the plan is we have a presentation set aside  
34 during the January 5 through 7, 2021 SSC, for the Science Center  
35 to talk about the process for this interim analysis request we  
36 have for red snapper and the incorporation of the Great Red  
37 Snapper Count data and the resulting projections and what other  
38 items may need to be considered during this process.

39  
40 We're planning to see that laid out in January, and then the  
41 next time we're planning to see, I guess, a more rigorous -- The  
42 final report and a more rigorous review for the SSC would be in  
43 late March, or before the April council meeting, and then the  
44 council would be able to, I guess, act on that in April and  
45 then, potentially, we would maybe need to consider a special  
46 council meeting in May, and so I will put that out there for  
47 now, if we wanted to act on these new catch levels quickly, and,  
48 of course, if you wanted to put those changes in catch levels

1 that come out from the count with this calibration document, you  
2 would need to incorporate the commercial side of things as well,  
3 I believe, in this particular framework action.

4  
5 I will put that out there as food for thought for us to be  
6 thinking about that, and staff has been thinking about this and  
7 talking about this and trying to plan, and so I will stop and  
8 see if anyone has any questions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks. That was helpful. I am going to go to  
11 Roy and then Leann, since they had their hands up, but, if folks  
12 have questions for Carrie, go ahead and put yourself in the  
13 queue. Roy.

14  
15 **DR. CRABTREE:** Thanks, Martha. Just speculating a little bit,  
16 based on the information that Greg presented, which I regard as  
17 extremely welcome and good news, and I don't think it's  
18 unreasonable to assume that it's quite likely the ABC is going  
19 to go up. How much, I don't know, but I think you can all work  
20 on the expectation that the catch levels are likely to go up,  
21 and so my guess is, in this document, you're going to end up  
22 adding an alternative and action that will make adjustments to  
23 it.

24  
25 I think you will also, in the course of doing this, have to  
26 ensure that you have brought everything into compliance with the  
27 Magnuson Act and the Amendment 50 and the plan, which means  
28 you're going to have to deal with these calibration issues, in  
29 some fashion or another, and we've had virtually no discussion  
30 over the course of the past few meetings about how to do that,  
31 but you're going to have to deal with it, in my opinion, to  
32 raise the quotas, and I think where you are is probably you're  
33 going to do a framework action of some sort, and the timing is  
34 going to become an issue for you, because, if you don't have a  
35 final document to vote on until April, or even May, and it's  
36 going to have to go through comment periods and the like, you're  
37 probably looking at late in the summer to make adjustments for  
38 some of these things, if then.

39  
40 I think you're not going to have the timing or ability to make  
41 changes to the allocations at this point, because you have to go  
42 through a plan amendment to deal with that, and so, presumably,  
43 the commercial quota increase is going to be parsed out to the  
44 shareholders as it has in past quota increases, and the  
45 charter/private allocations and all will remain the same, but I  
46 think the biggest decision you're going to have to make is how  
47 to deal with these calibrations, whether you're going to apply  
48 an across-the-board buffer or you're going to apply the ratios

1 on it, and, depending on how this comes out, I suspect you will  
2 find yourselves under quite a bit of pressure to move quickly on  
3 some of these things.

4  
5 I think it is quite reasonable to think you're going to have to  
6 have an additional council meeting to do this, but, to the  
7 extent that you can hash through some of these issues now and  
8 give staff some guidance on how you see this going and how you  
9 think you are likely to proceed, I think you will save  
10 yourselves time and issues down the road, and that's just some  
11 of my thoughts and advice to you.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Roy. I am going to go to  
14 Leann next.

15  
16 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thanks. My concern is with timing as well, if you  
17 wanted to get these things on the books, and I know it's going  
18 to be very contentious between the states, when you get into  
19 these actions in this document, just as the document stands now,  
20 with the actions that are in it, I mean the alternatives that  
21 are in it.

22  
23 It's essentially allocations, even though it's a calibration,  
24 and I just worry that, if we wait until the last minute to start  
25 taking shots across the bow of this, and actually having those  
26 discussions, that we're not going to get it done, and it seems  
27 like there's always more information that we want to see  
28 presented in the document, as we get into these discussions,  
29 and, if we don't get into those today and actually start to talk  
30 about these alternatives and flesh them out, and possibly even  
31 pick a preferred, and that usually spurs discussion, then we're  
32 not going to have what we need in April, because we sat around  
33 and didn't say anything, because we didn't want to talk about  
34 it, because it's unpleasant.

35  
36 I am hoping that we will have discussion on these alternatives  
37 today, and maybe somebody could even float a motion to pick a  
38 preferred, and maybe that would spur some discussion, and we can  
39 make sure, at that point, that we have everything that we need  
40 that we want to look at, and that's all.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Kevin.

43  
44 **MR. ANSON:** Unless I missed what Dr. Simmons was saying, my ears  
45 were piqued by our sage Dr. Crabtree trying to look ahead in the  
46 crystal ball and see about the timing of this, and my preference  
47 would be that there's minimal amounts of pain, at least in  
48 Alabama, for the private recreational angler for next season.

1  
2 I am not prepared to make a motion on any of the action items in  
3 the current document, and certainly I will participate in  
4 discussion, but it sounded like Dr. Simmons and Dr. Crabtree  
5 intimated that we might want to start looking at giving staff  
6 some direction on a framework action relative to the increase,  
7 the perceived increase, that we will receive from the interim  
8 analysis.

9  
10 We might want to do that today, so that, in January, we can at  
11 least have some semblance of the document, and I am thinking  
12 that, if this were to occur, the timeline would be that we could  
13 have the increases set and in place for use sometime next year,  
14 and it may not be during the summer, the peak summertime, but  
15 certainly any increase, from Alabama's perspective, facing the  
16 calibrations as they are currently, would be welcome, unless I  
17 didn't hear that correctly, and Dr. Crabtree or Dr. Simmons  
18 could chime in, but that's what I think I heard.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think you heard right, Kevin, but I will let  
21 Carrie or Roy jump in if they think you misconstrued something.

22  
23 **DR. CRABTREE:** No, I think that's fair enough, Kevin, and I  
24 think maybe the Center could give you some direction on the  
25 magnitude of change to be expected. I mean, if it gets to the  
26 SSC, and, depending on issues with respect to the reference  
27 point and all, and it's just hard to guess how big of a change  
28 it would be.

29  
30 If you can vote this up in April sometime, and submit it to the  
31 agency, they would have to go through a proposed and final rule  
32 during the summer, and so you would be -- It would be a rush,  
33 probably, to get it done much before July or August, and it's  
34 just hard to predict how things would be moving at that time,  
35 but the biggest issue seems to be are you going to go with some  
36 across-the-board kind of way of dealing with the calibration  
37 issue, because, when you look at it -- I mean, if there are more  
38 fish coming, that makes life easier for everybody, but the fact  
39 is we have exceeded the recreational quota now for a number of  
40 years in a row, and so we're going to have to do some type of  
41 buffer, or through these calibrations, but you're going to have  
42 to ensure that you aren't exceeding the recreational quotas in  
43 the future, because that's just going to lead you to trouble,  
44 because it violates the statute.

45  
46 The other thing to think about is you're going to be -- If you  
47 raise the quotas, you're going to be increasing these already  
48 high exploitation rates over these artificial reefs, and, at

1 some point, folks are going to start seeing the catch rates go  
2 down, and surely those high exploitation rates are going to have  
3 an impact, and so, somewhere along the line, you're going to  
4 have to try to find that balance in where you want the quotas  
5 and where you want the seasons, but I just think, to the extent  
6 you can come to some sense of where everybody is on how to  
7 approach the calibration issue, that will help staff with some  
8 guidance as to how to structure the document.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Carrie, did you want to jump in?

11  
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just was  
13 going to respond to Mr. Anson, and that's exactly correct. We  
14 have very little time, is my understanding, from the time the  
15 Science Center can work with Dr. Stunz and his team to get all  
16 the information into the projections and whatever type of  
17 assessment with the interim analysis that's done in late March,  
18 is when they're estimating they can finish that, based on the  
19 timing of receiving the data, to almost right before our April  
20 council meeting, and it's going to be very difficult for staff  
21 to turn that around quickly, and so, the more information and  
22 feedback we can get now from the council, the better. Thank  
23 you.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Next, I have General  
26 Spraggins.

27  
28 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a quick  
29 thought. You were talking about the calibration, and Dr.  
30 Crabtree keeps talking about what we need to do, and my question  
31 is how can we do a calibration on something when we already know  
32 that a state like Mississippi -- MRIP does not really work, and  
33 it is not something that would give equal representation of what  
34 happens in the State of Mississippi.

35  
36 Also, probably in the State of Alabama, because of the numbers  
37 and the small states, and I think we've all looked at it  
38 numerous times, to talk about how MRIP does not follow --  
39 Basically, it's not a great example of how to grade a state like  
40 Mississippi or Alabama, and so my question is how do we get  
41 that?

42  
43 How do we get some kind of study, or how do we get something to  
44 the point that says how would you grade a small state like  
45 Mississippi? How would you do that, because we all know that  
46 that's not the correct way to do it, as we're talking today, and  
47 I would just -- Before we try to do anything about moving on a  
48 calibration issue, I still think that we need to look at it very

1 strongly, and I thank you for your time, Madam Chair.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Next, I have Phil Dyskow.

4

5 **MR. PHIL DYSKOW:** Thank you, Madam Chair. As a non-technical  
6 person, looking at the options in front of us, it seems to me  
7 that we have two options. One would be for the five states to  
8 agree to a calibration methodology, and we don't seem to be  
9 making any progress there at all, for many good reasons, and the  
10 second alternative, which nobody seems to want, would simply be  
11 to install a buffer that would work towards preventing  
12 overfishing.

13

14 I don't see any alternatives to those two, and so my question  
15 is, is there a likelihood of the five states working together on  
16 a calibration methodology, or are we going to be forced to just  
17 put a buffer in place, and the number that Roy keeps bringing up  
18 is 20 percent, and so are there other options, or am I just not  
19 understanding this?

20

21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Well, Phil, I think, at least as the document  
22 is laid out now, those are the only options we have on the  
23 table, but, if people have other options in mind, this meeting  
24 would be a good time to get those on the table, so that we could  
25 have those analyzed. Susan.

26

27 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am kind of there with  
28 Phil, and one of the questions that I want to ask, and this kind  
29 of goes back to what Roy was just talking about, is, when I  
30 think of calibration, I think about it equal across-the-board,  
31 and, the way it stands now, with Alternative 2 in this document  
32 -- As I recall, when the SSC made the motion, it was we're going  
33 to do it this way for this state and this way for this state,  
34 and every state was different.

35

36 To me, that's not calibrating. To me, that's trying to get to a  
37 number to make it the least painful as possible, and so I don't  
38 know how -- Maybe somebody can help me get a better  
39 understanding of what it is we're trying to -- I mean, I know  
40 what we're trying to do, but it would seem to me that it would  
41 be the same methodology across-the-board.

42

43 The second thing is, is this something that we're going to have  
44 to do on an annual basis? I mean, I understand the calibrations  
45 will have to be done on an annual basis, and so I'm hopeful  
46 that, once we reach an agreement on calibrations, it will just  
47 be kind of automatic that it calibrates to this each year, but  
48 maybe I am being too simple in my mind. If someone could give

1 me a little more explanation, I would appreciate it.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I'm going to go to Roy. He's next in line, and  
4 I think at least one of your questions was to him. Roy, if you  
5 could speak to that and bring up whatever your points were.

6  
7 **DR. CRABTREE:** Well, I certainly don't know that you need to do  
8 it every year, but there's been a lot of discussions about what  
9 General Spraggins brought up, is what's the best way to do it,  
10 and we've had discussions about trying to figure out some way to  
11 ground-truth the recreational surveys, and so, you know, it's  
12 possible, over a period of a few years, that there's some really  
13 groundbreaking work done there that will shed a lot of light on  
14 what all this means, and, in that case, you might come back to  
15 it.

16  
17 It is going to gradually -- As these surveys run side-by-side  
18 over time, you're going to get more and more information on the  
19 performance of the various state surveys and the MRIP survey,  
20 and so I would think you would want to revisit the issue  
21 periodically, but, I mean, I think the way Phil kind of laid it  
22 out is -- It is sort of you put in place some type of a buffer  
23 or you calibrate to each state's individual currency, which will  
24 hit some states much differently than others.

25  
26 If you think back with Amendment 50, when we developed all this  
27 and went down the path of state surveys, I know we had a lot of  
28 discussions about the fact that we were interjecting a great  
29 deal of uncertainty into the catch estimates, because we've got  
30 all these different methodologies, and it's not clear how they  
31 relate to each other or relate to the quotas that we have, and  
32 the price of interjecting a lot of uncertainty into things is  
33 the need for buffers.

34  
35 In putting Amendment 50 together, we sort of stripped all the  
36 buffers out of these things, and we probably shouldn't have done  
37 that until we better understood how to piece it all back  
38 together.

39  
40 Now, I look at this as we've had a remarkable turn of fate  
41 though, and it looks like there's a lot more red snapper out  
42 there than we thought, and so it may be possible that we can put  
43 a buffer in place and deal with all of this and there's still  
44 more fish, and I don't know, but it's certainly going to be less  
45 painful than it otherwise probably would have, but, at this  
46 point, I -- I mean, if you would have asked me six to eight  
47 months ago, I would have said, well, you probably need to look  
48 at reallocating among the states a little bit, but I think

1 everybody agrees, at this point, that we probably don't have  
2 time to do that, and I think you would have to do a plan  
3 amendment to do that.

4  
5 I think it really comes down to are you going to spread the pain  
6 across and put a buffer in place that essentially absorbs the  
7 scientific uncertainty that exists because we haven't resolved  
8 how all of these state surveys fit together, and I understand  
9 Joe's desire to get to the bottom of that more, but I have a  
10 feeling that's going to take work, and it's probably going to  
11 take a couple of years, and I think you're going to want to  
12 adjust these quotas, and you're going to want to do it as  
13 quickly as you can, but, in order to do that, you're going to  
14 have to be able to demonstrate how you've brought everything  
15 into compliance with the statute.

16  
17 You're just going to have to make some calls about do you want  
18 to do it, but, at this point, it seems to me that the only two  
19 obvious ones are implement the calibration ratios that were  
20 worked out in the state workshops and under the SSC that we  
21 have, or put in place an across-the-board buffer that can absorb  
22 the uncertainty and ensure that you're able to stay below the  
23 overall recreational quota in the future.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Robin.

26  
27 **MR. RIECHERS:** Thank you, Martha, and I would echo what Roy said  
28 regarding the annual basis of this, Susan, and I thought about  
29 that as well, and I would not think that you're going to have to  
30 do it annually.

31  
32 I would think, at some point in time, you will come to some  
33 conclusion that this survey routinely is under the MRIP survey  
34 by X percent, if there is a fairly consistent approach there,  
35 but I would also suggest, just in this conversation, that  
36 there's been some conversation that a buffer, while maybe the  
37 easiest decision now, and certainly when we understand what the  
38 interim analysis does for the entire fishery across the Gulf,  
39 and we also have to understand that buffer, in and of itself,  
40 also brings in some reallocation issues with it, assuming you  
41 take a one-size-fits-all approach across that, or you take it  
42 off the top before it goes to the states.

43  
44 The other part to that is, you know, if we start thinking about  
45 Alternative 3, there is other implications to that, including  
46 Amendment 40 and Amendment 50 and the other implications that  
47 dealt with those landings histories that those various  
48 percentages were built on.

1  
2 Now, another option may be an option that says we're kind of  
3 starting anew with what we believe may be different landings  
4 systems, because, Roy, you talked about the uncertainty, and not  
5 only was there uncertainty between the different landings  
6 systems as they were, but we have added additional uncertainty  
7 with new landings systems, and so it is a complex problem.

8  
9 I do believe the new interim analysis is going to help sort  
10 through this, and certainly, as you suggested, Roy, probably  
11 reduce some of that pain, but I'm a little bit like Kevin and  
12 General Spraggins at this point, is trying to know where to go,  
13 at this point, without us understanding the interim analysis  
14 just a little bit better, kind of makes it difficult, but that's  
15 where I will stop at this moment, and we'll see what other folks  
16 have to say.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Robin. Clay.

19  
20 **DR. PORCH:** Thanks. Most of what I was going to say has already  
21 been said by Roy and Robin, and I would just emphasize, for Ms.  
22 Boggs, the reason why we have to have different conversion rates  
23 for the different states is because they are all using very  
24 different approaches, and likely, if you applied the different  
25 methods from each state in each location, you would have  
26 multiple different estimates, and so that's why we're having to  
27 have state-specific conversion factors.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thank you, Clay. Leann.

30  
31 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you. A couple of things, as far as feedback  
32 for staff. The title of the document, and how it's used  
33 throughout the document, we use the word "calibration", and I've  
34 always had a little heartache with calling this a calibration.  
35 To me, when you calibrate something, like you calibrate a set of  
36 scales that you weigh things on, you are making sure that it  
37 reads true, that it's accurate, right, and this -- We're not  
38 calibrating to determine if Mississippi's data collection system  
39 is more accurate than old MRIP, but all we're doing is applying  
40 a conversion factor.

41  
42 To me, it shouldn't be called calibration, and it should be  
43 called conversion. It's a conversion factor, just like the way  
44 you convert from dollars to euros. It's an exchange rate, and  
45 it's a conversion factor. That was one thing that I wanted to  
46 throw out there for discussion.

47  
48 Then a question, as far as how this document will evolve, and so

1 we've talked about we'll have this action item for the  
2 conversion, or the overall share cut off the top for everybody,  
3 and then we're going to have to add an action item to institute  
4 the new ABC and ACLs, and will we also possibly have to add an  
5 action item to this document -- If the SSC gets into this  
6 discussion about productivity and the SPR really probably  
7 shouldn't have been -- What is it, 26, and it might should be  
8 somewhere on the order of something like Clay had mentioned  
9 earlier, that some of the literature suggested a slightly higher  
10 -- Are we going to have an action in there to change that as  
11 well, before we can implement all of this?

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** That's a good question, and I, I guess, would  
14 ask staff if that's something that we could even do in a  
15 framework, or if that requires a full amendment to change the  
16 SPR that we're using, and I don't know off the top of my head.

17  
18 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** No, that's not something we could do as  
19 part of a framework. It would need to be a plan amendment.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Anything else, Leann?

22  
23 **MS. BOSARGE:** As a follow-up, if the SPR is something we can't  
24 do as a framework, and it has to be a plan amendment, and so  
25 chicken and egg, and which one has to come first for us to  
26 implement? Can we go ahead and implement new ABCs and ACLs  
27 based off of an SPR that doesn't match what we have on the  
28 books?

29  
30 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, we can. We just did that, for example,  
31 with Amendment 51 for gray snapper, where we modified the  
32 reference points and the ACLs in a single document.

