

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2
3 ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE

4
5 The Battle House Renaissance Mobile, Alabama

6
7 June 5, 2023

8
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

10 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
11 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
12 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
13 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
14 Tom Frazer.....Florida
15 Bob Gill.....Florida
16 Bob Shipp.....Alabama
17 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
18 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
19 Troy Williamson.....Texas

20
21 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

22 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
23 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
24 Phil Dyskow.....Florida
25 Jessica McCawley.....Florida
26 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
27 Chris Schieble (designee for Patrick Banks).....Louisiana
28 Greg Stunz.....Texas

29
30 **STAFF**

31 Assane Diagne.....Economist
32 Matt Freeman.....Economist
33 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
34 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
35 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
36 Mary Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
37 Natasha Mendez-Ferrer.....Fishery Biologist
38 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
39 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
40 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
41 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
42 Carly Somerset.....Fisheries Outreach Specialist

43
44 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

45 Chester Brewer.....SAFMC
46 John Mareska.....GMFMC SSC

1 Clay Porch.....SEFSC

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1
2
3 Table of Contents.....2
4
5 Table of Motions.....3
6
7 Adoption of Agenda and Approval of Minutes and Action Guide and
8 Next Steps.....6
9
10 Ecosystem Technical Committee.....6
11
12 SSC Recommendations on a Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem Model to
13 Support Fisheries Management.....22
14
15 Adjournment.....22
16

17 - - -
18

TABLE OF MOTIONS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

PAGE 20: Motion to direct the Ecosystem Technical Committee to remove offshore wind energy and achieving optimum yield for the reef fish complex from the working list of FEIs. The motion carried on page 21.

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1 The Ecosystem Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management
2 Council convened at The Battle House Renaissance in Mobile,
3 Alabama on Monday morning, June 5, 2023, and was called to order
4 by Chairman Kevin Anson.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN KEVIN ANSON:** I am going to up the Ecosystem Committee
11 agenda, Tab Q, Number 1. The members are myself, Susan as Vice
12 Chair, Mr. Broussard, Mr. Dugas, Dr. Frazer, Mr. Gill, Dr.
13 Shipp, General Spraggins, Mr. Strelcheck, and Mr. Williamson.

14
15 Item Number I of the agenda is Adoption of the Agenda. Are
16 there any changes to the agenda? Seeing none, is there any
17 exception to adopting the agenda as written? Seeing none, we'll
18 go forward to Number II, Approval of the April 2022 Minutes.
19 Any changes to the minutes? I have one. On page 5, line 38, I
20 believe it's -- Well, it's written as "looped", and I believe it
21 should be changed to "looked".

22
23 Is there any other changes to the minutes? Any opposition to
24 accepting the minutes as written, with the change? Seeing none,
25 the minutes are approved. Item Number III is the Action Guide
26 and Next Steps. Dr. Mendez-Ferrer, could you go through those,
27 please?

28
29 **DR. NATASHA MENDEZ-FERRER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next
30 agenda item, Number IV, is the Ecosystem Technical Committee
31 Report, and so the Ecosystem Technical Committee began work on
32 the council's task to identify fishery ecosystem issues and
33 developing metrics to prioritize them, and so I will be
34 summarizing the discussions from the April 2023 meeting, which
35 includes recommendations to modify the fishery ecosystem issue
36 loop, identifying areas for stakeholder feedback, the potential
37 fishery ecosystem issues for the council to consider, and draft
38 criteria to rank and prioritize in fishery ecosystem issues.

39
40 The Ecosystem Technical Committee will continue working on
41 prioritizing the fishery ecosystem issues and requests
42 additional direction from the council on how to properly weigh
43 each metric, as well as the meeting proceedings, and council
44 staff will suggest some next steps for the committee's
45 consideration.

46
47 Agenda Item Number V is the SSC Recommendations on the Gulf of
48 Mexico Ecosystem Model to Support Fisheries Management, and

1 we'll have Mr. John Mareska, representing the Reef Fish SSC, and
2 he will review a presentation by Doctors Holden Harris and
3 Skyler Sagarese from the Science Center, who presented their
4 research on ecosystem-based fisheries management with a U.S.
5 Gulf-wide ecosystem model. This model demonstrates how the
6 target biomasses of menhaden and menhaden predators could be
7 achieved by modifying fishing pressure on menhaden or its
8 predators.

9
10 The spatially-explicit model uses data syntheses for habitat
11 maps, spatial-temporal environmental drivers, functional
12 responses, and initial results and validation. Mr. Mareska will
13 summarize the SSC feedback on next steps and model calibration
14 fitting and incorporating qualitative scientific and fisher
15 knowledge in how to best apply the U.S. Gulf-wide ecosystem
16 model to address ecological questions that support regional
17 EBFM. The committee should review the information presented and
18 ask questions, as appropriate. The last agenda item is Other
19 Business, if there is any additional items that -- If time
20 allows, additional items can be brought up for discussion. Mr.
21 Chair.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Great. Thank you. Are there any
24 questions, before we proceed? Seeing none, I guess we'll go to
25 the next agenda item. Natasha.

