

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2  
3 GULF SEDAR COMMITTEE

4  
5 Doubletree by Hilton Austin Austin, Texas

6  
7 APRIL 6, 2016

8  
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

10 Kevin Anson.....Alabama  
11 Pamela Dana.....Florida  
12 John Greene.....Alabama  
13 Campo Matens.....Louisiana

14  
15 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

16 Martha Bademan (designee for Nick Wiley).....Florida  
17 Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi  
18 Doug Boyd.....Texas  
19 Jason Brand.....USCG  
20 Glenn Constant.....USFWS  
21 Roy Crabtree.....NMFS, SERO, St. Petersburg, Florida  
22 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi  
23 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC  
24 Myron Fischer (designee for Patrick Banks).....Louisiana  
25 Kelly Lucas (designee for Jamie Miller).....Mississippi  
26 Robin Riechers.....Texas  
27 John Sanchez.....Florida  
28 Greg Stunz.....Texas  
29 Ed Swindell.....Louisiana  
30 David Walker.....Alabama  
31 Roy Williams.....Florida

32  
33 **STAFF**

34 Steven Atran.....Senior Fishery Biologist  
35 Assane Diagne.....Economist  
36 Douglas Gregory.....Executive Director  
37 Karen Hoak.....Administrative and Financial Assistant  
38 Ava Lasseter.....Anthropologist  
39 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel  
40 Emily Muehlstein.....Fisheries Outreach Specialist  
41 Ryan Rindone.....Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison  
42 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager  
43 Carrie Simmons.....Deputy Director

44  
45 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

46 Pam Anderson.....PCBA, Panama City, FL  
47 Greg Ball.....Galveston, TX  
48 Chris Blankenship.....AL

1 Steve Branstetter.....NMFS  
2 Gary Bryant.....Gulf Shores, AL  
3 Bubba Cochrane.....GMSA  
4 Chris Conklin.....SAFMC  
5 Mike Garcia.....Austin, TX  
6 Bill Kelly.....FKCFA, FL  
7 Neal Meinzer.....Austin, TX  
8 Bart Niquet.....Lynn Haven, FL  
9 Mike Nugent..Port Aransas Boatmen's Association, Port Aransas, TX  
10 Clay Porch.....SEFSC  
11 Brandi Reeder.....TPWD  
12 Scott Sanderson.....Austin, TX  
13 Dave Sullivan.....Port Aransas Boatmen's Association, TX  
14 Ed Walker.....FL  
15 Daniel Willard.....EDF, Austin, TX  
16 Ted Venker.....CCA, TX

17  
18  
19

- - -

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1  
2  
3 Table of Contents.....3  
4  
5 Table of Motions.....4  
6  
7 Adoption of Agenda.....5  
8  
9 Approval of Minutes.....5  
10  
11 Action Guide and Next Steps.....5  
12  
13 SEDAR Steering Committee Review.....5  
14  
15 Discussion of Fiscal Year 2016 Completed and Planned Assessment  
16 Guide.....14  
17  
18 SEDAR Schedule Review.....23  
19  
20 Adjournment.....35  
21  
22 - - -  
23

TABLE OF MOTIONS

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

PAGE 25: Motion to recommend to the Council Chair and Executive Director that an assessment of king mackerel be conducted in 2018 in conjunction with the Gulf of Mexico large marine ecosystem joint project with Mexico of the same species. The motion carried on page 26.

PAGE 26: Motion to propose for the 2019 schedule the following species, gray triggerfish, at the appropriate level. The motion carried on page 28.

PAGE 30: Motion to add cobia to the 2019 schedule. The motion carried on page 30.

PAGE 30: Motion to add Spanish mackerel to the 2019 schedule. The motion carried on page 30.

PAGE 30: Motion to add yellowedge grouper and tilefish to the 2019 schedule. The motion carried on page 30.

- - -

1 The Gulf SEDAR Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel,  
3 Austin, Texas, Wednesday morning, April 6, 2016, and was called  
4 to order at 8:52 a.m. by Chairman Kevin Anson.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN KEVIN ANSON:** The next committee on the agenda is the  
11 Gulf SEDAR Committee. We have Pam Dana is here, Camp is here,  
12 Johnny is here. We need to adopt the agenda as the first item  
13 on the agenda. Are there any changes to the agenda? Would  
14 someone like to add anything to the agenda? Pam.

15  
16 **DR. PAMELA DANA:** Chairman Anson, there's a handout. I don't  
17 know if everyone has a copy of that in front of them, but there  
18 is a Fiscal Year 2016 Completed and Planned Assessment Guide  
19 that I was hoping we could go over.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Yes, everyone should have a  
22 handout. I think there was also an email that we sent out.  
23 That would be a motion to add that as an agenda item, and  
24 possibly maybe put it before Item IV and V. that might fit in  
25 there, I think, best. Is there a second to Pam's motion? Camp  
26 seconds. Any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, that is  
27 added. Anything else that needs to be added to the agenda? If  
28 there is no opposition to accepting the agenda as modified, I  
29 will go ahead. I don't see any opposition.

30  
31 The next item is Approval of Minutes, Tab I, Number 2. Are  
32 there any changes to the minutes from the previous meeting?  
33 Seeing none, I will see that -- Dr. Dana.

34  
35 **DR. DANA:** Move to approve.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Move to approve, and it's seconded by Mr.  
38 Greene. Any opposition to the motion to approve the minutes as  
39 written? Seeing none, the motion carries. Next is you will see  
40 in Tab I, Number 3 is the Action Guide and Next Steps for this  
41 committee meeting. Item Number IV, Mr. Gregory, is the SEDAR  
42 Steering Committee Review.

43  
44 **SEDAR STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEW**  
45

46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUGLAS GREGORY:** There is a PowerPoint or a  
47 PDF in your briefing book. The SEDAR Steering Committee met  
48 twice this past fall. We had an in-person meeting in Charleston

1 at the end of September. That was followed up at the end of  
2 October with a webinar, and I'm going to touch base on just a  
3 few of the things.