33  
34 **MS. BOSARGE:** But I thought you were just saying they won't be  
35 in a single document. I'm getting confused. I think I  
36 understood that we would have this document that could move  
37 quickly and would have the new catch limits and this action that  
38 we have here, and then we would have a separate document with  
39 this SPR change, and is that what you're saying, or no?

40  
41 **DR. FROESCHKE:** No, and I guess what I'm saying is we would roll  
42 the current document that we have on the screen into a -- It  
43 would become a plan amendment, and one action would be to change  
44 the reference point, and then the following action would be what  
45 we have here on the screen now.

46  
47 **MS. BOSARGE:** One more follow-up, Madam Chair.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead.  
2  
3 **MS. BOSARGE:** When it becomes a plan amendment, does that slow  
4 this process down any further?  
5  
6 **DR. FROESCHKE:** It's likely to slow it down some, but I couldn't  
7 speculate on how much.  
8  
9 **MS. BOSARGE:** One more follow-up, Madam Chair. The amendment,  
10 as it stands right now, do we have to send this out for webinar  
11 public hearings? If so, at what point are we planning to do  
12 that, and at what evolution in this document -- How far along  
13 does this document need to be when we send it to public  
14 hearings, if we have to do that?  
15  
16 **MR. RINDONE:** As a framework action, the council meeting serves  
17 as the public hearing. If it becomes a plan amendment, then we  
18 would have a more formal setup for having a public hearing for  
19 the public.  
20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Ryan. Carrie, did you have more to  
22 add?  
23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I just had a question, and maybe  
25 it's for Mara. If the council were to take final action on the  
26 SDC document, either at this meeting or in January, will you  
27 have, for the MSY, an MSY proxy action, and you have that  
28 automated process, that Alternative 5 process in there, and it  
29 seems to me that could speed it up, at least slightly, and I  
30 don't know if she has any feedback on that, and that would still  
31 have to go to the SSC and council, but I do think it would speed  
32 it up slightly.  
33  
34 **MS. LEVY:** Do you want me to respond?  
35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.  
37  
38 **MS. LEVY:** Well, I mean, if you're going -- Regardless of  
39 whether you have that Alternative 5 in the status determination  
40 criteria amendment or not, if you change this from a framework  
41 action to a plan amendment, it's going to slow it down. You're  
42 going to have to do the sixty-day comment on the NOA, and you're  
43 going to have some components of this document that you don't  
44 necessarily need if it's just a framework action.  
45  
46 I mean, I think my suggestion would be to deal with the  
47 calibration and the potential change in catch levels through a  
48 framework action and then deal with status determination

1 criteria for red snapper and other things that might come out of  
2 an assessment in a separate document.

3  
4 I don't know if Clay can speak to this, but, I mean, you're  
5 going to have a research track assessment after this, and so I  
6 don't know if the interim assessment, or analysis, is even going  
7 to address the MSY proxy issue.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Clay.

10  
11 **DR. PORCH:** No, the interim analysis would not attempt to  
12 address the MSY proxy issue. I think the way it would have to  
13 be tackled is the SSC might suggest that the ABC be based on a  
14 somewhat different metric, and I think there's precedent for  
15 that. For instance, in many cases, they recommended basing the  
16 ABC on something like 75 percent of the FMSY proxy, and so they  
17 may elect to go along those lines, and I don't think that would  
18 necessarily require a plan amendment, but someone can correct me  
19 if I'm wrong.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Clay. It's 3:30, and we're  
22 doing okay, and I don't want to cut this conversation off, but I  
23 do want to take a break, because I suspect there are probably a  
24 few of us that need one, and so, Tom, do you want to take a ten-  
25 minute break, or fifteen minutes? What is your pleasure here,  
26 given that we're probably a little bit behind still?

27  
28 **DR. FRAZER:** It's important discussion, and let's go ahead and  
29 take a ten-minute break, and we'll try to wrap it up soon  
30 thereafter, and so it's 3:30. We'll come back at around 3:40 or  
31 so, and I will let you kind of run the meeting how you want to,  
32 for sure, but we'll try to keep it constrained, okay?

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sounds good. See everybody at 3:40.

35  
36 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Let's go ahead and get started. Roy.

39  
40 **DR. CRABTREE:** If you let this become a plan amendment, it will  
41 absolutely take longer, and you're not going to want that, and  
42 so I would not engage in trying to change the reference points  
43 or allocations or things like that in this amendment.

44  
45 What I would though do is I would deal with the calibration  
46 issue, and then I would anticipate, based on the SSC discussion,  
47 what they may say about the reference point, and then I would  
48 set the catch levels with the appropriate amount of conservatism

1 in it, so that, if the reference point does go to something more  
2 conservative, you have stayed within it.

3  
4 I suspect that the SSC may very likely hinge their ABC advice on  
5 what they think is the appropriate reference point anyway, but  
6 remember that you can always set the catch levels below, and you  
7 just can't go over, and so that would be my advice to you.

8  
9 Then come back in with a plan amendment, and I don't know what  
10 the timing of that exactly would be, and you're going to have a  
11 benchmark assessment and other things, and then, in that plan  
12 amendment, you can readdress the reference point issue.

13  
14 If you want to re-look at allocations, or if you want to re-look  
15 at how quota increases in the IFQ and various other things are  
16 distributed, then that would be the place to do it, but I think,  
17 in this particular document, it will slow it down more than  
18 you're going to want if you open all of those particular issues,  
19 and I think there are other ways you could deal with it.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Roy. I'm going to go to General  
22 Spraggins.

23  
24 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A couple of  
25 questions. Number one, if you look at the Alternative 2 or  
26 Alternative 3, either one of those, is that the numbers that we  
27 would be looking at that we would start new with 2021 numbers at  
28 that point, or is there a payback? If there's a payback, what  
29 is the formula for the payback? Is it going to go back to 2018  
30 or 2019, or what is the numbers? Is there some way that we can  
31 come with an answer to it, and that's the first question, and I  
32 don't know if Roy has that answer or not, and I will pause for a  
33 second.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think I know the answer to at least part of  
36 it, but, Roy, chime in. I think Alternative 2, the options in  
37 there -- My understanding is that those probably wouldn't change  
38 based on this interim assessment, but Alternative 3 might. Roy,  
39 do you want to add more to that, or Clay?

40  
41 **DR. CRABTREE:** Well, if I'm looking at it, I mean, Alternative 2  
42 just applies to various conversion ratios, and I don't  
43 anticipate that they will change in the amount of time we're  
44 talking about, and I don't think that the across-the-board will  
45 change in Alternative 3.

46  
47 The payback is based on if a state exceeds its ACL and it needs  
48 to pay it back the following year, and you probably ought to

1 talk about though what happens if you're resetting everybody's  
2 quota and all of that is factored into it, and then does that  
3 mean that everybody starts fresh with a new state quota or not,  
4 and I don't know how clearly that's spelled out in the  
5 regulations, but, typically, when you figure if a state was over  
6 or under, you're taking the state's estimated landings, using  
7 the state survey, and figuring off of that, and that's what we  
8 did with the other states in the past. The payback is not the  
9 same thing as the conversions, and so don't let those get mushed  
10 together, because they're different things.

11  
12 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Okay. The other thing is, under Alternative  
13 3, the number of 23 percent, and I know you've come up with  
14 that, Roy, somehow, and I'm sure that you put a lot of effort  
15 into it, to make it the number that you thought was correct, but  
16 my question there is, because we have just been given a brief of  
17 the Great Red Snapper Count that shows at least about a triple  
18 amount of stock of what we had originally thought was in the  
19 Gulf of Mexico, would it be a possibility that, if we were  
20 looking at something to be able to help work this situation out,  
21 to lower that 23 percent down to maybe 10 percent, and say that  
22 each state would take a 10 percent reduction until we got the  
23 new Great Red Snapper Count allocations put in, and which we  
24 feel will take care of all the issues that we have prior anyway,  
25 and is that a possibility to look at? Is that something that's  
26 even something that we can look at at this point?

27  
28 **DR. CRABTREE:** If I could, Martha, I mean, I'm looking, Joe, at  
29 -- This is all part-and-parcel of it, and you're going to  
30 implement the Great Red Snapper Count new catch levels at the  
31 same time you implement the calibrations, and so, if the quota  
32 goes up by -- Let's just say, by chance, the quota went up by 23  
33 percent, then, when you reduce the buffer of 23 percent,  
34 everybody is even with where they would have been to begin with.  
35 If the quota goes up by -- If the quota doubles, then you would  
36 back off 23 percent, and everybody would have more fish. Now, I  
37 don't know how that's going to play out, but I'm looking that  
38 you're going to implement all of this and the new catch levels  
39 simultaneously.

40  
41 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Roy, when you say implement it  
42 simultaneously, what you're asking right now, I think, is --  
43 Maybe I'm out in left field, but is it to try to do something to  
44 do an alternative, either 2 or 3, and use that as our data for  
45 2021, as the amount of catch that we would have available for  
46 each state, but yet we would have an adjustment to it, once the  
47 Great Red Snapper Count comes through, but, if that doesn't come  
48 through in time, and which it doesn't seem like it's moving

1 extremely fast -- If that does not happen, then we're stuck  
2 with, as a state, of sitting here taking a 23 percent reduction,  
3 or whatever we're looking at, and, when we realize, and knowing,  
4 from our study through the Great Red Snapper Count and other  
5 issues, that we have that allocation there, and that we were not  
6 really overfished, that this would just be something that they  
7 were working off of, off of old data, and not new data. Am I  
8 out in left field here, or is it -- I am trying to figure this  
9 out.

10  
11 **DR. CRABTREE:** I am assuming, Joe, that you will get a new ABC,  
12 in the spring at some point, and then you will add another  
13 action to this amendment that adjusts the catch levels, taking  
14 into account the Great Red Snapper Count, and you would do all  
15 of this at once, and it will all be implemented at one time in  
16 one rulemaking.

17  
18 Now, if something gets delayed, and something gets off-kilter  
19 somehow, and that doesn't happen, then you guys are going to  
20 have to sort it out, and I think you have to deal with the  
21 calibration, under any circumstance, to keep this program going,  
22 but recall that we talked about, at the last council, the  
23 council's desire to implement the calibration -- The solution  
24 you come up with for the calibration and the new catch levels  
25 simultaneously, and so I'm assuming that that's what you're  
26 going to be able to do.

27  
28 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Okay. If that's the case -- I mean,  
29 obviously, and I don't understand why we would not wait until we  
30 had the Great Red Snapper Count in hand, to be able to make this  
31 allocation change, whichever way it goes, up or down, and we,  
32 obviously, know that, even if we use the calibration part, and,  
33 as it worked out, even though Mississippi obviously is not  
34 getting a fair deal with that, we could still -- It would give  
35 us some numbers to work with, and I just really don't  
36 understand.

37  
38 I know that we're sitting here with the thought that we  
39 understand that doing the calibration part of it -- That,  
40 obviously, the numbers are different than what we had originally  
41 thought, but we also know that we're looking at a possible  
42 triple amount of fish that, if we had used the calibration off  
43 of that fish, that amount of fish, it would have been entirely  
44 different, and I'm just having a hard time trying to decide why  
45 we would ever implement something that would reduce everything  
46 so low and then turn around and try to get it back to where it  
47 was, or even to equal where it's at.

48

1 I don't want to keep beating around the bush, and my personal  
2 opinion is I think we need to look at something entirely  
3 different than these two, because I think both of them are so  
4 far out of whack, as far as Mississippi, and I will be quiet  
5 with that, Madam Chair, and sorry for all the trouble.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** No trouble at all. It's good to get all this  
8 stuff out on the table. Roy, is your hand still up?

9  
10 **DR. CRABTREE:** No.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Leann.

13  
14 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I actually enjoyed  
15 General Spraggins' comments. I think he's trying to think  
16 outside the box and throw out ideas, and albeit maybe that one  
17 didn't stick, but I think that's -- If we don't start getting  
18 into these discussions, we are not going to have what we need  
19 when the time comes. We will not have fleshed this out the way  
20 that we need to.

21  
22 In an effort to spur the discussion, and we usually get into  
23 these deep discussions when we have to defend the position that  
24 we like or don't like, and so I'm going to try and float a  
25 motion. **I would like, in Action 1, to make Alternative 3 the**  
26 **preferred alternative.** If I can get a second, I will give you  
27 some rationale, and then we can start to have some discussion on  
28 why we think that is or is not the best course of action and  
29 maybe other things that we might like to see as a course of  
30 action.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. I'm going to let that go up on the  
33 board, and then we are going to need a second, but we'll get it  
34 on the board first. Okay. We've got a motion on the board. In  
35 Action 1, to make Alternative 3 the preferred. Alternative 3,  
36 for those following at home, is the buffer alternative. Is  
37 there a second to this motion?

38  
39 **DR. CRABTREE:** I will second for discussion.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. We've got a second. Discussion.  
42 Go ahead, Leann.

43  
44 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Alternative 1, status  
45 quo, we can't go that way. We have to do something, right, and  
46 so that leaves us Alternatives 2 and 3. Alternative 2 is the  
47 conversion alternative, where we're simply converting from MRIP  
48 to the state surveys.

1  
2 I listened to a lot of those discussions. Personally, I don't  
3 feel that we fleshed that out all the way. I think there are  
4 some other options there. Unfortunately, we don't have the time  
5 to pursue them in this document, it seems like, and I'm worried,  
6 if we go that route, we're going to set the precedent that, oh  
7 no, this is the conversion, and it's going to be an uphill  
8 battle to change those individual state conversions from there  
9 forward.

10  
11 For that reason, I'm left with Alternative 3 as the essentially  
12 lesser of the evils, although I'm still open-minded about this,  
13 and I can be convinced otherwise, and that's where all of the  
14 states have to take a haircut straight across the top. I would  
15 like to hear discussion, and not discussion about why we  
16 shouldn't choose this today and why we should put this off until  
17 we have the Great Red Snapper Count numbers, but more why we  
18 think this is a better alternative or worse alternative than  
19 Alternative 2.

20  
21 Maybe, if somebody has an idea about some hybrid alternative, or  
22 something of that nature, let's get that out on the table now.  
23 I want it all in the document sooner rather than later, and I  
24 don't want to be doing this at the last minute.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Kevin, you were already on the  
27 list. Do you want to weigh-in on this, or do you want to wait  
28 until after we deal with this motion?

29  
30 **MR. ANSON:** I had a separate topic.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. John Sanchez.

33  
34 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. For reasons that I have  
35 already stated, I would not be in favor of this motion, and,  
36 again, it's because there are states that their calibrations  
37 weren't as off as other states, and this 23 across-the-board  
38 buffer, giving everyone an equal haircut, disproportionately  
39 would impact states that did not have the same calibration woes  
40 that other states had.

41  
42 I believe, more appropriately, Alternative 2 in Action 1 would  
43 be fairer, in the sense that, as we're all waiting for the  
44 benefits of the Great Red Snapper Count to be able to weigh-in  
45 on this, that would at least more directly affect states in a  
46 more appropriate manner. I mean, if we weren't in a calibration  
47 issue, then I don't see why you should be disproportionately  
48 impacted, just because it seems like the right thing to do.

1  
2 I know this is a very difficult decision to make for everybody,  
3 and we want to help all of our neighboring friends and  
4 neighboring states, but it just doesn't seem fair to proceed in  
5 this manner, and so I'm not going to be in favor of this. Thank  
6 you.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, John. I know we had more people on the  
9 list, but I can't see it right now. Thank you. Susan Boggs.

10  
11 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm really torn with this.  
12 To me, the answer is somewhere in between Alternative 2 and  
13 Alternative 3. It comes back to, and I'm going to use Leann's  
14 word, this conversion, and I just -- We're converting each state  
15 in a different manner, and, if the states are okay with the  
16 conversion as it is in Alternative 2, then maybe we look at  
17 that, but I don't think the states are okay with that.

18  
19 I think we're going to get a bump in quota, and so maybe  
20 Alternative 2 would be fine. If you get the bump -- I mean,  
21 there's so many unknowns in this decision that we're about to  
22 make, and I am just going to state it as I always have. I mean,  
23 I am going to look in favor of the charter fleet, and, at the  
24 same time, I don't want to hurt the recreational sector, if  
25 there's fish out there to be caught, but I don't think I can  
26 support this motion.

27  
28 I am just really torn with this, and I think, yes, Alternative 3  
29 is probably the lesser of the evils, and it's the least haircut,  
30 I guess you could say, but I am just not ready to make a  
31 decision on this, because I think the answer lies somewhere  
32 between Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, and, unfortunately, I  
33 don't have a good answer for that. Thank you.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Susan. General Spraggins.

36  
37 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I would like to propose an amendment to this  
38 motion, if it would be okay with Leann, and to maybe change that  
39 to 10 percent, rather than 23 percent, as far as the reduction.

40  
41 **MS. BOSARGE:** Madam Chair, do you want me to respond to that?

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.

44  
45 **MS. BOSARGE:** I am not opposed to having -- What that sounds  
46 like, to me, General Spraggins, is to add a new alternative to  
47 the document that would have the 10 percent in it, and I'm not  
48 opposed to somebody throwing out that kind of a motion. Like I

1 said, I liked your comments earlier.  
2  
3 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I guess my question would be, rather than  
4 amend Alternative 3, would we need to make another alternative,  
5 Madam Chair?  
6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think so, and it sounds like Leann is not  
8 wanting to take -- I guess she is suggesting another action, and  
9 so, yes, that would be a separate motion to add, I guess, a new  
10 action or sub-action or whatever for a 10 percent buffer.  
11  
12 **MR. RINDONE:** Madam Chair, that would be a substitute motion for  
13 a new alternative. That would be the order of operations, given  
14 the motion on the board.  
15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Could you do a substitute to add a new  
17 alternative when the original motion is to make it a preferred?  
18  
19 **MS. LEVY:** No. You've got to dispense with this motion.  
20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. That's what I was thinking. Okay. We  
22 need to deal with this first.  
23  
24 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** We deal with this before we can even bring  
25 another motion? Okay. Thank you.  
26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes. Okay. Dr. Crabtree.  
28  
29 **DR. CRABTREE:** The problem, Joe, that I see with 10 percent is  
30 it's not sufficient to account for the uncertainties of the  
31 state surveys. The 23 percent is calculated based on the  
32 expected catches and compensating for the differences in the  
33 surveys, and I don't think there's any basis like that for 10  
34 percent, and so, if you did put in a 10 percent buffer, I think  
35 you would still be stuck with the fact that you're not in  
36 compliance with what we committed to do when we put in place  
37 Amendment 50, and I don't think you would have a sufficient  
38 cushion between the recreational quotas and the state  
39 allocations to make a convincing argument that you are complying  
40 with the statute requirements. Then that's going to leave NMFS  
41 with some difficulties in trying to implement a quota, and so I  
42 get where you're coming from, but I don't think that gets you  
43 where you need to be.  
44  
45 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Madam Chair, can I answer to that?  
46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.  
48

1 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Okay, but the question I've got, Dr.  
2 Crabtree, is I understand that, but, you know, if you go to  
3 Amendment 50, Amendment 50 says that, as a state -- It was  
4 giving the right to each state to look at their own and to  
5 manage their own, according to what was given, and, if that's  
6 the case, then we would go back to the no action, because that's  
7 where we're at with Amendment 50. The Amendment 50 signed off -  
8 - The Secretary of Commerce gave the states the right to manage  
9 it by their program.