26
27 **ECOSYSTEM TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT**

28
29 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Yes, and, Bernie, if we can open my
30 presentation on Tab Q, Number 4(b). I want to remind the
31 committee that we have Dr. Karnauskas, as the chair of the
32 Ecosystem Technical Committee, online, and so, if you have any
33 questions, you can address her and hopefully get some additional
34 input.

35
36 I will just start and give you a quick reminder that, in April
37 of 2022, you guys saw the results from the contract work by LGL,
38 and the council accepted LGL's proposed framework to begin
39 discussions and operationalize a fishery ecosystem plan, and
40 there was a couple of -- There was some homework, and there were
41 some tasks that were assigned to the Ecosystem Technical
42 Committee, and these were to develop goals and measurable
43 objectives for the FEP.

44
45 That led to four fishery ecosystem issues, and I'm going to be
46 calling these FEIs, and then to also create a criteria for
47 prioritizing FEIs and utilize this criteria to recommend the top
48 four fishery ecosystem issues, and then, initially, there was a

1 recommendation for the ETC to develop the stakeholder engagement
2 plan, but, after further consideration, this was changed to then
3 be assigned to the O&E Technical Committee, and so we had the
4 chair and vice chair of the O&E Technical Committee participate
5 during this last ETC meeting.

6
7 Some of the things that the group saw during the meeting were we
8 had Dr. Turley, from the University of Miami, go through the
9 work that has been done on red tide and trying to see how that
10 fit into LGL's proposed FEI loop and the work that they've done,
11 and this is a process that took, you know, a long time, and
12 we've had multiple red tides happen, and we've been able to
13 translate some of the research, and the results, into management
14 actions.

15
16 Some of the things, the lessons learned, from this process is
17 that stakeholder engagement is really important, that outlining,
18 from the beginning, management goals and how do we measure
19 success of that policy actions is also key to know -- To get an
20 idea of, you know, if we're meeting our targets. There is a
21 still a body of research that is being developed, but it has not
22 been incorporated into the management realm yet.

23
24 We are still in the kind of early stages of the FEP, this
25 framework that's going to kind of be a pathway in
26 conceptualizing how to address ecosystem issues into the
27 council's policymaking decisions, and so we expect a little bit
28 of tinkering happening as we work on the FEP, on the process of
29 the FEP, but then there's also the FEIs themselves, which are
30 kind of like the recipes inside the FEP being the cookbook, and
31 that's kind of the analogy that we've been using.

32
33 During the meeting, we had some feedback from the group on how
34 to modify LGL's FEI loop, and there were some concerns about the
35 arrows being confusing, and there was some rearrangement on the
36 components of each one of these steps, and, for example, the
37 question is does the council have authority to manage these
38 issues, and that was in step two, but we thought that should be
39 kind of like at the forefront. As we're scoping the FEIs, we
40 need to outline what the council's authority would be for this
41 issue.

42
43 The agency hasn't seen this diagram yet, and that's why I have a
44 little under construction, and we're planning to have a meeting
45 later on, so that we can continue getting some feedback. Right
46 now, from the discussions that we had during the meetings, the
47 Steps 1, 2, and 3 would be performed by the IPT, but also highly
48 involving the O&E Technical Committee, to get some feedback, and

1 this will be part of like the stakeholder engagement plans that
2 would feed into Steps 1 through 3.

3
4 As we're working on this FEI loop, there might be times where we
5 will need more research, and so we may have to slow down a
6 little bit, and then there might be other times where they might
7 not lead into an immediate action. Then, through all the whole
8 process, we need to think that we're going to be constantly
9 learning and adjusting, and this is going to be an open and
10 transparent process that we will be getting feedback from
11 stakeholders.

12
13 We tried doing an interim approach for this meeting, and we
14 tried to get the creative juices flowing, and we're using
15 Jamboard to get the group thinking and providing recommendations
16 on what these FEIs are going to look like, and so here's a
17 screenshot of the exercise, and the sticky notes in blue were
18 from an exercise that Science Center staff did where they chose
19 some FEIs, and then they tried to write a one-pager based on
20 some of the recommendations that LGL had in their framework.

21
22 Then the ones in blue were provided by the group, and so, as you
23 can see, the topics are wide and varied, and so we have to sort
24 through this in a way to make it -- To begin simplifying and
25 breaking down that list, and so we noticed that we could
26 categorize them into larger groups, for example water quality,
27 among the larger water quality umbrella, and we could do red
28 tide, for the hypoxic zone, but then that brings up the question
29 of how big these fishery ecosystems should be, if we're going to
30 work them through the FEI loop, and so something like water
31 quality, just having an FEI on water quality, might not be
32 something that's very doable, and so we might have to take --
33 Have a narrow scope and take smaller bite chunks.