4  
5 We covered the Best Practices Workshop, the Southeast Fisheries  
6 Science Center Data and Assessment Program Reviews, and, since  
7 then, they have also had an ecosystem review that Morgan and I  
8 participated in. We discussed the assessment prioritization,  
9 that you've seen presented to you a couple of times in the past,  
10 and the SEDAR SOPPs, which is a proposal from the Center to  
11 change the way our assessments are done.

12  
13 There was a discussion of stock assessment resource availability  
14 and then the assessment schedule. Ryan will go over the  
15 assessment schedule after I give this presentation, and the  
16 three things I'm going to really talk about is the best  
17 practices overview, the assessment prioritization, and the  
18 change in the way the SEDAR assessments are being proposed.

19  
20 First, the Best Practices Workshop, this was convened in  
21 Atlanta, and the goal was to increase the assessment timeliness  
22 and efficiency. I think most of us are aware of some of the  
23 difficulties we've had with some of the assessments, getting  
24 information completed at the various workshops we've had, and so  
25 the Science Center is looking hard at how to improve the overall  
26 process.

27  
28 One way to do that is to identify common decisions that are made  
29 in data workshops and to have them as standard practices to go  
30 into an assessment without having to reevaluate them every time.  
31 That's a little different than the philosophy of the original  
32 benchmark assessment, which was to completely reevaluate  
33 everything every time you do a benchmark.

34  
35 The recommendations from this Best Practices Workshop, and we  
36 had SSC members participating in this, but the recommendation  
37 was to create a Best Practices Panel, so this is an ongoing  
38 effort, and they would meet at least annually. Also, they want  
39 to convene a Stock ID Workshop sometime this year, as they  
40 identified stock identification, the migratory groups and are  
41 they separate stocks, as a primary concern in doing the stock  
42 assessments. As we get more and more genetic sophistication in  
43 our analyses, we're finding out there is more stocks than we  
44 previously thought, and it has a major impact on the  
45 assessments.

46  
47 They recommended a second workshop should address either discard  
48 mortality or the effects of reproductive inputs on reference

1 points, with the priority being the topic most influential on  
2 the assessment uncertainty. The decision hasn't been as to what  
3 kind of second workshop to do.

4  
5 They also recommended, or the Science Center is considering,  
6 doing something similar with stock assessments, having an  
7 Assessment Best Practices Workshop. That's the end of that.

8  
9 The next topic is the SEDAR stocks, which I've got labeled here  
10 as the research cycle assessments. This was presented at the  
11 Steering Committee. It was discussed briefly by our SSC, and,  
12 in talking with Dr. Porch yesterday, I think there is -- We're  
13 going to have more discussion about that here, because there  
14 apparently might have been some misunderstanding as to how this  
15 is supposed to operate, but I will go through this.

16  
17 A research cycle is to be the equivalent to a benchmark  
18 assessment. In other words, you have your three workshops and  
19 you have your independent reviews, and you produce the best  
20 assessment you can do with the available data. The main  
21 difference is, that got our attention, is no management  
22 recommendations come from this assessment.

23  
24 This assessment is used as the standard. Then, from that  
25 assessment, updates may be annual updates. What they are now  
26 terming operational assessments are provided to the council. In  
27 the long run, once the research assessment is done, unless  
28 something is identified in it that requires another one fairly  
29 quickly, that research assessment will be used to provide annual  
30 updates to the council, which could be beneficial, like red  
31 snapper, and now we're looking at king mackerel, where you have  
32 three five-year projections that are based on some assumptions  
33 that could change or not be fulfilled, such as harvesting all  
34 the fish.

35  
36 More frequent assessments, or updates, would give us increased  
37 yields in the future. We saw that with red snapper a couple of  
38 years ago, when we did what we called reruns. I was on the SSC  
39 at the time.

40  
41 The concerns that have been identified, both by us, staff, and  
42 the SSC was the amount of time required to do a research cycle.  
43 Is this going to take away from the frequency of assessments  
44 we're getting now, which most of us feel are not frequent  
45 enough, and so that was a concern, and Dr. Porch is going to  
46 address that.

47  
48 Consequently, the overall impact on productivity. Is the

1 potential short-term costs of getting less frequent assessments  
2 now going to be overwhelmed by getting more frequent assessments  
3 in the future? My understanding is that that short-term concern  
4 that I'm expressing here may not actually be true, and so it's  
5 something for us to talk about today.

6  
7 We were told at the Steering Committee that the Southeast  
8 Fisheries Science Center would present this to the SSC. At the  
9 SEDAR Steering Committee, we had like a five or six or eight-  
10 slide presentation. That was not presented to the SSC, and so  
11 it was more of a general discussion, and some of the people on  
12 the SSC had similar concerns that we have on the staff, that the  
13 research cycle will slow down the number of assessments for the  
14 next three to five years. We will definitely talk more about  
15 that today, because it's very critical to all of our concerns.

16  
17 The next topic I wanted to talk about was the assessment  
18 prioritization, and we've had a number of presentations with  
19 this. The SSC has had two, and I think we've had two. The  
20 SEDAR Steering Committee had one at this meeting. The Council  
21 Coordinating Committee has had two or three presentations.

22  
23 All along, I have expressed concern. We'll go through this real  
24 quickly, but the idea is to look at various components of a  
25 fishery and try to weigh what components would cause a fishery  
26 to have a high priority for an assessment or a low priority.

27  
28 The idea is to look at factors associated with stocks and also  
29 develop weights for those factors. My concern is, as we'll see  
30 in the next slide, the proposal is for the councils to be quite  
31 involved in this. The concern I've expressed is that I do not  
32 want our SSC to be bogged down for another year or two trying to  
33 develop basically subjective factors and weights on which  
34 assessments should go first, when it's ultimately going to be  
35 the council's decision anyway.