10  
11 I guess I am missing something here, sir, and I'm not trying to  
12 be argumentative with you or anything else, but my question is  
13 we obviously know -- We know very much that there is at least a  
14 double, to possible triple, amount of fish, and we know that the  
15 numbers are going to change, and it really just doesn't make  
16 sense to me why, if we show --

17  
18 If it's a question of worrying about the lawsuit that you all  
19 are worried about, or whatever, and, if that's the question,  
20 then let's make a good-faith effort and say that we will use a  
21 smaller number, but yet we're trying to get to that point, and  
22 we know we're going to get to that point probably in the spring  
23 anyway, and it's really not going to affect anything, because  
24 nobody is going to open the season prior to that, and is that  
25 correct?

26  
27 **DR. CRABTREE:** Well, I don't -- Joe, in the final rule for  
28 Amendment 50, we discussed the need to calibrate the state  
29 surveys. We didn't know how to do it then, and we didn't have  
30 the calibration ratios, but, in the Federal Register notice, in  
31 the response to comments that we discussed at the council  
32 meeting, we essentially said that this needs to be done, and we  
33 need to do it as quickly as we're able to, once we get the  
34 needed information on the calibrations.

35  
36 The fact of the matter is, when we put in place the regulations,  
37 we essentially said we're going to do this, and it's not about a  
38 lawsuit, and there isn't a lawsuit at this point, but it's about  
39 what we committed that we would do when we had the information  
40 to do so.

41  
42 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** But, sir, also, we've already agreed, I  
43 think yourself and others, that the calibration process is not  
44 correct for at least two out of the five states. How do we use  
45 a calibration process that's not correct, and we know it's not  
46 correct, and why do you punish a state that is as small as us  
47 especially, and which we only get 3.55 percent of the whole  
48 total catch, and it's not like we're actually depleting the --

1 If we caught our 3.55 percent, that would be a fraction of what  
2 everybody else catches, except for maybe Texas, and so I don't  
3 understand why that we are so concerned about this, if that's  
4 the case about the calibration part of it, when we know that it  
5 does not meet the criteria and should not be used in a state  
6 like Mississippi, and I'm sorry for taking up everybody's time.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I am going to go to John Sanchez next.

9

10 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Part of the reason too  
11 why I can't support Alternative 3 is it doesn't bring us any  
12 closer to arriving at the common currency that has been the head  
13 of the snake, and we have been talking about it for years now,  
14 and we're really no closer to getting there, and so whatever  
15 percentages, whether it's across-the-board or not, it's going to  
16 be difficult for me to support something with not knowing that  
17 there is some common currency to be developed at the end of this  
18 exercise, so that we don't find ourselves revisiting this again  
19 and again and again in the future. Thank you.

20

21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, John. Dr. Stunz.

22

23 **DR. STUNZ:** Martha, I have a clarifying question that I think I  
24 need to help make the decision here, and I don't know if this is  
25 to Roy or Clay. Currently, in that private recreational sector,  
26 or, I guess, even including for-hire there, what buffers are we  
27 currently under before Alternative 3, should that be selected to  
28 go into place, and what buffers -- I mean, we already have some  
29 buffers, I think, Roy, but you made some comment earlier, which  
30 wasn't clear to me, about the state plans did away with the  
31 buffers, and I wasn't sure what you meant by that.

32

33 **DR. CRABTREE:** Well, if I could, I think that was part of the  
34 previous presentation that we saw, but, originally, we had --  
35 Gosh, I don't remember how many years back this was, but,  
36 anyway, I think it was in 2013, and we had litigation for  
37 exceeding the recreational quota, and we put in place a 20  
38 percent buffer on the recreational side.

39

40 Then, in Amendment 50, we essentially removed that, and we  
41 changed the buffer on the for-hire fishery I think to 9 percent,  
42 but didn't the presentation that we went through before this  
43 discussion go over the magnitudes of the buffers?

44

45 **DR. STUNZ:** I couldn't get it from that, and so that's kind of  
46 what is stemming my question, and maybe I just didn't understand  
47 Ryan's presentation well enough, but I wasn't sure how those  
48 buffers were built into that.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Ryan, are you on?  
3  
4 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, I'm here. This is no buffer between the ABC  
5 and the sum of the sector ACLs, and there is no buffer for the  
6 state ACLs, because they are not using an ACT, and so the sum of  
7 the state ACLs equals the private vessel ACL, and the private  
8 vessel and the for-hire ACLs combine to equal the recreational  
9 ACL, and then the recreational ACL and the commercial ACL  
10 combine to equal the stock ABC. The only buffers that exist in  
11 red snapper management are between the OFL and the ABC, which is  
12 about 2.581 percent, and then between the for-hire ACL and the  
13 for-hire ACT, which is 9 percent. That's it. There are no  
14 other buffers that are in use.  
15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Does that answer your question, Greg?  
17  
18 **DR. STUNZ:** Well, now I'm really confused, and maybe it's just  
19 me, and I can look back through the presentation, but what  
20 happened to the 20 percent buffer below the OFL? That went  
21 away? Sorry, but I'm just -- Sorry to be so difficult here, but  
22 I can't keep track of all this.  
23  
24 **MR. RINDONE:** Under Amendment 50, that 20 percent buffer between  
25 the private vessel ACL and the private vessel ACT was rendered  
26 moot. It's still in the codified regulations, but it's replaced  
27 with Amendment 50 by state management. The states have the  
28 ability to set an ACT below their state-specific ACLs, if they  
29 choose to do so. At present, none of the states are choosing to  
30 do that. They are managing to their state ACLs, and you can see  
31 those in pounds whole weight in the second column and as a  
32 percentage of the private vessel ACL in the right-most column,  
33 in Table 1.1.1 that's up on the screen now. That 20 percent,  
34 even though it's still in the regs, it's not in use, and inert,  
35 if you will.  
36  
37 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Ryan, maybe I can help here. If we were in the  
38 scenario where one of the states dropped out of state  
39 management, for whatever reason, and this was setting a season  
40 with whatever quota, that 20 percent would apply in that case,  
41 right? It's just kind of almost like a backup?  
42  
43 **MR. RINDONE:** My inclination is to say yes, but I would be  
44 deferring to Mara on that, because, in the absence of state  
45 management, the old regulation would then come into play.  
46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** That's what I'm thinking. Okay. I don't know  
48 if that helps, Greg.

1  
2 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes. Thank you, Martha.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Dale.

5  
6 **MR. DIAZ:** I am struggling with all this stuff. This is --  
7 We've got, really, no good decisions, to me, to move forward,  
8 and that's why I'm struggling with it so much. I do know,  
9 during the calibration meetings, some of the meetings where all  
10 that stuff was discussed, they recognized that there are issues  
11 in small states, and we are not going to have time to address  
12 those right now, and I think those issues are real, and I think  
13 Alabama and Mississippi could be penalized pretty severely for  
14 not having that work done.

15  
16 It's a timing issue, and I understand maybe why that work is not  
17 done, but, still, I think Alabama and Mississippi both feel like  
18 it's a fairness issue, too. I also know that, in Amendment 50,  
19 whenever we decided on the allocations that we were going to  
20 use, we all had a perception of reality, and I think we all  
21 voted for the current allocation based on our perception of  
22 reality at that time, which is not the reality that we're being  
23 shown. That's not the reality that this document shows.  
24 Anyway, it's a difficult decision, and I don't really like  
25 either option. Thank you, Madam Chair.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Dale. Kevin, is your hand up for the  
28 motion?

29  
30 **MR. ANSON:** It is. Dale summed it up pretty well in his last  
31 comment, his last sentence of his comment there, and I don't  
32 really like either option. Certainly John Sanchez brought up  
33 the issue of the fairness for the other states that happen to  
34 have data collection systems that match fairly closely to the  
35 federal system, whether it was old or current, but, going back  
36 to the reality comment, at the time, when we did 50, we did the  
37 EFP, and, from Alabama's perspective, when we were doing the --  
38 When we were gathering landings information from the private  
39 recs in Snapper Check, that -- We originally put in our request  
40 for pounds based on a management target similar to NOAA's of  
41 0.1, using our habitat-based assessment.

42  
43 We had an abundance issue off of Alabama, an abundance that was  
44 estimate, and we added up the commercial and the federal for-  
45 hire, and what we had left over we gave to the private recs, and  
46 it ended up being very close to that habitat-based assessment,  
47 and so, I mean, it's a bad spot that we're in, and we have to  
48 make a decision.

1  
2 Roy said we are currently not under threat of being sued, but  
3 the perception of a threat is very real, and it's just something  
4 that we have to go through in order to be compliant with  
5 Magnuson, and so those are my comments. Thank you, Madam Chair.  
6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Kevin. I don't see any more hands, and  
8 I think we've had some good discussion about the motion. I  
9 think it's time to vote on it. Let's try this. I think there's  
10 going to be opposition to this motion, and so I don't know if we  
11 need to just do a roll call, Carrie. Is that how we're doing  
12 this?  
13  
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, Madam Chair. In the past,  
15 that's what we've done. Whatever is easier.  
16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Let me just ask the question. Is  
18 there opposition to this motion?  
19  
20 **UNIDENTIFIED:** Yes.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Let's do a roll call vote.  
23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Mr. Schieble.  
25  
26 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** No.  
27  
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Boggs.  
29  
30 **MS. BOGGS:** No.  
31  
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Swindell.  
33  
34 **MR. SWINDELL:** No.  
35  
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.  
37  
38 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** No.  
39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.  
41  
42 **MR. ANSON:** Abstain.  
43  
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Diaz.  
45  
46 **MR. DIAZ:** No.  
47  
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.

1  
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** No.  
3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.  
5  
6 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** No.  
7  
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Crabtree.  
9  
10 **DR. CRABTREE:** Yes.  
11  
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.  
13  
14 **MR. TROY WILLIAMSON:** No.  
15  
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Shipp.  
17  
18 **DR. BOB SHIPP:** No.  
19  
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dyskow.  
21  
22 **MR. DYSKOW:** No.  
23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Bosarge.  
25  
26 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes.  
27  
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Guyas.  
29  
30 **MS. GUYAS:** No.  
31  
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Stunz.  
33  
34 **DR. STUNZ:** No.  
35  
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Riechers.  
37  
38 **MR. RIECHERS:** No.  
39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** It's two to thirteen with one  
41 **abstention. The motion fails.** Madam Chair.  
42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thank you. Let's circle back here  
44 for a minute. Kevin, we had your hand up for a separate issue.  
45  
46 **MR. ANSON:** It's been brought up a couple of times during this  
47 item of business, and that is that we should probably take some  
48 action to include, either in this document or in a new

1 framework, something relative to setting ourselves up to be able  
2 to process, if you will, or be able to make available whatever  
3 increase that is realized after the interim analysis is  
4 conducted and the SSC has reviewed before the ABC recommendation  
5 is provided and the catch advice is provided to us.

6  
7 I am not willing to make a motion just yet, but I just want to,  
8 I guess -- There's a couple of ways we can do it. Again, we can  
9 add to this document, and it would kind of tie in the two  
10 actions, if you will, but some people may not like that, and so  
11 I have just floated that out there, that I think something  
12 should be done relative to making sure that, in January, we have  
13 a draft document to review and give staff time, between now and  
14 then, to start putting text on pages and such, and then maybe,  
15 as was previously mentioned, I think from either Dr. Crabtree or  
16 Dr. Porch, that staff could possibly conduct with Science Center  
17 folks to kind of get a feel as to what range of alternatives  
18 would be appropriate to include in the draft document, or  
19 include in this as a separate action.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks for bringing that up. I think we did  
22 circle around that issue, and it sounded like maybe people  
23 wanted to add it to this document, and I don't know if it would  
24 be helpful to do that at this meeting, or I guess, as you  
25 suggested, we could do it in a separate document. I see Ryan's  
26 hand, and then I think Dale wants to weigh-in on this as well.  
27 Ryan.

28  
29 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just with respect to  
30 adding an action to adjust the ACL, we would typically wait  
31 until we have that advice from the SSC to be able to do that,  
32 since we won't know what the ABC recommendation will be from the  
33 interim analysis that the SSC is going to review. Also, the SSC  
34 isn't anticipated to have that interim analysis from the Science  
35 Center until later in the spring, and so that would not be by  
36 the January 2021 council meeting.

37  
38 The SSC should hear from the Science Center, during its January  
39 meeting, about the Science Center's planned approach for  
40 incorporating the Great Red Snapper Count into that interim  
41 analysis, but the completed interim analysis is not expected  
42 until later. Right now, we're looking at, I think, late March  
43 or early April, and I think early April is our current target to  
44 try to get it done before the April council meeting, and so just  
45 to give you guys a heads-up on what the timing actually looks  
46 like. Madam Chair.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Ryan. That's helpful. Dale.

1  
2 **MR. DIAZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If it's possible, I mean, I  
3 think adding that action to this document, even if it's later  
4 on, is the way to go. The current motion that we're operating  
5 under says that, if we move forward with this document, we will  
6 implement it simultaneously with the results of the interim  
7 analysis from the Great Red Snapper Count, and so I think it  
8 fits in this document well. Thank you.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Dale. I guess, just to jump in, my  
11 only concern, I guess, is, if adding it slows this down, or we  
12 end up on -- If we end up in a situation where whatever happens  
13 with conversions, or buffers or whatever, doesn't go into effect  
14 until, I guess, late next year, or even late summer next year,  
15 my only concern would be that states may have already set up  
16 seasons at that point, and they may not be operating, at least  
17 in the first part of the season, knowing what they're working  
18 with for the year.

19  
20 I would just kind of put that out there. I think it's important  
21 for us to remember that, after we're done with it at the  
22 council, then, ultimately, it will be on the states to set up  
23 whatever management they're going to set up for their anglers  
24 for the year, and so that's just some food for thought. Phil.

25  
26 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Obviously, at some point,  
27 we need to come up with a solution, and it doesn't seem like  
28 there is universal support for the 23 percent buffer, because  
29 some states have been identified as overfishing and some states  
30 haven't. Why does the buffer need to be applied universally  
31 across all five states?

32  
33 If some states have evidenced an inability to work successfully  
34 with their regulations within their allocation, and we're  
35 concerned about future actions that would also put them in an  
36 overfishing position, why can't we apply larger buffers for  
37 states that are having some difficulty fishing within their  
38 allocation and a much smaller buffer for states that haven't  
39 evidenced a difficulty in fishing within their allocation?

40  
41 I don't know who that should be addressed to, but I guess my  
42 question is does the allocation percentage have to be applied  
43 universally across all five states, because, if we do it that  
44 way, some states that aren't overfishing would be punished, and  
45 some states that are overfishing -- The number may not be big  
46 enough, particularly if we use the number that General Spraggins  
47 came up with. My question is do we have to apply the percent of  
48 the buffer universally across all five states? Thank you.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks. Does anybody want to answer that one?  
3

4 **MR. RINDONE:** Martha, I've got it.  
5

6 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks.  
7

8 **MR. RINDONE:** I guess, just to go in order, as far as the states  
9 needing to plan accordingly for 2021, the states do have the  
10 ability to employ the use of an annual catch target, at their  
11 discretion, when setting up their management for a given year,  
12 and so there's nothing to preclude a state from employing that  
13 state-specific annual catch target, as it sees fit, to make sure  
14 that it doesn't exceed its state-specific private angling annual  
15 catch limit.  
16

17 Now, directly to Mr. Dyskow's question, the simulations that  
18 were done by the Southeast Regional Office showed that a 23  
19 percent buffer across all states is likely to prevent an overage  
20 of the private angling ACL. If you were to take an approach  
21 commensurate with state-specific buffers, that is essentially  
22 tantamount to what is in Alternative 2 with the ratio  
23 adjustments. It would lead you to a not dissimilar result.  
24

25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Ryan. Robin.  
26

27 **MR. RIECHERS:** This is a small, nuanced question, but, Ryan, do  
28 you -- The timeline that you just outlined seemed a little bit  
29 different, or maybe it was what Clay meant by his statement, but  
30 I thought he made a statement earlier that he was going to  
31 provide some discussion to us about interim ABC advice in  
32 January, and, now, maybe it was the approach to getting that  
33 advice, and I may have heard that -- Or read more into that  
34 statement than was actually there, because that's a little --  
35 Your timetable that you just laid out was a little bit  
36 lengthier, with the advice coming kind of further down the road,  
37 where I thought he said the advice was going to be coming then,  
38 and then it was going to be reviewed by the SSC in late March or  
39 early April.  
40

41 **MR. RINDONE:** Clay, hot potato.  
42

43 **DR. PORCH:** Thanks for that. The plan is to present the  
44 strategy that we'll take in January, but not the actual ABCs.  
45 We won't be able to fill out the number for a couple of months  
46 after that, and so, in short, we just got the data from the  
47 Great Red Snapper Count, and so it's going to take some time to  
48 understand what we've got there, and we'll be working with Greg

1 Stunz and his full Great Red Snapper Count crew to try and  
2 figure out a strategy for going forward.

3  
4 Then we'll -- Basically, we only have a few weeks until the  
5 January meeting, and so we'll just basically present that  
6 strategy of what we think we're going to do with it and a  
7 potential timeline in January, and I suspect the timeline though  
8 for complete ABC estimates will be probably towards the end of  
9 March.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Clay. Roy, and then I think we need to  
12 wrap this up.

13  
14 **DR. CRABTREE:** Well, I don't really have anything to add to  
15 that. I think you will, ultimately, add an action to this  
16 document to adjust the catch levels. When exactly you put the  
17 language in and the options and things like that, I would defer  
18 to staff to figure out, but I think you're going to end up with  
19 another action in here.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Fair enough. Okay. We need to  
22 move on, unless there is anything else on this topic that is  
23 really burning somebody up right now. Okay. In that case,  
24 let's move on to Item VII, the Draft Framework Action  
25 Modifications to Vermilion Snapper and Gray Triggerfish, and it  
26 looks like Ms. Somerset is going to take us through this one.

27  
28 **DRAFT FRAMEWORK ACTION: MODIFICATIONS TO VERMILION SNAPPER AND**  
29 **GRAY TRIGGERFISH CATCH LEVELS AND GRAY TRIGGERFISH RECREATIONAL**  
30 **FIXED CLOSED SEASON**

31  
32 **MS. CARLY SOMERSET:** I will wait until we get the presentation  
33 up, but, essentially, it will walk through the draft framework  
34 action for vermilion snapper and gray trigger. I do have the  
35 document on there, but hopefully I can use the presentation to  
36 walk us through the document, and I will try and get through it  
37 as -- I know we've got two more things to cover before we finish  
38 today. With that, I will get started.