34
35 Throughout this, then we asked the committee to use checkmarks
36 and rank them, thinking, you know, which ones we could begin
37 work on, and so we have a draft list here, and I won't go
38 through each one of them yet, and I have another slide, but I
39 would like to get some feedback from the committee.

40
41 Then, you know, when we open this up to the public, and we begin
42 getting all of these concerns and recommendations for FEIs, we
43 need to figure out a way of how to prioritize them, and how are
44 we going to begin working on them, and so, again, we used
45 Jamboard, and the sticky notes in blue were kind of the council
46 staff's first jab at some of the considerations that we should
47 be giving the FEIs, and the ones in yellow are from the
48 Ecosystem Technical Committee, and then we began grouping them

1 with the orange sticky notes and tried to narrow it down.
2 During this meeting, we came up with like four recommended
3 criteria.

4
5 There is work to be done, but there were some questions that
6 kept coming up during the meeting, in terms of what is going to
7 be -- What does the council find helpful, and so I want to --
8 This is the time that we can tweak and adjust, and I want to
9 hear from the committee, and does this list of potential FEIs --
10 What do you think about it, and do you still want the ETC to
11 propose four FEIs, or do you want to adjust that number of the
12 list, and is there anything on this list that we want to
13 completely scratch off, or are you not ready to make a decision
14 yet, and so, right now, the working list that we have right now
15 is reducing discards, offshore wind energy, red tide, finfish
16 depredation, impact of climate change on fishing communities,
17 and achieving optimum yield for the reef fish complex, and I can
18 stop here, Mr. Chair.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Does the committee have any ideas,
21 thoughts, on this potential list of fishery ecosystem issues?
22 Is there anything else that you want to see or replace any of
23 these? Susan.

24
25 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Thank you, Natasha, for the presentation. I
26 looked at this and made some notes last night, and, at the last
27 council meeting -- I really think that the discard issue is a
28 big issue for this council, and this fishery in the Gulf, and so
29 I would certainly like to see that, but I wanted to ask a
30 question about some of these, and I'm no expert, and so I do
31 apologize, but like offshore wind energy, and do we have enough
32 information to start anything, because there's really nothing
33 happening, but maybe we need to be proactive and look at what is
34 happening in other areas.

35
36 Climate change is certainly a huge one, and, again, I think
37 that's questionable, what is really happening to the fishery,
38 like cobia and king mackerel and these species that we've been
39 talking about for several years, and I think there's a lot of
40 heavy lifts here, especially if you keep six items on the list,
41 but those are just kind of my thoughts on some of these issues,
42 and, of course, red tide, I know, in south Florida is a big
43 issue, and so I don't know if there's a way that we could take
44 these six and prioritize them, if they all work in tandem
45 somehow, but those are just my random thoughts.

46
47 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs, and so that's where
48 the metrics, the prioritization metrics, would come in, and that

1 would help us rank how we should begin working on them. One of
2 the other things that I've been thinking about with the FEP is
3 that, you know, as we're going through the FEI loop, and we're
4 addressing some of these issues and concerns that are coming up,
5 they may not always lead to an amendment, right, but they might
6 provide additional rationale of why an alternative was selected
7 as preferred, for example, or like we listened to your concerns,
8 and we looked at it, and we have a section in our document about
9 it, but it might not directly translate to, you know, a change
10 in bag limits and things like that.

11
12 We can go to the next slide, if there are no other questions, so
13 we can talk about the metrics, and so, right now, we have the
14 recommended criteria are number and status of affected species
15 and resources, geographic scope, impacts to stakeholders, and
16 pathway to actionability within a reasonable timeframe.

17
18 We went through an exercise in which we chose -- We tried
19 ranking, and we used a metric of like one through five for each
20 one of these, but it is recognized that the ranking may not be -
21 - It might be something that might have to include multiple
22 groups, and it might not be done by the ETC themselves.

23
24 For example, they didn't feel that they were the most
25 appropriate group to rank impacts to stakeholders, but that
26 might be something that the O&E would be most appropriate to get
27 involved in, and the same thing with pathway to actionability
28 within a reasonable timeframe, and that might be something for
29 the council to be more involved in, given, you know, the various
30 actions that the council is currently working on, and so do you
31 agree on these, and, Susan, I think this kind of also tackles
32 your question. Like the number and status of species affected
33 and their geographic scope, and, when we look at these FEIs, we
34 can rank it.

35
36 This was hard, when we were having our meeting, and the ETC
37 requested some more time for them to work on this individually,
38 but one of the questions, or one of the things, that would
39 really helpful, when we're working on our next meeting, is if
40 there is one of these criteria that the council thinks should
41 have a higher weight, and then let us know, so that, when we're
42 developing the rubric, we can include -- We can give it a higher
43 number.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right, committee. Any thoughts on this
46 recommended -- The list of recommended criteria, the four items
47 here? I concur with Natasha's sentiment, and it's difficult,
48 and I attended the last ETC meeting, and there was some very

1 good discussion, but, you know, they had a little bit of
2 difficulty trying to set up this system, or get it to something
3 that could be a functioning system, as far as fishery ecosystem
4 issues. Any thoughts? Geographic scope -- Andy.