36  
37 This will be one criteria the council would use to set its  
38 assessment schedule, and so I'm pushing hard for the Southeast  
39 Fisheries Center to be the ones to go through this and come up  
40 with the subjective factors and weightings and have our SSC  
41 review it, rather than have our SSC develop them from scratch,  
42 because that can take a very long time. You're asking  
43 scientists to develop subjective-type indices that together  
44 makes for an objective analysis, but it can be very time  
45 consuming, and I think we have a better use for our SSC.

46  
47 Unless there is some disagreement with that assessment on my  
48 part, that's what I will take to the Steering Committee when we

1 meet in May. Again, the prioritization method will be but one  
2 aspect of the council's decision as to what the actual  
3 assessment priority is, and so this is not intended -- The way  
4 it's been presented, it's not intended to supplant the council's  
5 decision as to what species to assess when.

6  
7 Like I said, the staff concern is the amount of time on the SSC,  
8 and possibly the council, that would be required to develop  
9 these factors and these weightings. If you all want another in-  
10 depth presentation on this, Ryan or I could give that to you at  
11 a future time.

12  
13 What we need from the council is some guidance to the Chair and  
14 to myself to take to the May Steering Committee meeting  
15 regarding the proposed research assessment cycle and the  
16 proposed assessment prioritization. With that, I would welcome  
17 any questions or, if you would prefer, if Dr. Porch would  
18 prefer, for him to explain the research cycle more, because I  
19 think that is probably a more important subject of the two  
20 that's before us. Dr. Porch, what would be your preference?

21  
22 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** I'm happy to go now.

23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** Is that okay, Mr. Chair?

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Go ahead, Dr. Porch.

27  
28 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you. I think there was some miscommunication,  
29 including when the presentation would be made to the SSC, and so  
30 you just kind of got an oral update there, but our plan is  
31 actually to make a full presentation, expanding on what was  
32 shown to the Steering Committee, with a timeline, a proposed  
33 timeline, at the next SSC meeting in I think it's June now.

34  
35 I think it's next week when the South Atlantic SSC is meeting.  
36 They're going to get a similar presentation. That's in the  
37 works, but, just to kind of give you a flavor of what we're  
38 actually intending, first, I want you to keep in mind that in  
39 the Southeast that we integrate data from more sources and more  
40 partners than anywhere else in the country.

41  
42 You can sort of think of it like if you gave a tailor one nice  
43 piece of cloth and said make a shirt out of it, and then you  
44 gave another tailor thirty different little pieces of cloth and  
45 said make a shirt out of this, which one do you think is going  
46 to make a shirt faster?

47  
48 That's one of the challenges we have in the Southeast. We have

1 so many partners and so many little pieces of information from  
2 each fishery that we're trying to stitch together that it takes  
3 a while, and one of the big bottlenecks we have is in the data  
4 processing of the fishery data, and so that's our Fisheries  
5 Statistics Group. They have relatively few people and lots of  
6 pieces of data to try and provide for three different councils,  
7 HMS sharks, and so the NMFS HMS Division acts like a council for  
8 sharks, and the International Commission for the Conservation of  
9 Atlantic Tuna.

10  
11 There is five entities that they're trying to provide data to,  
12 and so what we're trying to do is lessen that load. It would be  
13 great if we can get more resources to give them more personnel  
14 to serve all those institutions, but, in the meantime, we're  
15 trying to lessen that load, and one of the things that chews up  
16 an awful lot of their time are these benchmark assessments in  
17 the SEDAR process.

18  
19 The problem with the benchmark is they're trying to provide the  
20 most up-to-date data, but then, during the benchmark process,  
21 decisions are made like a change in stock structure or a change  
22 in the way we aggregate different fleets in the model, and the  
23 Fisheries Statistics folks have to go back and recalculate  
24 everything, and sometimes that happens a couple of times during  
25 the cycle.

26  
27 What we're trying to do with the research track is avoid them  
28 having to do that, because we don't necessarily need the very  
29 last year of data for the research track. It's mostly a  
30 conceptual development of what's the best way to model and  
31 assess this particular stock, and so we can just focus on the  
32 science aspects and not worry about trying to meet a deadline,  
33 and, also, by not worrying about getting a deadline, we can  
34 actually give it the full attention it's due, because there's  
35 this sort of competing thing in a benchmark that you're trying  
36 to develop the best assessment model that takes into account all  
37 the things that all the consultants and fishermen are bringing  
38 to the table.

39  
40 At the same time, you've got a real deadline to produce the  
41 scientific advice, and so sometimes you have to say, well, we  
42 can't really look at this particular issue now, because, if we  
43 do, we're not going to finish on time. We always have those  
44 competing objectives.

45  
46 With the research track assessment, you're not worried about  
47 getting the management advice. You're just worried about  
48 getting the science right, and so we expect better assessments.

1 At the same time, that's kind of run in the background. It  
2 would not interfere with the current productivity rate, and I  
3 think that's a message that may have gotten lost in there.

4  
5 In fact, we did our own calculations, and by the savings we get  
6 running a research track assessment, we probably could actually  
7 step up production a little bit from what it is now initially  
8 and a lot as, as Doug mentioned, that Best Practices Workshop  
9 begins to take effect and we start to automate some of these  
10 processes.

11  
12 Right now, different working groups make different decisions,  
13 which obviously is a big burden on the data processing staff.  
14 If we came to an agreement on what's the best approach to handle  
15 this particular piece of data, you can start automating these  
16 things and gain a lot of efficiencies there, and so, in the long  
17 run, I expect our production would increase quite a bit. Of  
18 course, if we can get a couple more personnel to help process  
19 that data, then it would increase even more.

20  
21 Now, the operational part of this cycle would be much more like  
22 what the Alaska Fisheries Science Center does, the North Pacific  
23 Fishery Management Council, except, in our case, the data is a  
24 lot more complicated. We have eight states and multiple  
25 partners, as opposed to one state and large reduction fisheries.