39  
40 This is the framework action draft to modify the vermilion  
41 snapper and gray triggerfish catch levels and gray triggerfish  
42 recreational fixed closed season. First, the purpose the  
43 framework action is to modify the OFL, ABC, ACL, and ACT, as  
44 applicable, consistent with the most recent stock assessment for  
45 Gulf vermilion snapper and the interim analysis for gray  
46 triggerfish, and SSC, SEFSC, and Reef Fish AP recommendations.

47  
48 The need is to establish catch limits that achieve OY consistent

1 with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery  
2 Conservation and Management Act, while preventing overfishing.

3  
4 I am going to go through vermilion snapper first. Some  
5 background is the most recent stock assessment was completed  
6 this year, SEDAR 67, with updated data through 2017, and this  
7 assessment evaluated new data and reconsidered discards and  
8 shrimp bycatch estimates, and it was reviewed by the SSC.  
9 Vermilion snapper is not overfished or experiencing overfishing.

10  
11 The SSC also determined SEDAR 67 to be the best scientific  
12 information available and also suitable for management advice,  
13 and the committee also recommended constant catch, which may  
14 help account for year-to-year variability of recruitment and  
15 mortality.

16  
17 The stock has been considered healthy and capable of supporting  
18 increased yield, in part due to recent declines in fishing  
19 mortality, strong recruitment, and a subsequent increase in  
20 spawning stock biomass. SEDAR 67 did use MRIP-FES recreational  
21 landings, as opposed to MRIP-CHTS, which was used in the  
22 previous assessment, and that was SEDAR 45.

23  
24 The most recent amendment for vermilion snapper was Amendment  
25 47, which was completed in 2017 and implemented in 2018, and it  
26 defined an MSY proxy as the yield when fishing at F 30 percent  
27 SPR, and a constant catch ACL was set equal to the average ABC  
28 for 2017 to 2021, at 3.11 million pounds whole weight, and just  
29 to note that this is in MRIP-CHTS units.

30  
31 A quick reminder of the current vermilion snapper regulations,  
32 and the recreational sector is open year-round, unless landings  
33 reach the stock ACL, and this is also the same for the  
34 commercial sector. Both the recreational and the commercial  
35 sectors also have a minimum size limit of ten inches total  
36 length, and the recreational bag limit is ten fish per person,  
37 within the twenty-reef-fish aggregate, and there is no  
38 commercial trip limit.

39  
40 Getting into the alternatives for vermilion snapper, and this  
41 Action 1 in the document, Alternative 1 is the no action  
42 alternative, and it would retain the current OFL, ABC, and ACL  
43 for vermilion snapper, as implemented in 2018 by Reef Fish  
44 Amendment 47, and so, for 2020 and beyond, your OFL would be  
45 3.58 million pounds, and the ABC equals the ACL, and those are  
46 both currently at 3.11 million pounds, and just to note, again,  
47 that these are in MRIP-CHTS data currency.

48

1 Alternative 2 would modify the OFL, ABC, and ACL for vermilion  
2 snapper, based on the recommendations from the SSC for 2021 to  
3 2025. The stock ABC is equivalent to the OY, and, again, ABC  
4 equals the ACL, and so, for 2021 to 2025, the OFL would be 8.6  
5 million pounds whole weight, and the ABC and ACL would be 7.27  
6 million pounds whole weight.

7  
8 Just to recap, the Alternative 1 is retain the catch limits that  
9 are based on the previous vermilion snapper stock assessment and  
10 adopted in 2018 in Amendment 47, and the OFL, ABC, and ACL are  
11 in the MRIP-CHTS currency, and then, in Alternative 2, the catch  
12 limits are calculated using the MRIP-FES currency, and these are  
13 based on the most recent SEDAR 67 assessment, which the SSC  
14 determined to be the best scientific information available and  
15 suitable for management advice.

16  
17 To address a concern that was brought up at the Reef Fish AP  
18 meeting with the increase in yield streams, the change in the  
19 recreational data systems from CHTS to FES accounts for the  
20 majority of the increase in future yields, but some of the  
21 increase can also be attributed to high-recruitment events,  
22 specifically in 2015 and 2016, but this should not affect the  
23 sustainability of the stock. I believe Ryan or Captain Walker  
24 will be going through the Reef Fish AP recommendations. I can  
25 stop here, for discussion on vermilion, or I can continue with  
26 gray triggerfish. Madam Chair.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Carly. Are there any  
29 questions for Carly? Robin, I see your hand is up. Is that up  
30 from the last discussion still? All right. General Spraggins.

31  
32 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I just want to say, Carly, we miss you in  
33 Mississippi.

34  
35 **MS. SOMERSET:** Thank you, General Spraggins. I miss you guys,  
36 too.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay.

39  
40 **MR. RINDONE:** It doesn't get as cold here though, and so she's  
41 staying here.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Right. Leann.

44  
45 **MS. BOSARGE:** Carly, I was wondering -- You probably said this,  
46 but I missed it. What are you hoping to get from us right here?  
47 Are you just wanting to know if we want something else in this  
48 document, or where are we at on this?

1  
2 **MS. SOMERSET:** That's a great question, Leann. I'm sorry, and I  
3 should have been more clear about that. Basically, this is the  
4 Chapters 1 and 2, the first draft of the framework action for  
5 vermilion and gray trigger, and so, essentially, discussion on  
6 the alternatives that are in the document, if there needs to be  
7 any additions, and, basically, the next steps for staff moving  
8 forward with this, and so if there's anything that the council  
9 would like to see, or picking preferreds, and that's at your  
10 discretion.

11  
12 **MS. BOSARGE:** Madam Chair, can I follow-up?

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.

15  
16 **MS. BOSARGE:** That last document we went through with red  
17 snapper, there is state data, and then there's federal data, and  
18 that's why we're having to do these conversions, and we've been  
19 looking hard, when it comes to red snapper, and we actually take  
20 a look at what the state landings look like versus what MRIP  
21 landings look like, and I think that that should be the trend,  
22 regardless of the species, and so you have some recreational  
23 landings data in this document, and I pulled up the actual  
24 document here, and I am assuming a good portion, at least, of  
25 the recreational landings come from Florida, and surely not all  
26 of them, but a good portion of the private rec landings do.

27  
28 Can we, somewhere in this document, at least in a table, show us  
29 what the GRFS landings look like, and I think that gives me a  
30 full view of what we're looking at, especially when we're  
31 talking about taking a quota and just about doubling it, from  
32 what I can tell, on a stock ACL.

33  
34 **MS. SOMERSET:** Sure, Leann. I can work on getting that  
35 information in, and I should have mentioned that, in the  
36 document, the state recreational landings, in CHTS and FES, were  
37 added, I believe at your request a few months ago now, in  
38 addition to some separate information from Something's Fishy,  
39 but I will get to that once we finish this presentation.

40  
41 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, ma'am.

42  
43 **MS. SOMERSET:** Thank you.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Carly. Next, I have Susan  
46 Boggs.

47  
48 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Carly. Thank you, Madam Chair. I may be

1 a little premature in this, but, if we go down this road, which  
2 I am certainly not opposed, and, again, these FES numbers kind  
3 of scare me, but I would like to add an action to this document,  
4 if it's appropriate, to eliminate the ten-fish bag limit for  
5 vermilion snapper, but continue to retain the twenty-fish  
6 aggregate bag limit for those reef fish species without a  
7 specific bag limit.

8  
9 At one time, and I believe it was in 2007, we were able to  
10 retain twenty fish, twenty vermilion snapper, within the twenty-  
11 fish bag limit, and then it got reduced, and then it was given  
12 back, and then it got reduced again in 2013, and, if we're going  
13 to get this large of an increase in the quota, then I would like  
14 to see the recreational sector and the charter/for-hire sector -  
15 - I had to use the word, but get those fish back that they gave  
16 up in 2013. Thank you.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Susan, is that a motion?

19  
20 **MS. BOGGS:** If this is the appropriate time. If I need to form  
21 it again, I can.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think you could offer a motion now if you  
24 want to, but if you want to -- If you want to type it up and  
25 send it to staff, we can call on some other hands and come back  
26 to it once it's emailed in.

27  
28 **MS. BOGGS:** Okay. I will work on it, real quick. Thank you.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. I can't see the hands. Dr. Shipp.

31  
32 **DR. SHIPP:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to comment  
33 that it's very nice to have the situation, and it's so unusual,  
34 where we have a stock that's neither overfished nor overfishing  
35 is occurring, but, subsequent to my hand being raised, Susan  
36 made comments with which I totally agree, and so, if she's ready  
37 to make that motion, then I would support it and second it.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Noted. When we come back to that  
40 motion, I can recognize you for the second. Mara.

41  
42 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you. Just a comment on the statement about  
43 picking preferreds. I know sometimes -- With the last one, we  
44 were talking about preferreds basically in an options paper, or  
45 just with a couple of chapters, and, I mean, you can do what you  
46 want, but I think, generally, it's best to wait to pick  
47 preferreds until you have more of an effects analysis and a  
48 complete document, and so I just wanted to make sure that people

1 weren't necessarily going to be jumping and picking preferreds  
2 every time we have a Chapter 2, but don't have anything else, in  
3 a document.  
4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Noted. Thanks, Mara. Okay. I don't see any  
6 other hands right now, and so, Susan, how's that motion coming?  
7  
8 **MS. BOGGS:** I sent it in, and I would like to also comment that  
9 I am not looking to change the size limit. Just the bag limit.  
10 Thank you.  
11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. All right. When that comes in, we will  
13 get that on the board. Do you want to read it, Susan, and then  
14 we can just paste it in there when it comes through the email?  
15  
16 **MS. BOGGS:** Yes, ma'am. I will be happy to. **My motion is to**  
17 **eliminate the ten-fish bag limit for vermilion snapper, but**  
18 **retain the twenty-fish aggregate bag limit for those reef fish**  
19 **species without a species-specific bag limit.** Hopefully that  
20 makes sense.  
21  
22 **MS. SOMERSET:** Ms. Boggs, were you able to send the motion into  
23 the meetings email?  
24  
25 **MS. BOGGS:** I may have sent it to the wrong one. Hang on a  
26 minute. I always get my emails confused.  
27  
28 **MS. SOMERSET:** No worries. They were looking, and they couldn't  
29 find it.  
30  
31 **MS. BOGGS:** Okay. Here it comes. I think I sent it to the  
32 wrong one. Okay. There it went.  
33  
34 **MS. SOMERSET:** Thank you.  
35  
36 **MS. BOGGS:** You're welcome.  
37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** If I may, Susan, I am going to suggest a little  
39 bit of a re-word, just to make it clear. I think we would be  
40 adding an action to eliminate the bag limit.  
41  
42 **MS. BOGGS:** Yes, ma'am.  
43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. All right. **The motion is to add an**  
45 **action to eliminate the ten-fish bag limit for vermilion**  
46 **snapper, but retain the twenty-fish aggregate bag limit for**  
47 **those reef fish species without a species-specific bag limit.**  
48 Dr. Shipp, you wanted to second this, and is that correct?

1  
2 **DR. SHIPP:** Yes, indeed.  
3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Any discussion on this motion?  
5 Ryan.  
6  
7 **MR. RINDONE:** I put my hand down.  
8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Kevin.  
10  
11 **MR. ANSON:** I would be in favor of supporting this motion, but I  
12 am just wondering, as a friendly amendment, Susan, maybe if you  
13 can add an alternative that looks at a fifteen-fish situation  
14 for vermilion. Right now it's ten, and that could just be  
15 changed to fifteen, and then that would be still within the  
16 twenty-fish aggregate.  
17  
18 **MS. BOGGS:** I mean, we can look at it as an alternative to a new  
19 action, but, I mean, I would not want to limit us to the twenty  
20 fish if we could -- If that would be sustainable. I mean, to  
21 add an action to -- Well, I don't know how you would do that.  
22  
23 **MR. RINDONE:** Madam Chair.  
24  
25 **MS. BOGGS:** Go ahead, Ryan.  
26  
27 **MR. RINDONE:** If you wanted to accommodate Mr. Anson's request,  
28 it would be to add an action to modify the bag limit for  
29 vermilion snapper, including alternatives to eliminate the ten-  
30 fish bag limit and another alternative to increase the ten-fish  
31 bag limit to a fifteen-fish bag limit.  
32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Ryan. Susan, is that something you  
34 would be interested in?  
35  
36 **MS. BOGGS:** I mean, I don't mind looking at it. I certainly  
37 don't, but I would just like to see it go back to where it was  
38 back in 2007, but, I mean, if the seconder is okay with it, I  
39 don't have a problem looking at it.  
40  
41 **DR. SHIPP:** That's fine with me.  
42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. I guess, if that's where we're going to  
44 go, we need to modify this motion a little bit.  
45  
46 **MS. BOGGS:** Do you want me to start over and send another one?  
47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I am hoping that Ryan maybe -- Since he had a

1 plan. We're getting there. I think maybe we're there, and so  
2 the new, or modified, motion is to add an action to modify the  
3 recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper, including  
4 alternatives for a fifteen-fish bag limit and to eliminate the  
5 bag limit, but retain the twenty-fish aggregate bag limit for  
6 those reef fish species without a species-specific bag limit.

7  
8 **MS. BOGGS:** I'm okay with that, Madam Chair.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think we know what we're talking about.

11  
12 **MR. RINDONE:** Staff understands the direction you guys want to  
13 go with this.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Got it. Okay. Good. Dale.

16  
17 **MR. DIAZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think you just  
18 accomplished what I was hoping, and I agree with Kevin. What I  
19 would think we would have is we would have an action, and it  
20 would have a no action that would be the ten fish, and it would  
21 have an Alternative 2, which would be fifteen fish, and an  
22 Alternative 3 would be the twenty fish, and, in the beginning of  
23 the action, it would state that twenty-fish aggregate bag limit  
24 is intact, and so I support the motion, if that's what it  
25 accomplishes.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think you laid that out pretty nicely, Dale.  
28 Thanks. Mara.

29  
30 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, it's fine, and I just wanted to note that we  
31 don't -- I mean, we're not changing something, and we're  
32 retaining it, and so, to the extent that you're just looking at  
33 the vermilion snapper bag limits within the twenty-fish  
34 aggregate, and we're not looking to change the twenty-fish  
35 aggregate, and so we don't need to look at that, but, as long as  
36 you understand what you're doing in the motion, then we can work  
37 it out in the document.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Kevin, do you have your hand up still?

40  
41 **MR. ANSON:** I tried to lower it. Dale and Mara summarized my  
42 concerns relative to how it's written, but, as long as staff  
43 understands that you'll have the multiple alternatives, the  
44 fifteen and the twenty, specific to vermilion, including the no  
45 action, that's fine with me. Thank you.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Let's go ahead and vote on this then.  
48 **Is there any opposition to this motion? Hearing none, the**

1 **motion carries.**

2  
3 Okay. Let's go, I guess, back to Carly, and we'll go through  
4 the presentation. We've got a couple of other things under this  
5 item, and we have the Reef Fish AP recommendations and  
6 Something's Fishy. Are we discussing those, or are those just  
7 background documents?

8  
9 **MS. SOMERSET:** Madam Chair, I paused there for vermilion, and I  
10 do have a few more slides on gray triggerfish.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Right. Sorry.

13  
14 **MS. SOMERSET:** No, that's fine. I can go through those, unless  
15 we have something further right now for vermilion.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Hang on. I saw Leann's hand just went  
18 up. Is it about vermilion, Leann?

19  
20 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes. I don't guess we're going through the  
21 document, Carly, but there's a lot of good information in that  
22 document. I kind of wanted some background on one of those  
23 tables that you had, but we can do it the next time we see this  
24 document, and that's fine, as long as we're actually planning to  
25 go through the document in-depth the next time, and did you all  
26 have a plan on that yet?

27  
28 **MS. SOMERSET:** Yes, ma'am. I have the document, and I can go  
29 through it, if the council wishes. I tried to put as much  
30 background and the actions in the presentation, but we can  
31 certainly go through both, if that's what the council wishes, or  
32 I can continue with the presentation and, if time allows at a  
33 later date, we can definitely go through the document then.

34  
35 **MS. BOSARGE:** I know we're behind schedule, and so I'm not going  
36 to make us switch over to the document now, and I will just hold  
37 that for the next time that we get a chance to discuss it.  
38 Thanks.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann.

41  
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Madam Chair, I don't know when  
43 we're going to have this on the agenda again, and so I suggest,  
44 if there's changes we need to make in the document, that we do  
45 that, and maybe perhaps she can go through the presentation, and  
46 we can discuss both species, because I don't know when we're  
47 going to talk about this again, and so, if we can get all of  
48 that together before we bring it back to the council, that would

1 be helpful.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All righty then. I guess let's -- Since it was  
4 about vermilion, let's switch over to the document, and then we  
5 can cover gray triggerfish once we're finished with that.

6  
7 **MS. SOMERSET:** Sure. That will work.

8  
9 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay, and so it was Table 1.1.2, and it's on paper  
10 page -- How about PDF page 11, which would be paper page 5, I  
11 think. This table -- I don't know, and I guess I need a little  
12 history on what's been happening recreationally, and I'm --  
13 Never mind. I pulled up the wrong dang document. Never mind.  
14 I'm sorry. I'm in the gray triggerfish document, and that's why  
15 I couldn't figure what the heck was going on. Never mind.  
16 Sorry.

17  
18 **MS. SOMERSET:** You're in the right document, Leann. I think the  
19 one pertaining to vermilion is the 1.1.1, in the similar vein as  
20 the 1.1.2, just discussing vermilion. I can go through that, if  
21 you have questions.

22  
23 **MS. BOSARGE:** No, I don't. It's just I got confused because  
24 they were in the same document. Don't worry about it. I'm good  
25 now.

26  
27 **MS. SOMERSET:** I can go through this, since we have it up, and  
28 so, essentially -- I know it jumps back and forth a little bit  
29 with vermilion and gray trigger in the same document, but Table  
30 1.1.1 provides the commercial and recreational landings from  
31 2012 to 2019, and, essentially, the units are in there because,  
32 from 2012 to 2017, they are in MRFSS, and then 2018 and 2019 is  
33 when NMFS transitioned to monitoring in MRIP-CHTS.

34  
35 We have the recreational and the commercial landings that  
36 provide the total with the stock ACL, but they did decrease in  
37 2018 to 3.11, and it's been exceeded only once, by about three-  
38 and-a-half percent, and that was in 2018, also.

39  
40 Then, after that, it goes through the vermilion snapper stock  
41 assessment, and that's the most recent that I discussed in the  
42 presentation, and that's SEDAR 67, and that is the assessment  
43 that Alternative 2 comes from, which is the overall  
44 recommendation of 8.6 million pounds, and that was based on the  
45 yield at F 30 percent SPR, and then, also, the constant catch  
46 ABC recommendation of 7.27 million pounds for 2021 through 2025.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I am not seeing any hands. Leann, is your hand

1 up still?