5
6 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Kevin. I think this is a good
7 list of criteria. You know, one that might be captured with the
8 fourth bullet, but what I'm thinking was kind of the neediest
9 thing of addressing the issue, right, is like how urgent, how
10 critical is it, to capture this, and so the pathway to
11 actionability, right, is the implementation component, and how
12 easily could it be implemented, but I think there needs to be an
13 immediacy component as well, because some of these are going to
14 be, I think, prioritized higher than others, just because of the
15 implications, or consequences, of the ecosystem challenge.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you for the comment. Anyone else? I
18 guess that I mentioned geographic scope, and so, Natasha, just
19 trying to think back to the meeting, and, you know, there were -
20 - Because of the complexity of the Gulf of Mexico, the dynamic
21 nature that it is, there was, and the species range in use,
22 there was some discussion about geographic scope, and I'm just
23 wondering, and can you recall, or can you talk a little bit
24 about that, relative to, you know, how we might want to put
25 emphasis, importance, because sometimes I think it's linked, you
26 know, really with each situation, and I just don't know if
27 geographic scope would be a high, I guess -- If it would be
28 labeled as a high criteria, is I guess what I'm trying to get
29 to.

30
31 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** I see your point, because, you know, with
32 geographic scope, with something that applies to the entire
33 Gulf, a higher ranking, versus something that only applies to
34 the West Florida Shelf, for example, and so that's something
35 that we can -- Within the rubric, we can hopefully figure out,
36 but then the other thing is, even though it may have a low
37 geographic score, it might be high on like number of status, or
38 like input in the urgency, and so, hopefully, with the other
39 criteria, we may be able to still capture the gravity, quote,
40 unquote, or the urgency of how we need to address that issue.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Do you want to continue?

43
44 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Yes, and we can go to the next slide. There
45 was also a request for the council to update the ecosystem
46 status report, and we figured that, because there are a
47 multitude of ecosystem efforts taking place at the same time,
48 that we should bring the ETC into the conversation, and so the

1 group recommends that the ecosystem status reports be used to
2 inform and identify fishery ecosystem issues and progress
3 towards goals.

4
5 There were some concerns about how big the ecosystem status
6 report should be, how, you know, the Science Center's workload,
7 but it seems like we're now moving towards automation, and
8 hopefully we can have like speedier information on these
9 indicators, and then we can include it into our FEIs.

10
11 Keeping this in mind, we have planned a webinar with the ETC,
12 hopefully in August, and what we plan to discuss there is we
13 give them the homework on the FEIs and the prioritization
14 metrics for them to work on on their own and then present in a
15 public forum what their recommendations are. We also need to
16 have another meeting to continue working on the FEP itself and
17 the FEI loops, since we didn't get a chance during the meeting
18 to work on those, and we spent most of the time trying to figure
19 out the potential FEIs that we were going to work with and how
20 to prioritize them.

21
22 We will continue keeping the O&E Technical Committee engaged,
23 but we're not quite ready to go out there in the community and
24 hash out a stakeholder engagement plan. The FEP is still a
25 little too high up in the air for us to be able to get, you
26 know, in the nitty-gritty of a stakeholder engagement plan, and,
27 when we go out to the community, we want to make sure that we're
28 presenting -- That we have clarity on how we're going to use
29 their input, and so maintaining the community engagement.

30
31 Then the ETC also suggested an annual discussion at the council,
32 and the ETC level, and so maybe having like some sort of annual
33 meeting, or designating a time within our annual schedule, that
34 we could have some ecosystem discussions and talk about new FEIs
35 and how to, I guess, keep the whole ecosystem conversation
36 going. That's all I have for now. If you have any questions
37 for me, or for Mandy, we're open, and hopefully we can answer
38 them for you.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Again, committee, any thoughts on
41 what Natasha had presented, as far as any of the recommended
42 criteria and the weighting of those, as well as the actual six
43 proposed FEIs, and does that list need to be amended, or does it
44 need to be reduced? I will give another chance for folks.
45 Susan.

46
47 **MS. BOGGS:** The council, at one time, had suggested four, and so
48 my thought, in looking at that list -- As I stated, some are

1 very heavy lifts, and if you could pick two of the lower-hanging
2 fruit and two of the bigger, but, if they work in tandem, it
3 might be better to put some of them together.

4
5 Then my next question is -- I'm not prepared to, and maybe at
6 Full Council, if needed, but do we need to make motions to give
7 them direction, or is this just something that just kind of
8 works?