26  
27 Our situation will always be more complex, and our production  
28 rate would not match somewhere like Alaska, just by virtue of  
29 the complexity of the fisheries, but I think we can get a little  
30 bit closer by going this operational assessment approach, where,  
31 as Doug described it, all the parameters for how you conduct the  
32 assessment are determined during the research cycle. Then we  
33 just do it exactly the same way.

34  
35 Occasionally, there might be a need to tweak things, and as long  
36 as the SSC is comfortable with the kind of changes that are  
37 being proposed, I think we just go on similar to what an update  
38 is now. In that case, you're talking about a few months to  
39 conduct an assessment and not a year, like a benchmark typically  
40 takes. Let's see if there's any other points that I wanted to  
41 make there.

42  
43 I think that about covers it in terms of the research and  
44 operational assessment. We did, like I said, we have a  
45 preliminary timeline, which looks like we can do probably more  
46 than an assessment per person per year with our current  
47 personnel, and we can step that up even further if we can get a  
48 couple more personnel onboard. With that, do we have any

1 questions about the research and operational cycles?

2

3 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Lucas.

4

5 **DR. KELLY LUCAS:** We've discussed a little bit about it slowing  
6 down assessments. I mean what does that look like? Does that  
7 look like we don't get any stock assessments for three or five  
8 years and then all of a sudden, that year five, you start  
9 running ten assessments or providing ten updates? I mean what  
10 does it look like?

11

12 **DR. PORCH:** It won't slow down the assessment process at all  
13 now. In fact, I expect, even in the short term, that it will  
14 increase, because we won't have benchmarks on the schedule.

15

16 A research track assessment, for the lead analyst, is about  
17 equivalent to a benchmark, but it's much less work for the data  
18 processors, and so, overall, I think our assessment output would  
19 increase as soon as we get it implemented, unless, for some  
20 reason, the SEDAR Steering Committee elected to make all new  
21 assessments research track assessments. Then it would slow it  
22 down, but there's no reason to do that. It's basically  
23 equivalent to a benchmark, and so, unless you're really  
24 concerned about a particular stock, you don't need to have  
25 another research track assessment.

26

27 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** To further that point that I guess Dr. Lucas  
28 was getting to, in your timeline that you're going to bring to  
29 the SSCs, and certainly we would like we see it here at the  
30 council, possibly for the June meeting, will you have a timeline  
31 of the current process relating to the same number of staff and  
32 the research cycle five years out and this is how many research  
33 cycles we'll do and this is what the assessments we'll have  
34 potentially at the end of the five years and then going through  
35 the status quo process right now, to see what that would  
36 potentially look like with the same number of employees, because  
37 you know I realize if you get more people that you're going to  
38 be able to produce more, but here, as of late, when we've been  
39 talking about prioritizing and setting up species on the cycle,  
40 we essentially get five slots.

41

42 A benchmark assessment, as we were told, if I recollect  
43 correctly, is two slots, typically. Then updates and standard  
44 updates are one slot, and so, depending upon what species needs  
45 a benchmark or how many species need a benchmark, that will  
46 determine how many assessments you will end up with during that  
47 particular year, and so that's what I would like to see, is what  
48 we can expect under the current system, a timeline and the

1 output, and then output with the new research cycle.

2  
3 **DR. PORCH:** I think our thought was to compare it with the  
4 immediate past, because it's simply hard to anticipate what the  
5 council is going to ask for. It depends on which benchmark and  
6 how many slots it would take.

7  
8 For instance, something like red snapper, it really is two  
9 stocks, east and west, and there's so many pieces of information  
10 to go into that one. It is easily the equivalent of two regular  
11 benchmarks, but when you're doing some other species, where you  
12 may have less data, then you can probably do two or three where  
13 you could do red snapper, and so a slot is not a slot.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I understand that, but just kind of make it  
16 either very obvious in the description when you talk about the  
17 two different output efficiencies and impacts that one species  
18 may have over the other, as long as it's the same as far as the  
19 species make-up during that time schedule, we have a pretty good  
20 idea as to that -- Apples-to-apples I guess is what --

21  
22 **DR. PORCH:** Right. We'll make a point to do that.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Anyone else have any questions  
25 regarding the research cycle as Dr. Porch had described? I just  
26 want to make sure you intend to come back to the council to  
27 discuss that summary, I guess, and what you're going to be  
28 providing to the SSCs and you will be -- Do you intend to bring  
29 that back to the councils as well?

30  
31 **DR. PORCH:** Yes, absolutely.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Did you want to go over the  
34 prioritization schedule, Dr. Porch? Do you have any comments on  
35 that?

36  
37 **DR. PORCH:** The only comment I have there is that I think we're  
38 already planning on moving forward to help in that  
39 prioritization process and fill out those tables, and so we're  
40 kind of expecting that.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Riechers.

43  
44 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** We've kind of been back and forth on this  
45 prioritization in the past, especially regarding the Center's  
46 desire to look at more what we'll call data-poor stocks, as  
47 opposed to our desire to hit the four or five that we routinely  
48 deal with around this table and get those more frequently.

1  
2 I guess, while I agree with Doug's perspective of I don't know  
3 that we need to go and have our SSC spend a lot of time on this  
4 exercise, I would just hope that the Center at least thinks  
5 about what the council has already provided you in feedback  
6 before you go into these rankings. Otherwise, it's going to be  
7 an exercise in futility for anybody who goes about it, because  
8 it's going to get to us and we're going to have problems with it  
9 again.