2  
3 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and I raised it again. I am just wondering -  
4 - The discussions that we had earlier with the Great Red Snapper  
5 Count and all, and there's a lot more snapper out there than we  
6 once thought, and that leads us down this path of productivity,  
7 and we used to think it was a lot smaller stock, and we could  
8 fish it really hard, but it has come back, and so it was highly  
9 productive, because it bounced back so quickly.

10  
11 Do those same productivity questions apply to other species?  
12 Like, for example, you're looking at an OFL that's double your  
13 previous OFL, and we're going from about a three-and-a-half-  
14 million-pound OFL to an 8.6-million-pound OFL, and so that tells  
15 me there's a whole lot more fish out there than what we thought,  
16 I guess, in the past, but do we therefore get into these  
17 productivity questions here, which leads you down this path of  
18 are we using the appropriate SPR and so forth?

19  
20 **MS. SOMERSET:** Madam Chair, may I respond?

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, please.

23  
24 **MS. SOMERSET:** Okay. Leann, that's a great observation, and I  
25 just want to note that the Alternative 1, which is the current  
26 ABC, ACL, and OFL, were in MRIP-CHTS, and Alternative 2 -- There  
27 is a jump because that is transitioning to MRIP-FES, which is  
28 the recreational landings in SEDAR 67 were in the FES currency,  
29 and so there is -- The majority of the increase is due to that  
30 change in data currency, but there is also a slight increase  
31 based on the recruitment, high recruitment, in 2015 and 2016,  
32 but the majority of that jump is accounted for in the currency  
33 change.

34  
35 **MS. BOSARGE:** Right, and so, just to follow-up on that, in my  
36 mind, regardless of whether it's a study that was an absolute  
37 abundance, which led you to understand that there are a lot more  
38 fish out there than what you thought, or if it's a change in  
39 methodology for recreational landings, which leads you to  
40 understand that there were a lot more fish out there than what  
41 we once thought, either way, there's a lot more fish out there,  
42 and so does this productivity question come into play, and is it  
43 something that the SSC -- If they're going to evaluate it for  
44 red snapper, have they contemplated that and evaluated that for  
45 these other species, as we look at some of these same trends, in  
46 the sense that there's a lot more fish than we once thought?

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I am going to go to Clay. I suspect that he

1 was going to speak to this, because I see his hand is up.

2  
3 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you, Chair. It's not the same thing. In the  
4 case of the Great Red Snapper Count, there was a large segment  
5 of the population that we weren't accounting for, and so we were  
6 following trends mostly on the area where the fishery was  
7 operating, but not so well the trends of the population away  
8 from where the fishery operated.

9  
10 Now, it could be that that also applies to some of these other  
11 stocks, and, as we do a better job surveying, we may discover  
12 just that, but we don't know that at this point, and so, in the  
13 case of the FES, all you're doing is just raising the estimates  
14 of data that you already have, and so, in other words, you're  
15 saying we caught more all along, and so, therefore, there must  
16 be more fish, but that doesn't make the stock appear any more or  
17 less productive, per se, and it just scales the absolute  
18 abundance up and down, and it's a different mechanism.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Leann, did you have a follow-up?

21  
22 **MS. BOSARGE:** No, and that explains it. Thank you.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Back to you, Carly.

25  
26 **MS. SOMERSET:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I can also, just on that  
27 note, or, actually, I will go back to the presentation. We can  
28 move on to gray triggerfish. The last accepted stock assessment  
29 was SEDAR 43, which was finalized in 2015, using data through  
30 2013. The SSC reviewed the assessment and accepted it as the  
31 best scientific information available and agreed with the  
32 assessment stock status that gray triggerfish, at that time, was  
33 not experiencing overfishing, but was overfished.

34  
35 I should also mention here that Amendment 44, which I believe  
36 was effective in December of 2017, changed the MSST from one  
37 minus M times B 30 percent SPR to 0.5 BMSY, and then Amendment  
38 46 was completed in 2017, and implemented in January of 2018,  
39 and so this amendment established a rebuilding time period, and  
40 so, together, the stock status was changed from overfished to  
41 not overfished, but rebuilding.

42  
43 Specifically, in Amendment 46, and pertaining to the  
44 alternatives that I will be discussing in subsequent slides,  
45 Amendment 46 set the rebuilding plan at nine years, or by the  
46 end of 2025, as well as retained the ACLs and ACTs implemented  
47 in 2012, and it also set a fixed closed season from January 1 to  
48 the end of February and June 1 to July 31.

1  
2 This table was also in Amendment 46, and so I just put it here  
3 to show the current ABC and sector ACLs and ACTs, as well as the  
4 OFL is 1.22 million pounds, which has been used, although it was  
5 not directly addressed in Amendment 46.

6  
7 Most recently, an interim analysis was conducted following the  
8 withdrawal of SEDAR 62, which was aborted due to various  
9 impediments, and the interim analysis produced catch advice for  
10 2021, using the SEAMAP combined video index as its  
11 representative index of abundance. The SSC determined that the  
12 interim analysis is a useful tool for providing interim catch  
13 advice and is suitable for management advice, and they also  
14 recommended an increase in the ABC for 2021 to 2023.

15  
16 That leads us to Action 2 in the document, and it has two  
17 alternatives, and so Action 1 is the no action alternative, and  
18 so this would retain the current catch limits for gray  
19 triggerfish as implemented in 2018 by Reef Fish Amendment 46,  
20 and remember that these are in MRIP-CHTS currency. This action  
21 would also retain the buffers between the sector ACLs and ACTs,  
22 and so, currently, there is a 10 percent buffer between the  
23 commercial ACL and ACT and a 10 percent buffer between the  
24 recreational ACL and ACT.

25  
26 Moving forward from 2019, the OFL would be 1.22 million pounds  
27 whole weight, and the ABC would remain at 305,300 pounds. The  
28 recreational ACL would be 241,200, and the recreational ACT at  
29 217,100, and the commercial ACL is currently at 64,100, with the  
30 ACT at 60,900.

31  
32 Alternative 2 in Action 2 would modify the ABC, ACL, and ACT  
33 based on the results of the 2020 interim analysis and the  
34 recommendations of the SSC and Reef Fish AP. Alternative 2  
35 would also apply the ACL/ACT control rule to determine the  
36 buffer between the ACL and the ACT for the recreational and  
37 commercial sectors, respectively.

38  
39 For 2021 and beyond, the OFL would remain at 1.22 million  
40 pounds, and the ABC would increase to 456,900 pounds. The  
41 recreational ACL would change to 360,951 pounds, with an ACT 24  
42 percent below the ACL, and the commercial ACL would change to  
43 95,949 pounds, with an ACT 8 percent below the ACL, and, again,  
44 just to note that these catch limits would remain in MRIP-CHTS.

45  
46 Just to refresh you on the current recreational and commercial  
47 regulations, the stock ACL is allocated 79 percent recreational  
48 and 21 percent to the commercial sector. The recreational

1 sector has a fixed seasonal closure from January 1 to the end of  
2 February and June 1 to July 31. There is a minimum size limit  
3 of fifteen inches fork length and one fish per person per day  
4 within the twenty-reef-fish aggregate. The commercial sector  
5 has a fixed seasonal closure from June 1 to July 31 and a  
6 fourteen-inch fork length minimum size limit and a trip limit of  
7 sixteen fish.

8  
9 Action 3 is the result of the motion made at the previous  
10 council meeting to modify the current recreational fixed closed  
11 season, and so this action was added to the draft document.  
12 However, it hasn't been fleshed out, but it's provided here for  
13 further discussion, and we're working on a seasonal analysis and  
14 the use of a decision tool for more information.

15  
16 Alternative 1 would retain the current recreational fixed closed  
17 season of January 1 through the end of February and June 1  
18 through July 31 for gray triggerfish. Alternative 2 would  
19 modify the recreational fixed closed season to be January 1  
20 through January 31 and June 1 through July 31. Alternative 3  
21 would modify the recreational fixed closed season for gray  
22 triggerfish to be February 1 through the end of February and  
23 June 1 through July 31, and Alternative 4 would modify the  
24 recreational fixed closed season to be June 1 through July 31.

25  
26 The next slide has that in more of a visual format, and so the  
27 table provides the current and proposed fixed closed season as  
28 the months that would be closed in black and open in white, so  
29 you can see each of the alternatives there, and I believe that  
30 was my last slide, other than similar to the vermilion  
31 discussion timeline for proceeding and any other additional  
32 actions or modifications to the document.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Carly. Let me give folks a few minutes  
35 to raise their hands. I guess, in regard to timeline, and I  
36 will just bring this up, and we can figure out a path forward,  
37 either now or at Full Council, but, right now, we have vermilion  
38 and trigger in the same document.

39  
40 I think, at least from what I gathered from the discussion at  
41 the last meeting with trigger, that we wanted to get this new --  
42 These new quotas in place for 2021, and potentially adjust the  
43 season, but, of course, for vermilion, we just added new  
44 alternatives, or a new action, which may slow this document down  
45 a little bit, at least as far as vermilion snapper goes, and so  
46 I would just kind of put that out there for consideration for  
47 people. Now I see Kevin's hand is up. Kevin, go ahead.

48

1 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have two questions, or  
2 comments or questions, and that was one of them, was Dr. Simmons  
3 made a comment that she didn't really know when we might see  
4 this document again, which is a little disconcerting,  
5 particularly as it relates to gray triggerfish, and so I don't  
6 know if it would help if we were to split these in two, and  
7 maybe Dr. Simmons could address that and think about that,  
8 relative to putting it back into a schedule, to try to get this  
9 done as soon as possible.

10  
11 Even if we were to bring it back in April, if that's the  
12 earliest it could be brought back, will that affect the 2021  
13 season? I don't know, and probably not, and then my second  
14 question, or comment, would be we had a decision tool that was  
15 developed for gray triggerfish, if I recall correctly, and will  
16 that be mentioned and/or updated for council use as we look at  
17 Alternative 3, when we try to look at seasons?

18  
19 **MS. SOMERSET:** We're working on that, in between the last  
20 meeting and this one, and we haven't had time to flesh it out  
21 completely, but I believe that last decision tool was in 2016,  
22 Amendment 46, and so we can get that updated.

23  
24 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Dr. Simmons, did you want to speak to timing?

27  
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I know  
29 it's on the action schedule for January, but we have a lot of, I  
30 guess, competing priorities, and we need to work with the Chair  
31 and Vice Chair, and that's one reason why I said I wasn't sure  
32 when we would see it again. We have a couple of documents that  
33 may be deferred and also take up the agenda in January.

34  
35 One thing I'm not sure of is I don't know how long it's going to  
36 take the Regional Office to do the analysis for the bag limit  
37 for vermilion snapper, and so that could slow it down, and then  
38 I don't know, Carly, if you have been working with the Regional  
39 Office staff and know -- If you're fairly certain that you'll be  
40 able to get the analysis for triggerfish and put it in the  
41 document by the January council meeting, and so those are the  
42 kind of things that are up in the air, and we do have the  
43 holidays, and we're at the end of November here and into  
44 December. I'm not sure if either of them would necessarily be  
45 ready in January.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Carrie. Carly, did you have anything  
48 to say on the triggerfish timing?

1  
2 **MS. SOMERSET:** We have discussed that a little, and we could try  
3 to get something by January, and so we're working on it, but I  
4 can speak with them again, and members of the IPT, just to see  
5 where we're at on that timeline.  
6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Susan.  
8  
9 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Kind of back to what Kevin  
10 was saying, do we need to separate the document, the two  
11 species, and I just wanted to clarify -- I know that the timing  
12 for gray triggerfish is sensitive, as far as increases for the  
13 2021 fishing season. However, I was not looking for Action 3 to  
14 come into effect until 2022, because I am very aware of the time  
15 constraints, but, if we need to, for timing, to increase the  
16 triggerfish for 2021, to separate the documents, I would be in  
17 support of that.  
18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Susan. Dale.  
20  
21 **MR. DIAZ:** I think, with timing on all of this stuff, and it's  
22 unfortunate that we're stuck in this virtual world. We seem to  
23 move a lot slower, and I know it puts more pressure on the  
24 staff, and I think that's part of the issue, and I can sense  
25 that people want things to move faster. I think it's just part  
26 of all the issues we're having now, and I just wanted to mention  
27 that. Thank you.  
28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think that's an apt observation. Everything  
30 does seem to move slower virtually. I see a bunch of people  
31 with their hands raised. Leann, do you have your hand up?  
32  
33 **MS. BOSARGE:** No, ma'am.  
34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Peter Hood.  
36  
37 **MR. PETER HOOD:** I am getting some messages from staff about a  
38 gray triggerfish decision tool, and it's unlikely that anything  
39 would be ready by January, and it would probably be after that.  
40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Peter. It sounds like the  
42 soonest that we would maybe see at least the triggerfish part of  
43 this would be April, if it was separated, and vermilion is  
44 undetermined at this point. I don't think we need to answer  
45 this question right now, I guess, but just be thinking about  
46 this between maybe now and Full Council. If you are wanting to  
47 move triggerfish faster than vermilion, we need to make a plan  
48 for that.

1  
2 Are there other questions or thoughts on the triggerfish  
3 component of this document? I don't see any hands. Carly,  
4 we've got some other documents here under this item, and I'm not  
5 sure if we need to go through all of them or they're just  
6 reference materials, and there's also public comments for gray  
7 triggerfish.

8  
9 **MS. SOMERSET:** I believe I have the Something's Fishy  
10 presentation, as well as the two hot sheets. Some of this can  
11 be background information, and I know we're getting down on  
12 time, and there's other things to discuss, but I believe this  
13 will be the first time that the council has seen Something's  
14 Fishy, and I could continue with that, if that's appropriate.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I am going to look at Dr. Frazer here, because  
17 we're a little behind here. I don't know what your tolerance is  
18 and how late you want to go.

19  
20 **DR. FRAZER:** I was just sitting here talking with Carrie and  
21 John about where we might go, and so the question really is do  
22 you want to work through these hot sheets? Is that the  
23 question? I'm sorry.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** The Something's Fishy for vermilion.

26  
27 **MS. SOMERSET:** Madam Chair, we also have the Reef Fish AP  
28 recommendations.

29  
30 **DR. FRAZER:** My preference is to just go ahead and rack these  
31 out, real quick, to be honest with you.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay.

34  
35 **MR. RINDONE:** I can go first with the Reef Fish AP  
36 recommendations, if you want.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay.

39  
40 **MR. RINDONE:** The Reef Fish AP recommendations is Tab B, Number  
41 7(c), and, if you scroll down to -- It starts on page 2, but,  
42 going into page 3, you can see the AP's review of the SEDAR 67  
43 assessment, and, ultimately, the AP recommended that -- They had  
44 support for the recommendations from the SSC, and they said to  
45 set the ACL equal to the ABC, which would be to support  
46 Alternative 2.

47  
48 They did note, however, that vermilion snapper doesn't have

1 sector allocations, and, thus, is not expected -- We're not  
2 expecting concerns associated with the FES conversion, as it  
3 relates to allocations.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks.

6  
7 **MR. RINDONE:** Then, if we move on to gray triggerfish, that's on  
8 page 4, and the Science Center reviewed the interim analysis  
9 with the AP, and the AP ultimately recommended to go with the  
10 SSC's recommendation of setting the ACL equal to the ABC, or  
11 they agreed with the SSC's recommendation for ABC, and they said  
12 to set the ACL equal to the ABC at 456,900 pounds whole weight.  
13 That's it for those.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Ryan. Carly, do you want to go through  
16 Something's Fishy, real quick?

17  
18 **MS. SOMERSET:** Sure. I can go through that quickly.

19  
20 **MR. RINDONE:** Kevin, is your question for the AP stuff?

21  
22 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, it is. Madam Chair?

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead. I'm sorry. I didn't see your hand  
25 there.

26  
27 **MR. ANSON:** Ryan, real quick, the motion for the vermilion was  
28 passed -- It carried seven to six, and what was the rationale  
29 for the six that were in dissention?

30  
31 **MR. RINDONE:** Is Captain Walker on?

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** He is not now.

34  
35 **MR. RINDONE:** He's not, but he was before. I am trying to  
36 recall specifically why that motion was divided that way. I do  
37 know that the AP had expressed uncertainty about the use of the  
38 Fishing Effort Survey adjusted recreational catch and effort  
39 data for setting catch limits and had expressed some -- Some  
40 members had expressed some reticence about how accurate they  
41 thought those data may be.

42  
43 I am inclined to think that some of that may be -- Some of the  
44 dissenting votes may be attributable to that. However, specific  
45 dissention isn't something that I had noted in here. I am  
46 getting text messages here though, thankfully, from some AP  
47 members that are affirming what I was saying, is that they were  
48 just uncertain about the FES data and not confident in its

1 accuracy, and that was why they voted against the motion. Thank  
2 goodness for text messages, and thank you, all, for listening  
3 in.

4

5 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Leann.

8

9 **MS. BOSARGE:** I just wanted to comment that I am glad to hear  
10 that the AP had those same reservations that I'm having, when I  
11 look at the numbers. These new FES numbers, it's not all about  
12 application, and I have tried to say this before, but I think  
13 this is a good example, and it's a question of your perception  
14 of what the size of the stock is out there, and those landings  
15 change our perception of the size of the stock.

16

17 If those landings are in fact accurate, the new FES numbers,  
18 then there is nothing wrong with doubling the amount of fish you  
19 can kill every year, but, if they're off the mark, then we are  
20 about to pound this stock, and so, for me, that's another reason  
21 that I hope we separate these two documents, and we take these  
22 two species separately, because I think it's two different  
23 animals here, two different things that we're trying to  
24 accomplish and look at and evaluate and analyze, and I think we  
25 really need to be thorough when we start looking at vermilion,  
26 and look at all the ins and outs and really think about it  
27 before we jump right into it, because you can see -- I mean,  
28 we're going to --

29

30 I don't have anything against Susan's motion, and I'm all for  
31 Susan's motion about changing that bag limit and increasing the  
32 bag limit that the for-hire sector can keep, or this  
33 recreational sector can keep, but it goes back to this idea  
34 that, if you put that quota out there, somebody is going to land  
35 it, and so, as long as FES is correct, we're not going to harm  
36 the stock, but I think there's a lot of people out there that  
37 wonder if those numbers are right or not, and, if they're not,  
38 we're going hammer it, because it's not just recreational  
39 private anglers that are going to catch that quota, and it's  
40 everybody, and, if you put it out there, we're going to catch  
41 it. Those are just my thoughts.

42

43 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann. Do we want to go to the  
44 Something's Fishy?

45

46 **MS. SOMERSET:** Yes, Madam Chair. I can get through that  
47 quickly. This is the Something's Fishy for vermilion snapper.  
48 I believe everyone is familiar with the Something's Fishy tool,

1 which is used to gather information on fish stocks from active  
2 fishermen on trends or unusual occurrences that scientists and  
3 managers may not have observed. Responses for vermilion snapper  
4 were gathered from November 1 of 2019 to December 14, and the  
5 final report was sent to the stock assessment analysts in March  
6 of 2020.