9
10 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** That is a great question, and so, yes, if
11 you want to reduce the number from the recommendations for the
12 ETC, then I think a motion would be helpful. I think it is a
13 good idea to reduce the number, in the sense that we could focus
14 on maybe -- I don't want to say "low-hanging fruit", but it
15 would be a good test run on how the FEP -- You know, to help us
16 model the FEP better and, you know, focus our resources, and
17 hopefully then we can, you know, expand into more, rather than
18 be working on four FEIs at once.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Andy.

21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I don't have any specific recommendations for
23 how to weight the criteria, but, just kind of high-level
24 thinking through this, it seems like the impacts should be
25 weighted more heavily with regard to kind of what are the
26 consequences and the benefits of, obviously, the work that can
27 be done, as well as in the actionability component of that, and
28 so I just wanted to mention that.

29
30 Then if you could go back to Slide 8, and so I know these aren't
31 in a priority order, and kind of building off of Susan's
32 comment, there is potentially the ability to, I think, combine 1
33 and 4, right, because finfish depredation is a direct result of
34 reducing discards.

35
36 The other one I guess I'm struggling with is offshore wind
37 energy, and I understand why it's there, and I think the
38 struggle is more just kind of the council's role, at this point,
39 in terms of the ecosystem work that's ongoing, versus the
40 agency's role and, you know, how we're working with BOEM, and so
41 that might be another consideration that the council will want
42 to discuss, when we get the input back, is, you know, where do
43 we see kind of the actionability, from the council perspective,
44 directly tying into any sort of regulatory work.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Great. Thank you. Is there any other comments
47 that we need to -- Andy, do you want to maybe take a stab at a
48 motion about at least addressing the combining? I mean, does it

1 need to be two separate --

2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I guess my preference would be just to kind of
4 capture that, as you know, comments from the council, and pass
5 that back to the ecosystem team for consideration.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Dr. Simmons.

8
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I
10 think one thing that I think we're all kind of struggling with
11 here is these FEIs and the level of detail and magnitude they
12 should be, in order to make them, you know, applicable for our
13 management needs, and, even as a module, you know, that we could
14 use to inform the council's management decisions, is where I see
15 our first goal should be.

16
17 For Number 1, I mean, to me, that's just giant, and it's always
18 been a Reef Fish FMP objective, and it's in our IFQ, I think,
19 goals and objectives, and so, you know, I don't know, when we
20 start getting into the details of that, if it was going to be
21 broken down by sector, gear type, region, season, you know, and
22 so I think we probably need to have some more thought about
23 that, and I think it's good for folks to comment and provide
24 feedback, but I think we still need to provide the Ecosystem
25 Technical Committee some latitude and flexibility, as we work
26 through these with the management side of the house, where it
27 can help us inform those types of things, based on the data that
28 we have.

29
30 I think that's a struggle, for me, personally, and I think
31 others are also struggling with that as well, but I certainly
32 think any of this feedback we could continue to refine at the
33 next meeting, but perhaps, tomorrow, when we start talking about
34 some of the other reef fish items, we can think back, at Full
35 Council, on how some of these may interplay and help us inform
36 our management decisions, and so thanks.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Frazer.

39
40 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thanks, Kevin, and so, I mean, I'm just
41 listening to the discussion a little bit here, and there's a lot
42 on that list, obviously, and I agree with Carrie, and others,
43 you know, that discards is probably one of the biggest issues,
44 and I don't -- I would like to see it, you know, continue to
45 remain at the top, but, I guess, for a couple of reasons, and,
46 you know, we continually recognize that we have limited
47 resources, right, and this is a long list, and it's almost like
48 a wish list.

1
2 I'm hoping that the Ecosystem Committee might be able to think
3 about prioritizing the issues, and, from my own perspective, I
4 guess I would say, you know, reducing discards, and probably
5 impacts of climate change, are going to rise to the top, but,
6 with regard to the discards, for example, I mean, it essentially
7 affects every fishery that we have, and it's geographically, you
8 know, kind of omnipresent, I guess, but we don't really have a
9 good way of dealing with it, right, and so, if the Ecosystem
10 Technical Committee, or working group, could go back and look at
11 that issue, and maybe talk about some strategies that would
12 allow us to more effectively address the discard issues, using
13 the management tools that we have in place, I think that would
14 be helpful.

15
16 I was intrigued by a slide that was earlier in this that talks
17 about the loop itself, right, and there's this, you know, kind
18 of Item Number 3, where it says, well, how do we get there, and
19 there's, you know, recommend some research, and then you submit
20 an RFP to either the CRP, the Science Center, or whatever, and,
21 I mean, the council is not a funding body, right, and I've
22 always been concerned that we talk about, you know, we need this
23 research, but we haven't prioritized that research, and we
24 haven't put together a research plan.