10  
11 I would just hope that people will -- The Center considers the  
12 feedback you've already received from us countless times,  
13 because, otherwise, we're going to come back with a report  
14 that's not going to be very helpful in us moving down the road  
15 to getting more stock assessments.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Doug, did you want to continue?  
18

19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** That completed what I was going to  
20 present. The other thing we have on the agenda is the actual  
21 schedule of assessments that we've discussed before and had at  
22 the SEDAR meeting. Do you want us to do that or do you want to  
23 do the other thing first?  
24

25 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I would like to do the additional item at this  
26 point then. We did amend the agenda to include a discussion on  
27 the national -- From a national view, the number of assessments  
28 completed and planned and then some discussions that occurred  
29 during the National State Directors meeting, and Mr. Chris  
30 Blankenship from Alabama Marine Resources Division attended that  
31 meeting, and he's going to take over this agenda item.  
32

33 **DISCUSSION OF FISCAL YEAR 2016 COMPLETED AND PLANNED ASSESSMENT**  
34 **GUIDE**  
35

36 **MR. CHRIS BLANKENSHIP:** Thank you, Chairman Anson, for allowing  
37 me to join you at the adult table, instead of having to sit out  
38 in the audience. I appreciate the opportunity to talk a little  
39 bit about the assessment schedule.  
40

41 Several of the people around the table were at the National  
42 State Directors Meeting in March in New Orleans, and one of the  
43 things that we discussed at the meeting was stock assessments.  
44 Dr. Richard Merrick gave a presentation on the stock assessments  
45 scheduled and the prioritization, just like you've seen today,  
46 but one of the things that we discussed and asked him to provide  
47 are the numbers of assessments that are being done from the  
48 other regions of the country, from the other Science Centers.

1  
2 I was somewhat shocked to see the difference in the numbers of  
3 assessments that are being done in other parts of the country  
4 compared to what's being done here in the Southeast. I know our  
5 goal, for all of us, to have better and more frequent stock  
6 assessments, especially on the species that are discussed at  
7 length around this table.

8  
9 If you look at page 2 of the handout, and it's the one that says  
10 "Assessments This Quarter", and that's just kind of a synopsis  
11 of what was done in 2015. In the Northeast, there were twenty-  
12 nine assessments that were completed. In the Southeast, there  
13 were eleven. In the Northwest, there were seventy-five. Then  
14 in Alaska, I think there were sixty-seven, if you add those  
15 numbers across. That's a big difference in the other regions  
16 compared to the Southeast.

17  
18 Then, on the first page, the FY2016 Completed and Planned  
19 Assessments, that was a slide that was included in Dr. Merrick's  
20 presentation. Those are the assessments that are planned for  
21 this fiscal year for the different areas. The Southeast does  
22 have twenty-four assessments planned this year. I think nine of  
23 those are data-poor stocks that are being assessed, but it still  
24 is far less than the Northeast, the Northwest, and Alaska.

25  
26 Of those, what we've been getting out of the Gulf -- What we've  
27 been getting out of the Southeast Science Center averages a  
28 little bit less than ten or eleven stock assessments a year. Of  
29 those ten or eleven, about two of those are Gulf species per  
30 year, and so that is a concern that we have in Alabama and I  
31 think many of you have a concern. We would like to find some  
32 solutions to that, to increase the productivity from the  
33 Southeast Science Center to get us better and more frequent  
34 assessments on the species that we deal with in the Gulf.

35  
36 It sounds like Dr. Porch had some method to do that, but I just  
37 wanted to point out this issue, because it was discussed at the  
38 meeting, and a lot of the council members may or may not know  
39 the disparity in the assessments that are being done in other  
40 parts of the country, and that we would like to work towards a  
41 solution to find how we could have better and more frequent  
42 assessments here in the Southeast.

43  
44 I am looking at the future schedule, which is not included on  
45 the handout, but I think it -- I guess it was included in the  
46 material that was provided. Looking at 2016, 2017, 2018, and  
47 2019, we're still only looking at one or two assessments a year,  
48 no more than two for the Gulf.

1 I heard discussion yesterday about triggerfish. Lord willing  
2 and the creek don't rise, we might could have another  
3 triggerfish assessment maybe sometime in 2020 or 2021, which it  
4 seems an awful long distance in the future, considering the  
5 discussion that we had about that species yesterday.

6  
7 With that, I just wanted to provide that information from the  
8 National State Directors Meeting. I would be glad to take any  
9 questions or listen to comments from Clay or anyone else about  
10 how we can make improvements in that process.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I have Dr. Dana first and then followed by Roy.

13  
14 **DR. DANA:** Thank you, Chris. What is your sense, or what was  
15 the sense of the directors, as to why there's such a disparity  
16 between the regions? Is it a staffing issue or --

17  
18 **MR. BLANKENSHIP:** There was not a good answer on that difference  
19 between the areas. We've asked Paul Doremus, from the stock  
20 assessment line item in the budget, how that is allocated  
21 between Science Centers, that we can see if it's a funding issue  
22 or if it's a staff issue or if there's something that we can do  
23 to help increase productivity from the Southeast, and we're  
24 hoping to get that information from him before the June council  
25 meeting.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Williams.

28  
29 **MR. ROY WILLIAMS:** A follow-up on that. Clay, to some degree,  
30 referenced that earlier, in the sense that some of these  
31 northern regions have bigger masses and fewer species of fish.  
32 In some ways, it's somewhat easier.

33  
34 We have a lot of species of fish and smaller masses of them,  
35 divided among a lot of different states, but, Clay, do you have  
36 any sense as to how many assessment people they have compared to  
37 what we have, like in the Northeast region and Alaska, the  
38 Northwest region? Are they manned better than we are in this  
39 region, in terms of numbers?

40  
41 **DR. PORCH:** I don't have updated statistics, but both Alaska and  
42 the Northeast have more assessment folks than we do by a fairly  
43 large margin. The other thing you have to keep in mind is  
44 assessments aren't all equal.

45  
46 Just in the few minutes I had to review this here, I would point  
47 out that a lot of the other assessments, in both the Pacific and  
48 the Northeast, are actually also data-poor assessments. In the

1 case of Alaska and the Pacific Fishery Management Council, a  
2 large fraction of those are salmon assessments, and it's a  
3 salmon assessment for each stream, and so you've got people  
4 standing there counting fish. It's a lot easier than a stock  
5 assessment that we're doing.

6  
7 We really need to -- If you're looking at something like this,  
8 you need to look at like with like, and that's not what you're  
9 getting here. If there was a desire to, probably the same folks  
10 that put this together could kind of compare things in a more  
11 equal metric, like looking at the complexity of the assessments.