7  
8 There were sixty-three respondents self-identified with a  
9 sector, but this is not limited to a singular response, which is  
10 why that N equals eighty-three. They can associate with more  
11 than one sector, and you can see the private was the largest  
12 number of responses, followed by for-hire and the commercial.

13  
14 Response sentiment, both manual and automated analyses produced  
15 similar results. Both indicated a slightly positive trend in  
16 the perception of stock abundance, and the manual analysis  
17 showed a greater proportion of positive comments, while the  
18 automated analysis showed a minor trend toward positive  
19 comments. You can see the positive, negative, and neutral in  
20 the manual compared to the automated analysis.

21  
22 I believe, Leann, this was a request to split the vermilion  
23 snapper sentiment by sector, and so this is the responses split  
24 into private recreational, commercial, and both, and so there  
25 were only three categories, and they could not associated with  
26 more than one sector, and I just split them into one of the  
27 three categories, but, still, you can see that, overall, the  
28 majority had a positive sentiment in all three categories of  
29 private, commercial, and when they identified as both.

30  
31 This is response sentiment by location, and so respondents could  
32 report observations for multiple grid locations, and you can  
33 see, in the bottom-right and the middle, that no responses were  
34 gathered from central Louisiana or the Florida Keys. However,  
35 if you look at the sentiment, the majority of -- There were more  
36 negative comments near Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and  
37 more positive comments over in the western Gulf, near Texas.

38  
39 The automated analysis, this is the most frequently used  
40 positive and negative words that could be interpreted to  
41 indicate that anglers are generally seeing more fish and larger  
42 fish, while some anglers are experiencing a decline in average  
43 size and catch rate, and so there is the contribution to  
44 sentiment on the left for negative and positive, and then the  
45 word cloud on the right is showing the most used words in the  
46 automated analysis.

47  
48 Emergent themes from the manual analysis, just briefly, it

1 indicated a positive trend in stock health, that the stock has  
2 been continuously healthy for years, and it, in fact, may be  
3 healthier than ever. Anglers are seeing larger vermilion in  
4 deep waters, and vermilion are moving into shallower waters than  
5 they have been historically.

6  
7 Then, on the negative side, they are being outcompeted by  
8 triggerfish and red snapper, and juveniles are being found in  
9 lionfish stomachs or depredated by dolphins, which may be  
10 harming the population. Fishing effort is shifting to  
11 vermilion, due to unhealthy grouper stocks and shorter seasons  
12 for other species and increased commercial pressure. The red  
13 tide and the oil spill may have displaced local vermilion  
14 populations. I believe that is the last slide for Something's  
15 Fishy.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Are there questions or comments  
18 about Something's Fishy?

19  
20 **MS. SOMERSET:** Madam Chair, if there's no questions, or  
21 following this, I can go through those hot sheets, really  
22 quickly.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Let me ask Tom. I see he's got his hand up.

25  
26 **DR. FRAZER:** I do, and I'm just trying to move us along  
27 expeditiously here, and I think we can probably keep those, the  
28 hot sheets, for background, and we can -- I want to go ahead, if  
29 possible, and attack the original Agenda Item Number IV with Dr.  
30 Stephen, because we told her that we would move that to the end  
31 of the day, and I at least want to make sure that we accomplish  
32 that, if that's okay with you, Madam Chair.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, that's fine with me. I am happy to take  
35 that up next, but I do see Kevin's hand, first. Kevin.

36  
37 **MR. ANSON:** Sorry to be a cog in the process here, but, since it  
38 was the agenda, I just want to say great job, Carly, for your  
39 first time going through this type of item, the first item and  
40 the first type of item, but, on your one-pager for your gray  
41 triggerfish, there is a comment there, in the bottom of the  
42 description, a paragraph, that says the stock is not overfished  
43 nor experiencing overfishing, and that's contrary, I think, to  
44 what is actually the case for gray triggerfish, and it's  
45 certainly contrary to what you presented in the presentation  
46 that you provided, and so I just wanted to have you pay  
47 attention to that and correct it, as appropriate, since this  
48 will be a public -- More readily available public document.

1 Thank you.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Kevin. Okay. Let's move on. We're  
4 back up in our agenda then to Item IV, I think particularly  
5 Jessica's presentation in Item IV, the IFQ program landings,  
6 while she's still on the line.

7  
8 **REVIEW OF REEF FISH AND COASTAL MIGRATORY LANDINGS**  
9 **REVIEW OF IFQ PROGRAM LANDINGS**

10  
11 **DR. JESSICA STEPHEN:** What I'm going to go over, again, is the  
12 same things that we've seen for the last couple of meetings, and  
13 so, just real briefly, we're going to be looking at landings and  
14 allocations for a variety of species for the different IFQ share  
15 categories.

16  
17 This is the red snapper one, and I'm not going to spend a lot of  
18 time on these at this point, and what you will see in all of  
19 them is that we're kind of following the trends we've seen at  
20 the last couple of meetings, where we're well within the  
21 variations that we expect for this year with things. Typically,  
22 the pounds landed are coming up close to normal, and ex-vessel  
23 price sometimes is a little bit below normal. In order to kind  
24 of run through, we'll just spend a little bit of time on each  
25 slide, and I will just give you time to look at it.

26  
27 This is gag, and, again, it's similar trends to what we've seen  
28 before. Pounds landed are coming up close, and so the ex-vessel  
29 price is close to the average, or a little bit below, 2019. Red  
30 grouper, again, the trends are continuing what we've seen with  
31 the past months, again. Here, we have the pounds landed being  
32 above the 2019, but below the average, but that's due to the  
33 difference in quota overall, and we are seeing that the total  
34 ex-vessel value is close to what the average has been for the  
35 last three years.

36  
37 Yellowedge grouper is -- Here are the species for the deepwater  
38 grouper, and, as we've seen in the past, we do see that there's  
39 some effect of COVID in the deepwater grouper species, a little  
40 bit less pounds landed, as well as a lower ex-vessel price, but  
41 it's still within the variation range.

42  
43 Scamp is the proxy for shallow-water grouper, and, here, we see  
44 that the pounds landed are above what we had last year, but a  
45 little bit less than the average, and it seems to be kind of  
46 leveling off, like we typically see at this point in the year,  
47 and the same thing is true of the ex-vessel value.

48

1 Golden tilefish, which is primarily the main species caught in  
2 the tilefish category, here, we see that the pounds landed,  
3 similar to what we saw with the deepwater grouper, is a little  
4 bit lower than we're expecting, and so is the ex-vessel value,  
5 but, again, both are still within a range that isn't unexpected.

6  
7 These slides are the ones looking at the allocation, and we can  
8 see here that there's not a huge amount of variation or  
9 different between 2020 and 201, and the pattern from the last  
10 month's presentation is following true again still.

11  
12 There's a similar thing occurring with gag, where we're seeing  
13 that the total amount of pounds being transferred for allocation  
14 is fairly similar to 2019 at this point in time, and we're  
15 looking at kind of the weekly allocation transactions being  
16 consistent, a similar pattern to what we saw last time.

17  
18 Red grouper, again, it's a similar pattern. You can see where  
19 we're at with the amount of pounds landed and the total value.  
20 This is deepwater grouper, and, again, this is for the entire  
21 category as a whole and not by species, and we see that, again,  
22 with 2020, we're a little bit lower on the pounds landed, as  
23 well as the allocation price, which kind of goes hand-in-hand  
24 with what we are seeing with the landings, as there were less  
25 landings than expected.

26  
27 Shallow-water grouper, again, it's similar patterns to last time  
28 that we saw, and we have 2020 with a little bit less amount of  
29 pounds being transferred, but the weekly transactions are about  
30 on par with what we've seen before, and the weekly allocation  
31 prices are about even throughout.

32  
33 This is the last one for the allocation categories, where we're  
34 looking at -- This should actually be tilefish as a whole, and  
35 we're seeing similar patterns to what we saw in the past, and,  
36 if you notice there, even with the weekly allocation transfers,  
37 it's right about the same time we start plateauing off in the  
38 year, but we just haven't gotten as high as we have in the past,  
39 and the amount of the pounds overall transferred is less than  
40 what we expected in 2019.

41  
42 This is the one that I think I want to spend a little bit more  
43 time on. This is where we're looking at where we were at the  
44 end of October in the past years as to where we are at the end  
45 of October in this year, and, as in the past, we've seen that  
46 we're fairly on track for red snapper and gag. Red grouper,  
47 again, you need to be careful to only compare it to 2019, in  
48 which case we've landed more than we did in 2019, and, again,

1 that was due to the quota drop.  
2  
3 The areas where we're a little bit below the curve for where we  
4 normally are for the end of October was deepwater grouper,  
5 shallow-water grouper, and tilefish. Again, with shallow-water  
6 grouper, we typically don't land a good proportion of the quota.  
7  
8 This slide takes the 2020 year-to-date, and that year-to-date  
9 goes all the way up through November 23, and so fairly recent  
10 data, and we're comparing it to where we were at the end of year  
11 in 2017, 2018, and 2019, and this gives you a little bit of an  
12 idea of where we were from that October graph to where we're  
13 looking at now here, almost at the end of November.  
14  
15 Again, it's a similar pattern, where we're seeing red snapper,  
16 red grouper, and gag seem to be on par for where we were  
17 expecting to go, and deepwater and shallow-water and tilefish  
18 are a little bit below expected values, and I believe that's my  
19 last slide, and so I will take any questions or move back to any  
20 slides, if people want to look at them more closely.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Stephen. I see a  
23 couple of hands going up, I think. Leann.  
24  
25 **MS. BOSARGE:** The slide before this one, I think -- Those  
26 percentages -- That only goes through September 30, and did we  
27 not have any percentages -- I mean, tomorrow is December 1, and  
28 did we not have any percentages that were a little more up-to-  
29 date than September 30?  
30  
31 **DR. STEPHEN:** That's actually through October 30. There's a  
32 typo in there. It's the end of the month October, and we didn't  
33 do the end of the month November, because we're here now, and  
34 today is the last day of it.  
35  
36 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay. Thanks. Then that next slide, the last  
37 slide, if I can, Madam Chair, and I'm trying to hurry here.  
38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead.  
40  
41 **MS. BOSARGE:** If I'm looking at that, we have got to make up 14  
42 percent in the next thirty days. If you just did an average,  
43 twelve months and 100 percent, 14 percent is a lot to catch up  
44 in thirty days, especially at the end of the year like this, and  
45 we have crappy weather. I mean, it was blowing like heck here  
46 yesterday.  
47  
48 Here's my question. So, obviously, I guess we're going to have

1 to wait until the end of the year to really see what's left on  
2 the table and make a determination as to whether we want to  
3 carry that over or not, and so do you need some sort of motion  
4 from the council or instruction from the council to tell you and  
5 NMFS that, hey, on December 31, when you close down the IFQ  
6 program, we need a snapshot of not only the pounds that are  
7 left, but the pounds in each account that are remaining in that  
8 account, so that, if the council so chooses next year to carry  
9 those fish forward, and put those fish back in the account of  
10 the fisherman that was holding them on December 31, so he or she  
11 can go back out and catch them, and do you need a motion to do  
12 that, or is that data that you can capture at any time? If I  
13 told you that on February 1, you would say, oh, yes, I can go  
14 back and pull that data, and it will show me exactly whose  
15 account and how many pounds were in there at the close of  
16 business on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December.

17  
18 **DR. STEPHEN:** It's easier if we do the snapshot rather than  
19 trying to reconstruct it, because you have to actually run it  
20 through time to get to that, and I've already kind of planned  
21 for an end-of-year process to grab that snapshot, anticipating  
22 that this would be a desire of the council, but I think we're  
23 good with knowing that we're going to grab the snapshot of the  
24 amount of allocation that is in the individual shareholder  
25 accounts at the end of year. When we do the end-of-year  
26 shutdown, allocation from the vessels goes back to the  
27 shareholder, and then we'll take the snapshot there before we  
28 take back the allocation at the end of the year.

29  
30 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay. Well, I think I'm going to pass a motion  
31 anyway, and I just don't want anything falling between the  
32 cracks. That tells me what I need to know, that you do need to  
33 capture it on that date, rather than trying to recreate it.

34  
35 **I would like to make a motion that NMFS capture IFQ data on**  
36 **December 31 which details individual accounts and the pounds**  
37 **remaining in those individual accounts at the close of business.**  
38 Dr. Stephen, is that clear enough, if I word it like that?

39  
40 **DR. STEPHEN:** Yes, that's clear to me.

41  
42 **MS. BOSARGE:** My rationale there is, Madam Chair, is so that, if  
43 the council does indeed decide to carry those pounds forward, we  
44 have the data at our disposal to put them back in the accounts  
45 of the fishermen that were holding them at the end of the year.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. That makes sense.

48

1 **MR. DIAZ:** I will second that motion.  
2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Good. Thank you, Dale. All right. The  
4 motion is that the council request that NMFS capture IFQ data on  
5 December 31, 2020, which details individual accounts and the  
6 pounds remaining in those individual accounts at the close of  
7 business. Any other discussion on this? **Is there any**  
8 **opposition to this motion? Hearing none, the motion carries.**  
9 Carrie.  
10  
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If this  
12 passes at Full Council, I guess, just procedurally, we would  
13 write a letter to NMFS asking them to do this, and then they  
14 would decide if it needs to go to the SSC? Can somebody remind  
15 me what else we need to do for this?  
16  
17 **DR. STEPHEN:** Carrie, I think, if we decide to do the carryover,  
18 we'll need to have a meeting with the SSC, particularly  
19 depending on what categories we carry over.  
20  
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and so that would be decided  
22 after we have that information at a later date.  
23  
24 **DR. STEPHEN:** Yes. We would need to have that before we could  
25 probably redistribute.  
26  
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Thank you.  
28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Anything else on the IFQ landings? All  
30 right. I don't see anything, and so, Tom, it's 5:47. What do  
31 you want to do? How late do you want to push this?  
32  
33 **DR. FRAZER:** I think we'll be okay for today. I think everybody  
34 has put in a long day, and we'll pick up in the morning with  
35 lane snapper, and we'll try to knock that out as early as  
36 possible and try to move things through a little more quickly in  
37 the morning, if that's okay with you.  
38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** That is perfectly fine with me. I don't know  
40 if you also want to hit the rest of the reef fish landings, if  
41 we have time, but we can think about that later and see how we  
42 do.  
43  
44 **DR. FRAZER:** So we will adjourn for the evening, and we'll pick  
45 up with the remaining reef fish tidbits in the morning, and so I  
46 will see folks first thing in the morning. Have a good evening.  
47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, everybody.

1  
2 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on November 30, 2020.)  
3

4 - - -

5  
6 December 1, 2020

7  
8 TUESDAY MORNING SESSION  
9

10 - - -

11  
12 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
13 Management Council reconvened via webinar on Tuesday morning,  
14 December 1, 2020, and was called to order by Chairman Martha  
15 Guyas.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think we left off with lane snapper, and I  
18 think Dr. Hollensead is going to take us through that. Whenever  
19 you're ready.  
20

21 **DRAFT FRAMEWORK ACTION: MODIFICATION OF THE GULF OF MEXICO LANE**  
22 **SNAPPER ANNUAL CATCH LIMIT**  
23

24 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** I think, for the sake of time -- We do  
25 have the one-page sort of species sheet, which, if anybody has  
26 any questions, I can go over it, but, if not, it will be  
27 included in the document, and we can just add that into the  
28 document, Madam Chair, if you agree with that.  
29

30 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sounds good to me.  
31

32 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Great. This is Tab B, Number 8(a), and so this  
33 document -- Just a quick overview, it will just be Chapters 1  
34 and 2, and this is the first time the committee has seen this  
35 document, and so that's where it's at right now. Even though  
36 it's a relatively short document, I am going to make Bernie go  
37 through every single table, and so we'll make sure she's awake  
38 this morning as we go through and do that.  
39

40 Just a quick overview about lane snapper, the fishery runs  
41 through the calendar year, January 1 through December 31, and it  
42 is a stock ABC and ACL, and so there's no breakout between the  
43 commercial and the recreational sector. Lane snapper is subject  
44 to an eight-inch total length size limit, and it is included  
45 within the twenty-reef-fish aggregate recreational bag limit.  
46

47 If we go to Table 1.1.1, this is just sort of where we're at  
48 right now, and so what is on the books for lane snapper right

1 now, and so, not completely dissimilar to what Carly gave  
2 yesterday, talking about the various currencies, lane snapper  
3 right now is monitored for recreational data collection from the  
4 Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey, or MRFSS, and  
5 so I know we've talked a lot about CHTS, but, here, we're  
6 actually talking about MRFSS.

7  
8 The top part of that table is the catch limits, which, for the  
9 purpose of this document, will be defined as the OFL, the ABC,  
10 and the ACL. You can see those values for each one of those in  
11 that table, and those would be considered in MRFSS units for the  
12 recreational sector, as well as the calculation method for how  
13 those values were ascertained, based on the Generic ACL  
14 Amendment.

15  
16 Additionally, lane snapper has accountability measures,  
17 including an ACT, and so an annual catch target, and that is set  
18 at 259,000 pounds whole weight, and it's a 14 percent reduction  
19 from the ACL, and, again, keep in mind that would be in MRFSS as  
20 well, and there's also a seasonal closure, and so, in the year  
21 following an overage of the ACL, an in-season closure will occur  
22 if the harvest meets or is predicted to meet the ACL within that  
23 fishing year, and so it's sort of an alternating monitoring and  
24 not monitoring sort of a situation for the ACL.

25  
26 That is what's on the books currently, and where the sort of  
27 issue comes in -- If we go Table 1.1.2, at the bottom of this  
28 table is where I want the committee to focus, and that last  
29 column has the percent of the total ACL, and, in recent years,  
30 and highlighted in 2017, there was an overage of the ACL, and,  
31 in 2017, there was even an overage of the OFL.

32  
33 In recent years, this has been exceeded, and so the council was  
34 interested in sort of re-looking at lane snapper, and, because  
35 of this, a SEDAR 49 update was conducted, and it concluded  
36 earlier this year and was presented this year. The results of  
37 that assessment indicated that there was no overfishing  
38 occurring and that the stock was not overfished, and, also, it  
39 updated those recreational landings, so we could get some catch  
40 limit advice in FES rather than MRFSS.

41  
42 This was sort of the reasoning for reassessing and looking at  
43 lane snapper. Was there any questions on that, before I get  
44 into sort of where we're moving into now, the sort of  
45 justification for the document?

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** It looks like Leann's hand is up.

48

1 **MS. BOSARGE:** On that first table you gave us, Table 1.1.1, we  
2 have our catch limits, and it says the calculation method is  
3 ten-year average plus two standard deviations, or one standard  
4 deviation, and so this is a data-poor species, and I guess what  
5 we used to do is just take an average of whatever the landings  
6 had been for ten years and then buffer it with some standard  
7 deviations, and then -- I was trying to look through this  
8 document. In 2016, we actually did a data-poor stock  
9 assessment, and it was in there, I guess, and so did that change  
10 anything? Can you give us a little background on that?