25
26 I think the more effective way to influence the research kind
27 of, I guess, efforts would be to figure out, you know, how you
28 get these priority items in the funding stream somehow, whether,
29 you know, it's with a state agency, or whether it's a federal
30 level, and, again, I can't imagine we're just going to recommend
31 to the Science Center that they do five new projects, right,
32 and, I mean, their workload levels are real, and that means they
33 have to change priorities, drop something off the table, and so,
34 again, it's a long-winded thing, but I'm trying to figure out
35 how to make this group provide some value here and not just spin
36 their wheels, because, as Carrie said, it's huge, right, but I
37 think, if we could focus in on these kind of really, really big
38 issues, and start to prioritize, or at least compartmentalize,
39 where we might be able to provide some insights that would allow
40 us to have some manageable impacts, I think that would be good.

41
42 I don't know how to move that forward, necessarily, but that's
43 my suggestion, and, I mean, perhaps here we can agree on what
44 those list of items are, recognize that the list is long, and
45 don't spend a lot of time on, you know, Issues 4, 5, 6, 7, and
46 8, right, because we'll never get there, right, and I think
47 that's a problem that we have. Thanks.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Dr. Porch.

2
3 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** I appreciate very much Dr. Frazer's comments,
4 and I appreciate the council taking this on, and I think you
5 should be commended for this. The center itself is trying to
6 develop our ecosystem-based management strategic plan, and this
7 would be a very big part of it, how do we mesh with the councils
8 and the other drivers that we have.

9
10 Offshore wind energy, obviously, is going to continue to be a
11 high priority for us, because it's a priority of the
12 administration, but it doesn't mean that it has to be a priority
13 within this, and that's another driver that we have.

14
15 I think the main point that I want to come back to, that's kind
16 of been said already, is, for this fishery ecosystem plan, the
17 way it's designed, to be successful, the items that we would
18 pick as priorities really have to be things that the council
19 both is able to act on and willing to act on, and so discards
20 would be a great example of that. It's within your power to do
21 it, and there's an interest to do it, and so it makes sense for
22 that to be near the top of the list.

23
24 What we're afraid of, sometimes, and we've seen it in other
25 arenas, is, you know, people pick topics that are important, but
26 they don't have any ability to really influence, beyond writing
27 letters or something, and so what we would prefer is that, if
28 the council is weighing-in on this, that you pick things that
29 you really feel like that not only are important, but things you
30 can actually act on and make a difference on, because the worst
31 thing you can do is invest a lot of money and come up with all
32 these strategies and then it amounts to a letter-writing
33 campaign. Thank you.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you for your comments, and so I just
36 wanted to touch upon what you just said, and so I think Natasha
37 mentioned, during her presentation, about, you know, the
38 actionability, and that that, you know, might come back to the
39 council, as far as, you know, the weighting, or looking at the
40 list of topics, and that we would have those discussions with
41 each FEI that we brought, and hopefully be able to kind of, you
42 know, find our way though that and make sure that it is
43 something that isn't necessarily just going to be, you know, an
44 exercise in finding out something so that we can write a letter.

45
46 Going back to Tom's comments, you know, although I think there
47 was mention of, you know, having something come out of the
48 process of doing a loop, and kind of doing the investigation, if

1 you will, a deeper dive into some of these, the FEIs, and having
2 a product of that being some, you know, research ideas, or an
3 RFP proposal, or something like that, I don't think that's
4 necessarily the ultimate goal of that.

5
6 It might actually be to that, as you go through each of these
7 FEI investigations, I guess, at this point, but, you know, I
8 think everyone recognizes that there are limitations to
9 resources, limitations to data, and, you know, to the extent
10 that we can take each of these and, you know, have this
11 criteria, list of criteria, and be able to at least frame it as
12 to where we would put those initial resources to, as far as
13 meeting and coming to those discussions, to determine what is
14 there and what isn't there, and how do we proceed then, and, you
15 know, there still might be things that are there, or enough
16 there, that you could go forward with something and have it be
17 actionable.

18
19 Obviously, you may not have everything that you need, but I
20 don't know, and that's just my initial comments, is that it's
21 not an end-all-be-all just to try to find some more research
22 ideas. Susan.

23
24 **MS. BOGGS:** So, thinking about what Andy and Clay have said, and
25 this is just food for thought, and I'm not ready to make a
26 motion, and I'm just looking for maybe some feedback, but, if
27 you combined 1 and 4, and Clay stated that offshore wind energy
28 is already going to be something that they're looking at, and
29 remove it, and then maybe this is more of a question, but, as
30 you're working through these, do they not ultimately achieve
31 optimum yield for the reef fish complex, in which case you could
32 remove that?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Simmons.

35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, I
37 think it's good to get this feedback from the council, so we
38 have a good focus, but the other thing, logistically-wise, we're
39 trying to figure out is how to engage stakeholders, because we
40 don't want to get too far along with these before we do that,
41 and the right process for doing that, and we haven't figured
42 that out yet, because we don't know what we want to tell
43 stakeholders what we're going to do with these yet, and so we're
44 struggling a little bit internally, trying to figure out, you
45 know, which ones should come first, but I don't want us to get
46 so focused on these and come back with stakeholder input and we
47 totally switch gears.