12  
13 Other examples, in the case of the Pacific Fishery Management  
14 Council, you have two Centers for one council. The Southwest  
15 and the Northwest both serve that one council, and, as I  
16 mentioned before, we've got one Center serving three councils  
17 and NMFS HMS and the International Commission for the  
18 Conservation of Atlantic Tuna, with fewer people. Obviously  
19 it's a challenge. We're spread pretty thin.

20  
21 In the case of the Gulf, I have five lead analysts that split  
22 time with the Gulf and the Caribbean, and so you're not going to  
23 crank out that many assessments with those, and that's not even  
24 the primary bottleneck. The big bottleneck is in the fisheries  
25 statistics processing, which we're working on making more  
26 efficient, but, with current staffing levels, we're not going to  
27 approach the rate that Alaska does.

28  
29 We don't have salmon assessments, where we're counting fish in  
30 individual streams, and so so every stream counts, and the large  
31 reduction fisheries they have and things like hake and pollock  
32 and all of that, it's relatively few large boats, the same basic  
33 fisheries, no recreational fishing to speak of. It's just a  
34 much simpler situation. It's much easier to crank out  
35 assessments there.

36  
37 They have good people and they're high-quality assessments, but  
38 it's a much easier situation. You can't compare. They don't  
39 have to worry about discards like we do and all of these things.

40  
41 **MR. WILLIAMS:** One follow-up. Would you say -- Are there four  
42 NMFS regions, the Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, and  
43 Southwest? Is that the four regions? No, the Alaska region  
44 too, I guess. Of the regions, would you say that we are last in  
45 terms of the number of assessment people?

46  
47 **DR. PORCH:** The Pacific Islands has fewer, but they only do  
48 data-poor assessments. They don't have any so-called data-rich

1 assessments.

2  
3 **MR. WILLIAMS:** So other than that, we would be last in terms of  
4 the number of assessment people?

5  
6 **DR. PORCH:** I don't know if we're behind the Southwest, but  
7 remember the Southwest and the Northwest both serve the one  
8 council.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I have a few people. Dr. Lucas, Dr. Crabtree,  
11 and then Dr. Stunz.

12  
13 **DR. LUCAS:** Thanks, Clay. One of the things that was pointed  
14 out at the directors meeting was the fact that a lot of the  
15 assessments that we're doing down here are benchmark  
16 assessments, which do take a longer time. I think one of our  
17 concerns was, and in looking at the last page, page 5 on this,  
18 that kind of shows the mean years between assessments, I think  
19 some of our concern was you oftentimes have no choice but to do  
20 a benchmark if you're going seventeen years or eight years or  
21 five years between these assessments.

22  
23 Really, by the time you've let it go that long, you honestly  
24 don't really have a choice to do an update, and so I was -- Will  
25 your research cycles, in doing this, how many of these species  
26 do you plan on getting through the research cycle so that you  
27 could potentially just provide updates on a yearly basis? I  
28 mean what do you see as a goal for that helping improve this?

29  
30 **DR. PORCH:** Our expectation is that for each region that we  
31 would do the equivalent of one or two research cycles each year.  
32 That should keep things fairly well refreshed, but even if you  
33 have a long gap between assessments, if there is no compelling  
34 reason for changing the model, you don't necessarily have to do  
35 a benchmark.

36  
37 That's mostly if people just wouldn't feel comfortable  
38 otherwise, but if the council and the SSC were satisfied that  
39 there hasn't been some fundamental change with major new changes  
40 in the data or some new discovery about the species, you could  
41 still use that existing model and just update it.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Crabtree.

44  
45 **DR. ROY CRABTREE:** I think Clay has covered a lot of what I  
46 wanted to say. I have talked with most all the other Science  
47 Center Directors, and the assessments they do in Alaska are a  
48 lot more straightforward, generally, than down here. You have

1 long-term fishery-independent trawl survey that goes out does  
2 trawl fisheries. They don't have all the recreational  
3 components and all the complexities from that to use.

4  
5 The other part of it though is we have, on the east coast, two  
6 Regional Offices and two Science Centers and they, up until a  
7 few years ago, we had four Regional Offices on the west coast  
8 and three councils.

9  
10 The Southwest Regional Office was merged in with the Northwest  
11 Regional Office and now is the Pacific Regional Office, but the  
12 people and the buildings and all are still there, and that  
13 Regional Office has two Science Centers that deliver to it and  
14 one council.

15  
16 It's a complicated issue, but there's certainly -- I have seen  
17 the numbers of assessment scientists over the years at the  
18 various regions, and they do tend to have substantially more  
19 assessment scientists at the other regions.

20  
21 I think there is a lot in this issue. That may be do we need to  
22 rethink where the positions are in the Center and try to move  
23 people towards new positions and more emphasis on stock  
24 assessments? I think some of that has been going on over the  
25 last few years.

26  
27 It's unlikely we're going to get a new Center or a new Region,  
28 because I don't think the funding is there for that, but I  
29 doubt, under any circumstance, we would get to the point where  
30 we can turn out the numbers of assessments that they're turning  
31 out, because of the things that Clay has talked about, but I do  
32 think that our needs for assessments are greater than what we're  
33 getting and that we do need to try to find some ways to address  
34 that, but you know when we've sat and talked about the SEDAR  
35 process and how to make it go faster, generally a lot of moving  
36 it faster means fewer public meetings, more webinars and fewer  
37 in-person meetings, and that reduces the amount of transparency  
38 and the amount of engagement with fishermen and things.

39  
40 There are tradeoffs in all of these things, and if you want to  
41 deliver assessments more quickly, you're going to do more  
42 updates and you're going to do them with fewer workshops and  
43 those types of things, but there is going to be a downside to  
44 that, that you're going to get pushback on from people who want  
45 more benchmarks.

46  
47 We've gone through that argument here at the council about red  
48 snapper I don't know how many times. People want a benchmark

1 and the scientists are telling us that we need to do an update.  
2 It's a complicated issue and there are all kinds of factors  
3 playing into it.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Stunz.