11  
12 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Dr. Froeschke can jump in if I have missed  
13 something, and that was done, but, since the values were so  
14 similar to what was calculated for the Generic ACL Amendment, it  
15 did not change, and so what you see on the books now was  
16 generated from that 2012 Generic ACL Amendment.

17  
18 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay. Thank you.

19  
20 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** If there is no more questions, we'll go to  
21 Table 1.1.3. This table gives us the landings with the  
22 recreational sector in MRIP-FES, and I just wanted to bring this  
23 to the committee's attention. When we start to look through the  
24 alternatives for the various actions, if you're interested in  
25 what those catch limits would look like in FES, or what has been  
26 harvested since then in FES, we can use this table as a  
27 comparison for that. Again, that's just another reference table  
28 for you all to look at as you look through the various  
29 alternatives.

30  
31 Then Table 1.1.4 -- Again, this would be just sort of a  
32 reference table, and it's just sort of going to walk you through  
33 the various alternatives in Action 1 and Action 2 and give a  
34 little description of what they're essentially trying to do.

35  
36 For example, Alternative 1 would keep what we have on the books  
37 now, which, of course, would be retaining sort of the out-of-  
38 date MRFSS information, as well as not accounting for the recent  
39 assessment update, which we updated the new catch limits there.  
40 Alternative 2 takes all those things into account, but it does  
41 not set an ACT, and Alternative 3 would also update the catch  
42 limits and set a value of an ACT using the ACT buffers for that.

43  
44 So Action 1 is generally going to be some procedural things of  
45 updating the catch limits. Relative to Action 2, it would be  
46 potentially looking at modifications of that seasonal closure  
47 accountability measures, and so that's broadly what these  
48 actions are doing, and so, if you have a hard copy of this and

1 can keep that table handy as we go through the actions,  
2 hopefully that will be helpful, as move through this. If there  
3 aren't any questions on sort of the general background, I'm  
4 going to jump right into the actions.

5  
6 For our first action, again, it would be modifying the catch  
7 limits and annual catch targets for lane snapper. Again,  
8 Alternative 1 is the no action, which would leave what is  
9 currently on the books right there, and there is an ACT on the  
10 books for lane snapper right now, though it's not really used to  
11 trigger any kind of in-season accountability measures just yet.

12  
13 Alternative 2 would, again, modify the catch limits, and I just  
14 want to bring the committee's attention to that bottom row would  
15 be what the updates would be from the stock assessment if it had  
16 been done in MRFSS, and so that bottom row in that first table  
17 in Alternative 1 are sort of an apples-to-apples comparison, and  
18 then that top row for Alternative 2 gives you the updates from  
19 the -- The modifications from the updates, as well as it  
20 incorporates MRIP-FES, if that makes sense.

21  
22 It would actually be more -- If you looked, apples-to-apples, on  
23 that bottom row on the table of Alternative 2 and the  
24 Alternative 1 table, and you can see it would be about a  
25 doubling of the OFL, for example, if we just took that into  
26 account, and then, with the associated transition to FES, you  
27 would see that the OFL is a little over a million pounds for  
28 that example. Alternative 2 also would not set an ACT, and so  
29 it would drop the ACT consideration for lane snapper.

30  
31 Alternative 3 is similar to Alternative 2 for the OFL, ABC, and  
32 ACL, but it would also incorporate the ACT with a 16 percent  
33 buffer between the ACL and the ACT, and then just to keep in  
34 mind during perhaps discussions, and so I will pause here for a  
35 minute to discuss this, but I did just want to let you know the  
36 Reef Fish AP reviewed this document at their last meeting, and  
37 they selected Alternative 2 as their preferred in that case, and  
38 so I will let Mr. Rindone go through that when he gives that  
39 report, but I just wanted to let you know to keep that in mind  
40 as we discuss Action 1.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Dr. Hollensead. It looks like we have  
43 a couple of hands up. Susan.

44  
45 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Dr.  
46 Hollensead. When we set these OFLs and ABCs and ACLs and all  
47 that, are we going to be setting it in MRIP-FES? I mean, is  
48 that how it's going to come out to the public? I guess, to me,

1 when you put -- I understand why you did the comparisons, but it  
2 could be confusing, I guess, to the public if we put a document  
3 out like this, and so, when we do a final document, is it going  
4 to MRIP-FES or MRFSS?

5  
6 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** It will be MRIP-FES, and so the MRFSS is for  
7 comparison, and that's why I had that language at the bottom of  
8 the table, but you are correct that the MRFSS was just for  
9 comparison. Anything that would be codified in the text would  
10 be MRIP-FES.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Leann, is your hand also up?

13  
14 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and so I just wanted to make sure that I  
15 understand, and so the new stock assessment, or the update  
16 assessment that we received, that essentially put more years of  
17 data into the model, but it was still generating catch limits  
18 based on the ten years plus one or two standard deviations,  
19 depending on if you're looking at OFL or ABC, and is that  
20 correct? What you show us on the screen is what that would be  
21 in old MRIP, or MRFSS, and what it would be in the new MRIP,  
22 right?

23  
24 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** I believe -- To set the ABC, I think it didn't  
25 take that ten years, and, instead, it used the Tier 3, and Dr.  
26 Froeschke can correct me if I've got that wrong. It actually  
27 used the probability density function, instead of taking the  
28 ten-year average to calculate the ABC for this go-round in the  
29 update.

30  
31 **MS. BOSARGE:** So the OFL is the ten-year average of whatever the  
32 landings were, because it's a data-poor, but then, when we  
33 buffer for scientific uncertainty, we use this PDF to get down  
34 to the ABC, and is that what you're saying?

35  
36 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, and so that last sentence of the second  
37 paragraph on document page 4 says "since catch estimates were  
38 generated based on the March 2020 SEDAR 49 assessment update,  
39 the SSC recommended modifying the justification for setting lane  
40 snapper catch limits from the Tier 3a approach to the Tier 2  
41 approach outlined in the Generic ACL Amendment". The Tier 2  
42 approach for setting catch limits is appropriate for species  
43 where a stock assessment exists, but does not provide an  
44 estimate of MSY or its proxy. Instead, the estimate provides a  
45 measure of OFL based on the probability density function that  
46 could be calculated to estimate scientific uncertainty.

47  
48 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you.

1  
2 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** That's clear as mud, hopefully.  
3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Susan, is your hand up again?  
5  
6 **MS. BOGGS:** Yes, Madam Chair, and thank you. Is there a reason  
7 -- I mean, why would we not set an ACT, as reflected in  
8 Alternative 2?  
9  
10 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** I believe an ACT was dropped for gray snapper  
11 as well, and so is not -- Something similar has been done for  
12 other species. You know, the ACT would be a more conservative  
13 approach, and so that would be sort of Alternative 3. Right  
14 now, there is an ACT on the books for lane snapper, but it's not  
15 necessarily used to trigger anything. Right now, the in-season  
16 closure is only put in place should the ACL be exceeded in the  
17 previous year, expected to be exceeded in the previous year. If  
18 it's not being used, then maybe it doesn't have to be on the  
19 books, but it's just an option for the committee to consider.  
20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Mara.  
22  
23 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you. Just on the ACT issue, you're correct  
24 that it's not really being used right now for an accountability  
25 measure, but, when we look at Action 2, there is the update to  
26 use it for either in-season monitoring or in the post-season,  
27 like we have now, where we exceed in one year and then we  
28 monitor the next to the ACT, and the reason that you might want  
29 to keep it and do that is because there have been overages, in  
30 the last couple of years, when trying to constrain to the ACL.  
31 That is why there is the option to keep it and use it. If you  
32 can have a discussion and a justification about why you don't  
33 think it's necessary, maybe because the catch levels are going  
34 up, then you have the option to get rid of it and not use it.  
35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Any other questions or comments on Action 1?  
37 Leann, is your hand up again?  
38  
39 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and so Mara mentioned the overages, but, in  
40 this particular stock, the way we manage it, it's essentially  
41 based on an average of the last decade of landings, and that's  
42 how we decide what's an acceptable catch level, and we had an  
43 average that went back to 2011, and so our overages were after  
44 2011, when it looked like we started landing more fish, but we  
45 never updated the ten-year average landings, from what I can  
46 tell, until now, and so that, to me, explains why you had  
47 overages, because it wasn't a rolling ten-year average, and it  
48 was sort of a static ten-year average, and, as landings went up,

1 we didn't go back and redo the ten-year average. If we had, we  
2 probably wouldn't have had those overages, and so I could see, I  
3 guess, some justification for why you wouldn't necessarily need  
4 an ACT in this stock, but I'm just throwing that out there.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** That's a good point. An average is just an  
7 average though, and there's going to be years when it's above,  
8 and there's going to be years when it's below. Mara, is your  
9 hand up again?

10  
11 **MS. LEVY:** Just quickly, to that point, I agree with that and  
12 the idea that the catch limits are going up, and so maybe you  
13 don't need it, but keep in mind that part of what's happening  
14 here is, when we've exceeded the ACL, NMFS is supposed to be  
15 monitoring in the following year and close when we approach that  
16 ACL, when it's projected to be met, and so the fact that we've  
17 gone over, when we're supposed to be doing that, potentially  
18 shows that maybe there is some uncertainty in the monitoring to  
19 close when you reach the ACL, and so you may still want to keep  
20 an ACT, which is a lower level, so that it provides for some  
21 buffer in that projection, but, again, you may not need it,  
22 because the catch levels are going up enough to account for that  
23 and help that issue.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Last year, it looks like we were over by 27  
26 percent, and this fishery did close early, from what I remember,  
27 sometime in December, and I'm trying to find it in here.  
28 Anything else?

29  
30 **MS. BOSARGE:** Madam Chair, I put my hand back up.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Go for it.

33  
34 **MS. BOSARGE:** To me, the way you alleviate that is to actually  
35 update the average each year, to have it be a rolling average,  
36 and then maybe you could have some accountability measures, if  
37 you get too far over the average, but there should be some years  
38 where your over and some years where you're under, but, when  
39 it's static for almost a decade, you're probably going to have  
40 some overages, and maybe we can look at that in the future, and  
41 I don't know if that means you have to do a stock assessment  
42 every year, and I don't know what that entails, but that's one  
43 option.

44  
45 **MS. LEVY:** Can I just make a point with respect to that? Just  
46 to be clear, this assessment doesn't use that average, and so we  
47 used the average in the ACL amendment, but this assessment uses  
48 the probability density function, or whatever that's called,

1 right, and it's a percentage of that, and so I think we're  
2 getting rid of using the ten-year average when we go to this  
3 assessment and these recommendations.  
4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Mara. That's helpful. Dr.  
6 Hollensead, did you want to jump in here, before I go to Susan?  
7  
8 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** I will second what Ms. Levy just said. She  
9 said what I was going to say.  
10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Awesome. Susan.  
12  
13 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you. I was just curious -- I was reading in  
14 here, and it says the recent stock assessment update relied on  
15 recreational landings data reported in the Southeast Region  
16 Headboat Survey through 2018, and what other data was used? Did  
17 you just use -- Or was the headboat survey all that was used to  
18 update this data?  
19  
20 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Can I answer that, Madam Chair?  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.  
23  
24 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** No, and the commercial landings were also used  
25 as well, but, yes, primarily, the information for the  
26 recreational side did come from the headboat information.  
27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Leann, is your hand up again?  
29  
30 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and I was just wondering if Clay, Dr. Porch,  
31 had any insight on what changed and how we determined catch  
32 levels in this model versus the 2000-whatever assessment that we  
33 did, and I only ask because this was an update, and usually you  
34 wouldn't change -- Make huge changes like that in just an  
35 update, and you would be using the same model and the same basic  
36 parameters and everything else to determine the stock, the  
37 fishing levels and things like that, and so that is a pretty big  
38 change, when we went from a ten-year average plus some standard  
39 deviation to some other method of determining where the stock is  
40 at and what a healthy catch level is, just in an update, and I  
41 just want to understand what has changed, and that helps me  
42 understand where to go on these alternatives.  
43  
44 **DR. PORCH:** As I understand it, we were asked to update this  
45 analysis using the FES data, but this is just a data-limited  
46 assessment, and so it's not the same as what we normally think  
47 of benchmarks or operational or research tracks, and so it's an  
48 update of SEDAR 49, with just the new FES catch estimates.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Does that answer your question, Leann?

3  
4 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and so, if the old stuff was a ten-year  
5 average with some standard deviations, I'm assuming this is too.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead, Ryan.

8  
9 **MR. RINDONE:** The catch recommendations that you guys are seeing  
10 in Alternatives 2 and 3 from the SSC are not based on the ten-  
11 year average. They are using the probability density function  
12 applied using the council's ABC control rule for Tier 2, based  
13 on the update of the iTarget model that was used in SEDAR 49.

14  
15 This update looked at the data in the headboat index, which was  
16 the index that was used as the representative index for  
17 determining the reference period for that model, because that's  
18 the way that that model functions, and it included recreational  
19 catch and effort data from MRIP-FES and the commercial data that  
20 is collected through the state trip ticket systems and was  
21 updated, I believe, through 2018. Then projected landings for  
22 2019 were used to fill in that year, and then 2020 landings were  
23 assumed to be equivalent.

24  
25 This is not -- Like what you see in Alternatives 2 and 3 is  
26 definitely not using the ten-year average any longer, and that's  
27 not the way that those numbers were generated. The reason why  
28 we didn't update the catch limits for lane snapper following the  
29 original SEDAR 49 assessment was because they were very similar  
30 to what we had on the books from the development of the  
31 council's 2011 Generic ACL and Accountability Measures  
32 Amendment, and it was a difference of I think less than 20,000  
33 pounds or something like that, and so the council chose not to  
34 change the catch limits in response to that, and so they're  
35 changing here because we're changing data currencies in which we  
36 intend to monitor the catches, and so that's what you're looking  
37 at now.

38  
39 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thanks, Ryan, and so you've explained how we got  
40 to the ABC and what that represents, and we applied a tier  
41 whatever control rule, but that's to buffer the OFL for  
42 scientific uncertainty, to get down to an ABC, and so that OFL -  
43 - What does that represent? Is that a ten-year average plus  
44 some standard deviation?

45  
46 **MR. RINDONE:** It is not. The OFL represents a probability of  
47 overfishing, a 50 percent probability of overfishing, the stock,  
48 and so that's the way that the council's ABC control rule is

1 designed for determining the OFL and the ABC. The OFL is set at  
2 that 50 percent probability of overfishing, and then the ABC is  
3 set at an amount less than that, based on the SSC's application  
4 of either the P\* or another method that they may choose to  
5 employ, and I can pull up the -- Do you have it in the document,  
6 Lisa, what they used for setting the ABC? I don't remember off  
7 the top of my head, and was it P\*, or was it 75 percent?  
8

9 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and so I know it's a 50 percent probability  
10 of overfishing, and that wouldn't really matter what species  
11 we're looking at, but that number of pounds is different whether  
12 it's data-poor or something else, and so that's what I'm trying  
13 to figure out. Did that basic function change for OFL from the  
14 previous assessment to this one? It used to be a ten-year  
15 average, plus some standard deviation, for OFL, and is that --  
16 When we did the update, is it no longer a ten-year average plus  
17 some standard deviation that gets you to an OFL poundage?  
18

19 **MR. RINDONE:** When we set what's in Alternative 1, that was  
20 based on what was used on the ten-year average in the 2011  
21 Generic ACL and AM Amendment. When we did SEDAR 49, which no  
22 longer would have used that ten-year average anymore, because  
23 now we had our first stock assessment for lane snapper, using  
24 the iTarget model.  
25

26 Because the results of the iTarget were not dissimilar from what  
27 we already had on the books, the council, at the time, chose not  
28 to modify those catch levels. If they had, at the time, then we  
29 would not be using the ten-year average any longer, and we would  
30 already be beyond that, and we would be using Tier 2.  
31

32 Now that we've modified, or that we've updated the iTarget model  
33 to include MRIP-FES, and we've updated it through 2018, and the  
34 SSC has accepted that as their best available science, you have  
35 the results of those recommendations in Alternatives 2 and 3,  
36 and that migrates us away from that ten-year average, which we  
37 could have done back in 2015, but we chose not to, because the  
38 results were not dissimilar, but, again, those results weren't  
39 using FES.  
40

41 Now they are, and they are markedly different, because FES  
42 results in an increase in how many lane snapper we think are  
43 actually out there, based on fishing pressure, and the OFL was  
44 set at a 50 percent probability of overfishing lane snapper, and  
45 the ABC was set at a 30 percent probability of overfishing lane  
46 snapper. That is the bottom of the last paragraph on page 4 of  
47 the document.  
48

1 **MS. BOSARGE:** Now I'm following you. Thank you, Ryan. I've got  
2 it.

3  
4 **MR. RINDONE:** So we skipped a step there, and we could have  
5 migrated away from that ten-year average when we did SEDAR 49  
6 initially, but, because the results were so similar to what we  
7 already had on the books, the juice wasn't worth the squeeze,  
8 and so passed by that one. Now, because we're incorporating  
9 FES, it's exceptionally different from what we currently have in  
10 Alternative 1, and so that's why we're here.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Ryan. Susan.

13  
14 **MS. BOGGS:** Martha, my hand is not up. Thank you.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Very good. Okay. Now that we have all  
17 the background, do we have any other questions or comments on  
18 Action 1? If not, I think we can dig into Action 2 a little bit  
19 more. It looks like we're good. I will turn it back over to  
20 you, Lisa.

21  
22 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Let's go to  
23 Action 2. Action 2 is going to explore alternatives to the  
24 seasonal closure accountability measure, and the Alternative 1,  
25 no action, would leave it as we have it on the books now, and  
26 so, if the ACL is exceeded in a given fishing year, NMFS will  
27 prohibit harvest of lane snapper in the recreational and  
28 commercial sectors in the subsequent fishing year, if landings  
29 are projected to meet the stock ACL.

30  
31 Very similarly, the Alternative 2 would apply that same  
32 mechanism, but, if the ACL is exceeded in year-one, for example,  
33 NMFS would monitor to the ACT in the following year, and so the  
34 pro of this is, as we mentioned, if an ACT is put on the books  
35 through Action 1, it could then be applied here, for example.  
36 One of the cons of this alternative is you would end up in  
37 perhaps a situation where you're switching back and forth from  
38 monitoring to the ACL to the ACT in subsequent years,  
39 alternating years, and so that could be difficult for  
40 enforcement, if folks on the water try to monitor to that catch  
41 level, or catch target, in a particular year.

42  
43 Alternative 3 is a little bit different than those, in that,  
44 instead of having sort of this alternative in year-one, if a  
45 catch limit is exceeded and do something in year-two, instead it  
46 would modify the seasonal closure such that, if annual landings  
47 in a given year meet or are projected to meet the prescribed  
48 trigger, then NMFS would prohibit harvest of lane snapper within

1 that fishing year, and so this is not dissimilar, for example,  
2 to what happened in greater amberjack recreationally.