1 I think we just should keep that broader picture in mind, and
2 we're going to engage with the O&E on that as well, and so we're
3 trying to figure out the best way to do that right now, and I
4 think Mandy's group did a series of workshops, and I don't know
5 if that's the right approach, but that was a lot of time and
6 effort, and I'm not sure that's our best bang for our buck, but
7 the council will certainly be involved in the best way that we
8 can move forward with that as well.

9

10 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Susan.

11

12 **MS. BOGGS:** So, Dr. Simmons, maybe I am confused, and so is the
13 council looking for -- Is council staff asking the council to
14 approve or disapprove or modify these things, or are you saying
15 are you all okay with this, and you want to take this out to the
16 stakeholders for feedback, and I think I'm confused now with
17 what the process is here, and I understand wanting to take it to
18 the stakeholders, but don't we need to decide first what that
19 is, or are you wanting the stakeholders to provide you feedback
20 on what it should be?

21

22 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** I am not considering this as a final list at
23 all, and the way that I interpreted the motion was that we
24 needed to have the prioritization metric -- Like propose the top
25 four FEIs, and there needs to be a rationale behind them, and
26 why they're being proposed, and so this is kind of like a
27 beginning -- Like a working list, right, and we need to rank
28 something, and so I guess I wanted to get feedback from the
29 committee of if you like where this is going, or is there
30 something that's like, well, I have a lot of concerns here.

31

32 Then, along the lines of the prioritization, I keep hearing the
33 discussion of urgency is something that the council cares about,
34 and so these are things that I can bring back to the ETC, so
35 that, when we finalize the ranking, I can bring those back to
36 you and say, hey, this is how this list ranks, based on this
37 criteria, and do you agree, and so that's why it's really hard
38 to, from just one meeting, to come in and say these are the
39 FEIs, and these are our concerns.

40

41 Then, once we have a clear idea, we would still need to engage
42 the community, although that's still a little unclear, in my
43 mind, and I don't know how we're going to do the stakeholder
44 engagement, but that's something that we're working with, you
45 know, Emily and the O&E.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Susan.

48

1 **MS. BOGGS:** So, basically, we, this council body, is a little
2 premature in doing anything with this, until you come back with
3 that prioritization, and is that what I just heard?

4
5 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Yes, but I wanted to -- You know, if you saw
6 something that was like -- This is an update, a status report,
7 right, and I don't like where this is going, or I really like
8 what you guys are doing, and keep it up, and then you can just
9 come back to me with that, and I'm just keeping you informed.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Just my perspective, again attending the ETC
12 meeting, you know, I think there was some discussion, during the
13 meeting, because they're, you know, a little unsure as to how
14 the process is going to, you know, shake out and go forward, but
15 inasmuch as, you know, trying to address the issue of, you know,
16 resources, data limitations, these types of things, you know, I
17 think there was some discussion about maybe, you know, throwing
18 up on the list, if you will, or having up on the list, an item
19 that would be relatively easy, in the grand scheme of things,
20 because you mentioned earlier, Natasha, that some of these are
21 very broad, and very large, and it would take up a lot of those
22 resources, and so, inasmuch as, you know, trying out the FEI
23 loop within the FEP, it's that maybe there is something that
24 isn't, you know, as far-reaching, or broad, as these appear to
25 be in that list, but, again, that would fall under then the
26 criteria and whether or not it would score, but there were lots
27 of ideas that, you know, came from a couple of different places,
28 as Natasha had in her presentation, but, you know, that's
29 something also to consider, I guess, as we go forward, is, if we
30 don't feel comfortable with these specific items --

31
32 Let's say, for instance, if they came back as being the top
33 four, based on the scoring criteria, you know, that's just
34 something to consider, I guess, and is there something else that
35 we would want to do, in order for it to be much more accepted,
36 or at least understood, how the process would go forward with
37 something that's a little smaller, a little bit easier lift, and
38 go through that, and that's just, again, something that was
39 discussed during the ETC. Any other comments or discussion on
40 this particular presentation? Dale.

41
42 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** I'm not on your committee, but I do want to say
43 that I thought Dr. Frazer's comments were excellent, and I like
44 the idea of trying to look at some actionable things. I thought
45 discards is, to me, the thing that we could get the biggest bang
46 for the buck from, and I think, right now, we're pecking away at
47 discards with different things, and this could be very
48 beneficial for this council, if we had a focused, coordinated

1 effort to go through and look at how we could make a big impact,
2 because, I mean, we could see huge impacts there.

3
4 Also, I agree with Dr. Porch, and I don't think wind energy --
5 That there's much that we're going to be able to do with wind
6 energy, and I think it's -- To me, it probably should not stay
7 on the list, but I like what the Ecosystem Technical Committee
8 has done so far, and I appreciate their hard work so far. Thank
9 you.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you for those comments, Dale, and that
12 reminds me, and, I guess, to what Natasha said earlier, is that
13 she would like a motion if we want to strike any of these, and
14 so, if there's any desire, at this time, within committee, to go
15 and modify -- To make a motion to modify the list that is
16 currently being considered, and now would be the time. Susan.