6

7 **DR. STUNZ:** Dr. Crabtree made many of my points, but I still  
8 have a question for you, Clay, kind of along the lines of Mr.  
9 Williams. We talked about people needs, but when you look at  
10 the budget coming in for assessment among these different  
11 scenarios, and I know there is nuances among each one, but, I  
12 guess on a per capita basis of assessments that you have, is it  
13 a budget issue preventing the number of people or are there  
14 other issues related to increasing the number of assessment  
15 biologists or perhaps is it just lack of qualified individuals  
16 or what?

17

18 **DR. PORCH:** Now you're starting to get above my pay grade.  
19 There certainly is some budget issue. I mean if we had a  
20 greater budget, then we could hire more people to do the work.  
21 There is no question about that, but I would be hard pressed to  
22 talk about how we could reposition existing funds. That is  
23 something I would have to punt to Bonnie when she is available.

24

25 **DR. STUNZ:** Just to follow up with that, I understand obviously  
26 more money would mean more assessments, but do you get the  
27 feeling or the sense that the allocation is fair among the  
28 regions in terms of money that's directed to the assessment  
29 process? By fair, I mean I don't know if that's right word, but  
30 appropriately distributed among the regions?

31

32 **DR. PORCH:** I'm sure every region would say we would like to  
33 have more funds to do more work, and so, of course, I feel the  
34 same way, but fair, that depends on the national priorities.  
35 Again, I am going to have to punt that one.

36

37 **DR. CRABTREE:** To that point.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** To that point, Dr. Crabtree.

40

41 **DR. CRABTREE:** If you got every Regional Administrator in this  
42 room and every Science Center and every Council Executive  
43 Director, all of them will tell you that they need more money  
44 and all of their programs are critical. Then when you start  
45 trying to move money from this region to this region, everybody  
46 is going to feel like their cart has been gored or whatever the  
47 expression is, and so it's very difficult, because everybody  
48 feels like they aren't the getting the science and the amount of

1 assessments and all the things that they need to manage it.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** It's a classic allocation issue. Mr.  
4 Blankenship.

5  
6 **MR. BLANKENSHIP:** I do appreciate the comments from Roy and from  
7 Clay. Where we feel like that there may be some changes or some  
8 work that can be done is in Silver Spring and at Capital Hill to  
9 maybe make some changes in the prioritization within NOAA. All  
10 the information that was provided in the handout, except for the  
11 slide that's up there now, it was information that was from NOAA  
12 publications or provided by NOAA.

13  
14 I don't have a Pollyanna idea that we're going to get to seventy  
15 assessments in the Gulf per year, but if we could double what  
16 we're doing now, that would be a dramatic increase, and it would  
17 make all of our jobs a lot easier, if we could just double what  
18 we've been doing.

19  
20 With the prioritization, that's great, but if you're  
21 prioritizing stocks and you're only getting two assessments done  
22 a year, it will take a long time to get through that priority  
23 list and then I think that there's definitely room for  
24 improvement.

25  
26 I don't think we're going to solve it around the table today,  
27 but as we move forward with some SEDAR discussions and changes  
28 with the research assessments and some other things, I would  
29 like for the Southeast Science Center to maybe come back and to  
30 have some recommendations on, besides just the research  
31 assessment, how we could improve the productivity there and what  
32 needs to happen, and see if we can all work towards making that  
33 a reality.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Ms. Bademan.

36  
37 **MS. MARTHA BADEMAN:** Yes, I think there's definitely work that  
38 we could do. I did want to point out also the numbers for the  
39 Southeast include a number of FWC assessments. Normally, we do  
40 one or two a year in-house. Then, once those are complete, they  
41 go through the review process with SEDAR. Some of those are  
42 coming from state staff.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Riechers.

45  
46 **MR. RIECHERS:** I think we just have to look for, as Chris  
47 suggests, any ways that we can improve, and certainly it's a  
48 little déjà vu to hear some of the discussion regarding the

1 research cycle, because that's some of the same discussion that  
2 occurred when we brought in SEDAR.

3  
4 SEDAR was twofold. One, it was the thought of transparency, as  
5 Dr. Crabtree pointed out, but it was also a thought that you  
6 would gain benefits by building on the last assessment, so that  
7 you don't go through those same steps again at every assessment.

8  
9 I think any time that we can look to do that, and if it's called  
10 something different and it works this time, great. I think the  
11 key is finding something that works and trying -- As Chris  
12 suggests, even if we can double what we're getting now, that's a  
13 significant increase for the Gulf, and so whatever we can do to  
14 help that.

15  
16 I certainly look forward to the June presentation and getting  
17 some of those numbers, because, as you suggest, it's the numbers  
18 of stock assessment scientists, it's the funding going into  
19 stock assessments, it's the funding going into stock assessments  
20 within each region, as compared to total funding, because maybe  
21 that that's reprioritization issue as well. Any of that  
22 information we can have, it can help better inform us in how we  
23 approach those different solutions as a council.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Lucas.

26  
27 **DR. LUCAS:** I just want to -- I have a question, and I guess  
28 this is for Clay. The FWC does a couple of assessments, and  
29 they run it through you all's shop after they've completed them.  
30 What is the timeline for once they provide you that assessment  
31 for you all's shop to take over and look at it?

32  
33 **DR. PORCH:** The FWC does it through SEDAR, just like we do, and  
34 so it's not that it goes through my shop at all, although some  
35 people at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center provide data  
36 for their assessments, and so it does use some of our resources,  
37 but not as much as the assessments we do ourselves.

38  
39 While I have the mic, I wanted to make one point, because,  
40 Chris, you made the point that they were only doing two  
41 assessments per year, and I'm wondering if you're referring to  
42 the 2017 and 2018 schedule.