3  
4 Underneath this is the two options under this alternative for  
5 the prescribed trigger, and it could either by the ACL or the  
6 ACT, depending on -- One is a little bit more conservative, the  
7 ACT. That is how those would work.

8  
9 Again, just for your consideration, the Reef Fish AP had  
10 selected, for their sort of suggested alternative -- Their  
11 preferred was Alternative 3, Option 3a, and so the prescribed  
12 trigger is the ACL, and so, if there's any questions on that, I  
13 would be happy to take those now.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Let's give people a minute to put  
16 their hands up. I am not seeing anything, but I guess my  
17 question, I guess overall for this document, if nobody has  
18 questions on this action, is when do we think we would see it  
19 again, and I'm assuming it would be for final action, since this  
20 is a fairly straightforward amendment?

21  
22 **DR. HOLLENSHAD:** Madam Chair, I'm not sure. Originally, this  
23 was supposed to be brought to the committee in April of this  
24 year, and this is the first time it's brought to you,  
25 unfortunately, with everything that's going on, and so I'm not  
26 sure.

27  
28 Certainly the IPT is sort of prepared, I think, to move forward  
29 with the document, and I think what the IPT would be curious to  
30 know is -- Unless we hear from the committee about potentially  
31 adding another alternative, or another action, or if the  
32 committee is okay with how things are laid out right now, the  
33 IPT could continue completing the document, the other chapters  
34 and the analysis and that sort of thing, and the IPT could  
35 certainly continue working on it, should the committee not make  
36 any changes necessarily to what has been presented today.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Are there thoughts on the timeline from  
39 anybody from our Action 2? Are there any additional actions or  
40 alternatives that anybody would like to see in this document?  
41 Leann.

42  
43 **MS. BOSARGE:** I was just wondering, and so -- Can maybe Susan or  
44 somebody tell me -- Is this something that's targeted a lot by  
45 the for-hire sector, and, if so, I assume it's in the twenty-  
46 fish reef fish aggregate, but does it have an individual bag  
47 limit underneath that twenty-fish aggregate that we want to look  
48 at, the way we did for vermilion? I have no idea, and I'm just

1 throwing that out there so that, if it needs to be in the  
2 document, we'll do it now, rather than wait until later, and  
3 maybe it won't matter.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Susan, do you want to jump in on that?

6

7 **MS. BOGGS:** Yes, ma'am. Thank you. I know up here, where we  
8 fish, it's not a very targeted fish, and I do believe it is down  
9 in central Florida, and it is included in the twenty-fish  
10 aggregate bag limit.

11

12 The only question I have, and I'm certainly not trying to  
13 complicate this, and I don't know the answer, and so I'm going  
14 to look to the scientists that are a little smarter than I am,  
15 but an eight-inch fish -- I mean, is that -- I mean, I don't  
16 know the average size for a lane snapper, and, again, I'm not  
17 trying to complicate this, but that seems to me like a very  
18 small fish.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Good question, and, yes, Susan, I think you're  
21 right. I think lane snapper are targeted off of the Tampa Bay  
22 area. Bob Shipp, your hand is up?

23

24 **DR. SHIPP:** Lane snapper, obviously, don't get nearly as big as  
25 reds, and I think the world record is about eight pounds, and so  
26 an eight-inch fish is kind of small, but I think it fits with  
27 the overall biology of the species.

28

29 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you.

30

31 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Hollensead.

32

33 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** On the hot sheet for lane snapper, it's got the  
34 reproductive maturity, and 50 percent of females are mature at  
35 nine inches, and that's about an age-one to two fish, and so  
36 that would sort of go in line with the biology here.

37

38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Dr. Simmons.

39

40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If the  
41 committee is happy with this document, I think we could move it  
42 fairly quickly, if there's not maybe a lot of other changes. I  
43 think one thing that is important, before the council takes  
44 final action, is to select preferreds, and so, right now, we had  
45 slated to bring this back for final action in April, and so, if  
46 the committee is not ready to select preferreds now, we could,  
47 obviously, try to squeeze it in in January, but, again, I'm  
48 going to have to get with the Chair and Vice Chair regarding

1 priorities, because we have quite a few things scheduled in  
2 January as-is.

3  
4 The other thing we've kind of been discussing, and we can  
5 rehash, perhaps, if there's time, again later this afternoon,  
6 is, if this document is moving fairly quickly, then maybe we  
7 could pull the gray triggerfish ACL change out of the other  
8 framework action and perhaps put it in this amendment, and so  
9 that's also a potential option and try to move it a little  
10 faster. Thank you, Madam Chair.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Carrie. Yes, I think that makes sense.  
13 I'm going to go to Phil Dyskow and then Leann.

14  
15 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Martha, you probably are  
16 more familiar with this than I am, but I have gotten a lot of  
17 input from charter and for-hire vessels about the importance of  
18 this fishery and the health of this fishery, and their comments  
19 to me, kind of universally, are, whatever you do, don't screw it  
20 up. If anything, they would like to be able to see their catch  
21 increased and not tabled or decreased, and so I guess the  
22 overriding input that I get from the people in that Tampa area  
23 was this is an important fishery and don't screw it up. If  
24 anything, it's a healthy stock, and they would like to see it  
25 retained, or even increased, as opposed to reduced. Thank you.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Phil, for bringing that up. Yes, I've  
28 heard similar comments. I've also heard of some big lanes  
29 popping up recently too, and so this is interesting. Leann.

30  
31 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thanks, Madam Chair, and I've heard the same  
32 comments, that they would like that increase, and those comments  
33 are coming mainly from the for-hire sector, and they would like  
34 that increase as soon as possible, and that's people, like you  
35 were saying, down in that Florida area that you were talking  
36 about.

37  
38 I don't want to slow the document down. However, it does bother  
39 me, at a very basic level, that a nine-inch fish -- Only 50  
40 percent of the females at nine inches are sexually mature, and  
41 so, if we've got an eight-inch minimum, and somewhere south of  
42 50 percent of those eight-inch fish are sexually mature, and so  
43 we're fishing on babies, and so, for the long-term health of the  
44 stock, in the long term, that's usually not ideal, and I don't  
45 know that it has to go in this document, but, if it doesn't go  
46 in this document, I would like to see us follow-up with an  
47 action -- A document with an action in it to increase that  
48 minimum size limit a little bit.

1  
2 It's a data-poor species, and so I don't like to get overly  
3 conservative with things, but, if we know a nine-inch -- At nine  
4 inches, only half of them are sexually mature, and we're killing  
5 them younger than that, then they're not getting a chance to  
6 reproduce.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Leann. I don't see any more  
9 hands right now, and so we've got some things to think about,  
10 based on the conversation we just had here, and so, one, we  
11 basically want this to move quickly, and Dr. Simmons indicated  
12 it would be preferable if we could choose some preferreds.

13  
14 Now, we could do that now, or we could do it at Full Council,  
15 potentially, after hearing public testimony, and we also could  
16 consider combining this document with gray triggerfish, or I  
17 guess pulling gray triggerfish out of the vermilion document and  
18 moving it over here, to also move that quickly.

19  
20 Then what Leann just brought up about the size limits, if that's  
21 something that you all would want to consider, another thing to  
22 think about, and I maybe would recommend waiting until public  
23 comment, if we were going to consider adding that in today, or  
24 we could certainly do it at a later time, if that's something  
25 the committee is interested in. I am not seeing any more hands,  
26 and is there anything else on this, Dr. Hollensead, this  
27 document? I see Kevin's hand. Kevin, go ahead.

28  
29 **MR. ANSON:** It's not pertaining to the document or what to do  
30 with it going forward, but it highlights an issue, or a topic,  
31 that I thought of, and that is the query tool on the MRIP page  
32 for NOAA. They do not have a few species that we manage under  
33 ACLs, and one of them is lane snapper, and hogfish is another,  
34 and it's not on their drop-down list of species, and it's handy,  
35 at least to me, to go to it, because you can parse out landings  
36 information, at least what's estimated from the survey, the MRIP  
37 surveys, either parse it out down to state level or weight level  
38 and those types of things, as well as go up to region-level  
39 estimates of catch.

40  
41 I know you can go to the ACL monitoring page, under the  
42 Southeast Regional Office, and look at those species that are  
43 managed under ACLs and see what the landings are, but I'm just  
44 wondering -- This might be something that could be brought up at  
45 a future meeting, but what the process would be for us to  
46 request, if we might, as a letter to the agency, to the MRIP  
47 folks, a request that they add ACL species to the list.

48

1 I don't know how difficult it would be, but that's just  
2 something that I thought of in trying to go through the  
3 conversation today, as well as looking ahead to maybe addressing  
4 some issues as we go to manage this fishery in the future,  
5 because the trend appears to be increasing landings, and so some  
6 of the issues of tools in the toolbox that we normally would use  
7 to constrain catch would come into play, and that's when we  
8 start looking at average size of fish and where the fish are  
9 caught and times of year and all those types of things, and  
10 that's information that can be gleaned from the MRIP site.

11  
12 I don't know, again, if we need to do a motion or anything, but  
13 that's just something that maybe someone from the agency could  
14 help address, or, again, if we need a formal letter, then maybe  
15 we'll need to have a motion to instruct staff to do so in the  
16 future. Thank you.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Kevin. I see Richard Cody's hand is  
19 up, and I assume to respond to that. Richard.

20  
21 **DR. RICHARD CODY:** Kevin, the species you're talking about, lane  
22 snapper, is not included in the drop-down list, although, right  
23 beside the drop-down list, there's a category or a button for  
24 other species, and so you can specify lane snapper in there, or  
25 any other species that MRIP collects data on, and you should be  
26 able to get the landings information there.

27  
28 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Richard. I overlook that button every  
29 time I go to the site, and I just go to the drop-down menu, but  
30 I will give it a shot. Thank you.

31  
32 **DR. CODY:** Sure.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Richard. Okay. Dr.  
35 Hollensead, is there anything else for this amendment?

36  
37 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and so there's nothing  
38 more on the document. I didn't know if you wanted to take a  
39 moment to have Mr. Rindone go through the Reef Fish AP comments  
40 on this document or not, or I could try to do it very quickly.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think we could get through that pretty  
43 quickly, and then go through the landings for I guess all reef  
44 fish, and I think we have time for that.

45  
46 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Ryan has passed the hot potato to me yet again.  
47 If we scroll down here to lane snapper, there were two motions,  
48 and so, in Action 1, the panel made Alternative 2 the preferred

1 alternative, and so, again, to get back to Ms. Boggs question of  
2 should something like this be codified, this is going to be in  
3 that top row there which relates to MRIP-FES, and they also  
4 voted to not set an ACT, and so it would just be those catch  
5 limits right there. That motion carried unanimously for Action  
6 1.

7  
8 In Action 2, the panel voted to make Alternative 3a the  
9 preferred alternative, and the AP mentioned that, in terms of a  
10 business standpoint, not knowing what was going to happen in the  
11 subsequent year, because of what was happening in the current  
12 year, sort of made things difficult for them, in terms of  
13 running a business, and, ideally, it would be something more in-  
14 season, and they would prefer if whatever was going to happen  
15 within that one fishing year was going to happen within that one  
16 fishing year, and they wouldn't have to think about the next,  
17 for example.

18  
19 They mentioned that they are seeing quite a few fish, and things  
20 seem to be going well, and, therefore, using that prescribed  
21 trigger would be the ACL, which is also probably, again, why  
22 they mentioned the preferred in Action 1 to drop the ACT, and so  
23 the prescribed trigger for the in-season management would be the  
24 ACL. That's just a quick summary of what was discussed at the  
25 Reef Fish AP meeting on this document.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Great. I am looking for hands, to see if there  
28 are any questions on that, and it doesn't look like it, and so  
29 I'm going to suggest that we move on to our last item of  
30 business, which is wrapping up the review of reef fish and CMP  
31 landings, going back up to Tab B, Number 4(a). I assume Peter  
32 Hood is going to give us this report.

33  
34 **MR. HOOD:** Yes, I am.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Awesome. It's all yours, Peter.

37  
38 **REVIEW OF REEF FISH & CMP LANDINGS**

39  
40 **MR. HOOD:** Thank you. Just a couple of things that I want to  
41 point out before I get into this. As to this point, we're not  
42 foreseeing any additional closures coming up, because it doesn't  
43 look like any species are going to be running up against our  
44 ACL, and so, for the most part, anything that's open today  
45 should be open through the end of this month, unless something  
46 unexpected happens.

47  
48 Also, because we really don't have any -- You know, we don't

1 have the recreational landings, because of the issues with MRIP  
2 and COVID, I won't be presenting anything on recreational  
3 landings. Then, finally, at the end of this, I'm going to show  
4 a figure, and, actually, it's a -- I'm trying to think of a way  
5 to present this information that might be more useful to you,  
6 and so I'll just very quickly go over the figure and look for  
7 comments.

8  
9 For the first part of this table, we have gray triggerfish and  
10 greater amberjack, and you can see that -- This is the  
11 commercial sector, and they're below their ACL, and we project  
12 they will be open through the rest of the year. It seems like  
13 landings are a little bit behind what they were last year, in  
14 2019.

15  
16 For the IFQ species, certainly we saw Jessica's presentation  
17 yesterday, but you can see that we have a month-and-a-half. Of  
18 the landings that are provided here, we have the landings that  
19 are provided here, and we have a month-and-a-half of fishing to  
20 go, and you can see that, for red grouper and red snapper, they  
21 are fairly close to what was caught in 2019, and gag seems to be  
22 lagging behind a little bit, and so, at the end of the year, it  
23 wouldn't surprise me if gag landings are less this year than  
24 last year.

25  
26 This is for the stock ACLs, and, again, I won't go over  
27 recreational landings, because we don't have the complete  
28 picture there, but, for the most part, and this is for the  
29 commercial sector, landings have been below what we've seen in  
30 2019, and the two exceptions are lane snapper and mutton  
31 snapper, which are fairly close to -- What was landed in 2020 is  
32 fairly close to what was landed in 2019.

33  
34 Lane snapper is about 3,000 pounds below, and that's, again, as  
35 of when these landings were pulled, and there's a month-and-a-  
36 half of fishing to go, and then mutton snapper is just within a  
37 few hundred pounds of what was landed in 2019, and that would be  
38 on the next page, if we could scroll down. You can see there  
39 that 56,844 in 2019, compared to 56,780 in 2020.

40  
41 If you scroll down, we'll talk about the coastal migratory  
42 pelagic species. For king mackerel, the season starts for king  
43 mackerel on July 1, with the exception of the Northern Zone,  
44 which starts on October 1, and, as we would expect, the current  
45 status is that they're open and that we're below the ACL.

46  
47 Remember the king mackerel Southern Zone gillnet fishery is  
48 closed right now, and that won't open until January, and

1 hopefully, at the January meeting, I will be able to provide  
2 some landings for that.

3  
4 For Spanish mackerel, remember that season starts April 1, and  
5 so they basically had about a half-year of fishing going on,  
6 and, as expected, we're below the ACL, and they're open.  
7 328,000 pounds have been landed so far, and then, for cobia  
8 commercial, that's a January 1 to December 31 fishing year, and  
9 you can see that they're about 4,000 pounds below what was  
10 caught in 2019, and, again, we assume that they will be open for  
11 the rest of this year.

12  
13 If you keep going to the next page, this is just -- I kind of  
14 hate going over these tables, because I kind of have to stumble  
15 through them, and certainly we would continue to provide the  
16 tables, but I thought that maybe presenting this information  
17 graphically might help you out, and this figure is something  
18 similar to what you've seen in some of Jessica's figures, and it  
19 basically shows the landings on the Y-axis over the year.

20  
21 In this case, it's commercial gray triggerfish landings, and  
22 then we have monthly landings, and, certainly, for recreational  
23 species, it would be by wave. One thing that I would add to  
24 this figure would be a horizontal line where the catch target or  
25 appropriate catch limit is, and I think there would be three  
26 advantages for you in providing information this way.

27  
28 One is you can quickly assess where the harvest is relative to  
29 the catch limit or catch target, and, secondly, you can see how  
30 the current year's harvest trends compare to past year's harvest  
31 trends, because I've got -- In this figure, we have 2020  
32 landings, and then 2019 landings, and then an average of 2017 to  
33 2019 landings, and so you can see how things are performing this  
34 year compared to past years.

35  
36 Then, finally, you could look to see how regulations are  
37 performing, and, in this case, with the gray triggerfish  
38 commercial sector, they have a closure from June to July, and,  
39 if you look at that figure, you will see a flat spot about  
40 midway through, which corresponds to that closure, and it shows  
41 that, yes, that closure does slow down fishing effort and  
42 overall harvest, and so that's something that seems to be  
43 working.

44  
45 If you think that this type of figure would be helpful for you -  
46 - If you want to comment right now, that's fine, but, if you  
47 want to message me, it's [peter.hood@noaa.gov](mailto:peter.hood@noaa.gov), and I would be  
48 happy to listen to your comments, and, if I get favorable

1 comments, I would be happy to put together a series of figures  
2 like this for the next meeting. Thank you.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Peter. I see Leann has her hand up.

5

6 **MS. BOSARGE:** Peter, I really like it a lot. I mean, I don't  
7 want you to work yourself to death, but I think those are very  
8 helpful, to see those landings in a graphical format like that,  
9 and, to me, landings are a good indicator of what's happening  
10 with the stock, albeit a lagging indicator, probably, but still  
11 more of a leading indicator than the stock assessment, just due  
12 to timing a lot of times, and so thank you, and I appreciate it.  
13 Then my one request would be can we add yellowtail to our  
14 landings update?

15

16 **MR. HOOD:** Okay. Will do.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Peter, I agree with Leann. I like the graphs,  
19 and I also do like the tables, because sometimes I find myself  
20 needing the exact numbers and the date that the fishery closed,  
21 if it has closed, but I guess, if those are kept updated on the  
22 SERO website, then they're available to the public all the time,  
23 and so that's less critical, I guess, for being here at the  
24 meeting, but go ahead.

25

26 **MR. HOOD:** We would continue to provide the tables, and so the  
27 tables would be in the briefing book, but this is the way I  
28 could just sort of go over the landings, and hopefully in a more  
29 user-friendly manner.

30

31 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Leann, is your hand up again?

32

33 **MS. BOSARGE:** I lowered it, but I'm with you that I would like  
34 to see both of them, the table and the other way, in the graph.

35

36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Dale.

37

38 **MR. DIAZ:** I just want to weigh-in, and I like the way that he  
39 has got it presented it here, also, and I think it would just be  
40 really for us to understand, and, you know, I'm thinking about  
41 maybe a species where we have different allocations and how that  
42 might also fit well in those, but I really like that format.  
43 Thank you.

44

45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Well, unless there is any other  
46 business to come before this committee, I think we have finally  
47 reached the end of our agenda. I am not seeing any hands, and  
48 so I will pass it back to Tom. Thanks for allowing us some

1 extra time to get through everything, and I think a lot of it  
2 was good and stuff that we needed to talk about. Poor little  
3 lane snapper has been postponed since April.

4

5 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 1, 2020.)

6

7

- - -