17
18 **MS. BOGGS:** Okay. Well, I guess I will make a motion. **I wasn't**
19 **ready to, and I was going to wait until Full Council, but, for**
20 **the ETC to remove offshore wind energy and achieving optimum**
21 **yield for the reef fish complex.**

22
23 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** We have a motion that will be on the board here
24 momentarily, and it's been seconded. Susan, that's your motion?

25
26 **MS. BOGGS:** It is.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Natasha.

29
30 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Can I suggest a few more words, if I may,
31 just to make it clearer, and to add to the motion "from the
32 working list of FEIs".

33
34 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right, and so we have a motion on the
35 board, and it's been seconded. Is there any discussion on the
36 motion? Andy.

37
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** If we're trying to reduce the list, I made the
39 suggestion about combining depredation and reducing discards,
40 and I agree, I think, with taking wind energy out, just because
41 of the lack of a direct nexus with the council. Optimum yield
42 continues to be a concept that's brought up regularly, and,
43 although I don't fully grasp exactly what is intended here, I
44 feel like it's important to maybe keep that in the list and go
45 through the prioritization exercise.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other discussion on the motion? Susan?
48 No? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the**

1 motion carries. Andy. **Andy is in opposition.** Susan.
2
3 **MS. BOGGS:** I would like to make another motion, but I need the
4 list back, Bernie. **To direct the Ecosystem Technical Committee**
5 **to combine reducing discards and finfish depredation on their**
6 **working list of FEIs.**
7
8 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** While staff is putting the motion on the board,
9 Dr. Simmons.
10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think, to
12 Mr. Strelcheck's point, I think the reason the group decided to
13 make this separate was that, when we get into finfish
14 depredation, it can involve marine mammals or highly-migratory
15 species, and so that one may be a little bit different than some
16 of the other efforts with discards.
17
18 Again, I struggle with like giving them some flexibility and not
19 making these so big that they're not meaningful, yet not so in
20 the minutia that we're doing the same thing through our FMP
21 process, and so I think there's a balance there, that we haven't
22 figured out just yet what these FEIs -- How large of a magnitude
23 they're going to look like as we go through the prioritization.
24 Maybe Natasha can fill in the gaps, but I think that was some of
25 the discussion that we had when we went through this process, or
26 maybe Mandy as well could help us with that.
27
28 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Andy.
29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** That's why I mentioned earlier just not being
31 prescriptive at this point, given where we're at in the process,
32 and let the process play out, but let them know that at least
33 this was a discussion with the council for consideration.
34
35 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Yes, I can capture that in the report, and
36 it's something that I can definitely bring to the ETC. I don't
37 think we need a motion on that right now, especially since what
38 Dr. Simmons had mentioned, the interactions with mammals and
39 other protected species, and those were some of the
40 considerations that we were planning on incorporating within the
41 ranking criteria.
42
43 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Susan.
44
45 **MS. BOGGS:** Well, we didn't get a second on the motion, and so
46 let me withdraw the motion, and then I have a question. If
47 these make the cut, once you go out to public -- Get the public
48 and stakeholder input, et cetera, can maybe later, if it looks

1 like they can work together, put them together, at a later date?
2 Okay.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Any other discussion on this agenda
5 item? Seeing none, that will take us to Agenda Item Number V,
6 and that's the SSC Recommendations on the Gulf of Mexico
7 Ecosystem Model to Support Fisheries Management, and that will
8 be Mr. Mareska.

9
10 **SSC RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE GULF OF MEXICO ECOSYSTEM MODEL TO**
11 **SUPPORT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**
12

13 **MR. JOHN MARESKA:** Doctors Sagarese and Holden Harris presented
14 a Gulf-wide ecosystem model to address the ecological questions
15 of how biomass targets could be achieved by modification of
16 fishing pressure. It was based on the menhaden purse seine
17 fishery and the predators of Gulf menhaden.

18
19 They presented the Ecopath and Ecosim components, as well as
20 Ecospace. Overall, they felt that the models could still be
21 improved, looking at species overlap and bycatch, the size of
22 prey items being consumed by the different sized predators,
23 environmental drivers, and then alternate configurations and
24 then a robust review of the model itself. They felt like this
25 was the path forward to incorporation of the fishery ecosystem
26 plan, and they also needed identification of fishery ecosystem
27 issues, such as climate change and bycatch reduction and changes
28 in habitat. Questions?

29
30 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any questions from the committee? I don't see
31 any. All right, and so, John, thank you very much. That
32 concludes the last item in the agenda, other than Other
33 Business, and is there any business not on the agenda that
34 anybody needs to bring? We have plenty of time. Seeing none,
35 Mr. Chair, that concludes Ecosystem.

36
37 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 5, 2023.)
38

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40