43  
44 The big reason for only doing two in those years is our  
45 understanding is that we're on the hook for all these MRIP  
46 recalibrations, because of the moving from the telephone to the  
47 mail survey and the effort estimates changing. We're doing a  
48 lot of updates for all the stocks, and so if you count that,

1 then we're actually doing quite a few assessments. If we took  
2 that off the table, we could do regular updates, as we normally  
3 would.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Lucas.

6  
7 **DR. LUCAS:** I just had kind of a follow-up that may involve a  
8 question. First of all, any way we can help your staff  
9 structure or operate in a way, however we can advocate to help  
10 you produce more assessments, but, of course, quality  
11 assessments. There is always that tradeoff between the quality  
12 and the quantity.

13  
14 In addition to that, I mean I'm looking at -- Here's the Florida  
15 Wildlife Commission and they also operate -- Is there other ways  
16 that other entities can do this, operate through the SEDAR  
17 process, and help alleviate some of this kind of backlog that we  
18 have in these stock assessments?

19  
20 **DR. PORCH:** My understanding is that there's any number of  
21 cooperators that could work through the SEDAR process. Our  
22 concern at the Science Center would be if the SEDAR process were  
23 circumvented and so some assessments go through the rigorous  
24 review and then others are just produced by a third party and  
25 don't have the same level of review, because then we have  
26 problems with NS 2.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other -- Dr. Lucas, one more.

29  
30 **DR. LUCAS:** So as long as they were following the same review  
31 process, doing the review the same way, you would consider that  
32 the quality process we needed?

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other questions or comments about these two  
35 topics? Seeing none, we will go on to the next agenda item, the  
36 SEDAR Schedule Review, Tab I, Number 5, and Mr. Rindone.

37  
38 **SEDAR SCHEDULE REVIEW**

39  
40 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Tab I, Number 5 has  
41 our Gulf SEDAR schedule, which I last updated on March 3. I was  
42 updating some of the start and end dates for future assessments.  
43 I would also like to note that the 2017 assessment schedule, at  
44 this point, is considered final by the SEDAR Steering Committee.

45  
46 Let's start with 2016. We have the data-poor assessment effort,  
47 which is underway, and we'll have a data scoping webinar for  
48 that coming up real soon. The data-poor assessment will look at

1 red drum, lane snapper, wenchman, yellowmouth grouper, speckled  
2 hind, snowy, almaco jacks, and lesser amberjacks. We also have  
3 a goliath grouper benchmark assessment, which will be concluding  
4 soon, that's being done by the FWC, and shortly after the  
5 conclusion of that assessment, FWC will be picking up a black  
6 grouper benchmark assessment.

7  
8 In 2017, we have the MRIP calibration updates for Gulf of Mexico  
9 species. Dr. Porch went into that a little bit. We also have a  
10 benchmark assessment for gray snapper and a standard assessment  
11 for red snapper. Then, in 2017, FWC will also be beginning an  
12 update assessment of yellowtail snapper in the fall.

13  
14 Proposed for 2018, we have the conclusion of the gray snapper  
15 benchmark assessment, and I have that running over just because  
16 benchmark assessments tend to be time-intensive, as you guys  
17 well know. We also have the conclusion of the MRIP calibration  
18 updates and our first research track assessment being done with  
19 scamp, and this is obviously contingent upon the implementation  
20 of the research track and operational assessment framework.

21  
22 Now, yesterday, Dr. Porch mentioned, during the -- It was two  
23 days ago, during the Mackerel Committee, that the Gulf of Mexico  
24 Large Marine Ecosystem Project was cofounding a stock assessment  
25 for king and Spanish mackerel in cooperation with Mexico, and  
26 that would be for 2017 or 2018.

27  
28 Both king mackerel and Spanish mackerel are assessed through the  
29 HMS Branch at NMFS, and so those don't take away from any of the  
30 assessments that we currently have on the schedule. If the  
31 council were interested in doing some sort of assessment project  
32 in cooperation with getting the Mexican data analyzed, that  
33 might be something that you guys want to look at for say 2018.  
34 Mr. Chair.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Any questions of Ryan  
37 and what he discussed? Ryan, what you were proposing just now  
38 with potentially mackerel, king or Spanish, is to add that to  
39 the list that's next to 2018, and so there would be potentially  
40 four species? Is that what you said?

41  
42 **MR. RINDONE:** Unless there is objection or I misunderstood what  
43 Dr. Porch was talking about on Monday, I would say both.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Porch.

46  
47 **DR. PORCH:** Obviously I would support that.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. I don't see any discussion. Dr.  
2 Dana.  
3  
4 **DR. DANA:** Do you need a motion to add those? **I am going to**  
5 **make that motion, but I'm going to ask Ryan to wordsmith it for**  
6 **me.**  
7  
8 **MR. RINDONE:** Perhaps to recommend to the Council Chair and  
9 Executive Director that an assessment of king and Spanish  
10 mackerel be conducted in 2018 in conjunction with the Gulf of  
11 Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem Projects cosponsoring of a Mexican  
12 assessment of the same species, something to that effect. You  
13 guys can play with it a little bit, but that might give you a  
14 starting point.  
15  
16 **DR. DANA:** Yes, that's what I meant.  
17  
18 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I think it's cosponsoring a Mexican assessment  
19 of the same species. Dr. Dana, that's your motion?  
20  
21 **DR. DANA:** Yes.  
22  
23 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Is there a second to the motion?  
24  
25 **MR. MATENS:** I will second that, but I have a little concern  
26 about the term -- I am comfortable with that motion, but I'm a  
27 little concerned about just the words "Mexican assessment". How  
28 do we roll this into a real live Mexican assessment and not two  
29 guys in Juarez or something?  
30  
31 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Porch.  
32  
33 **DR. PORCH:** Just to point out that this would be a joint  
34 assessment with Mexico. It's not that they're taking the lead  
35 on it. We would work together on it, and a second point that we  
36 would be hard pressed to do king and Spanish mackerel in the  
37 same year, and so probably "or" would be better.  
38  
39 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Dana, do you have a preference of the two  
40 to make a recommendation for either king or Spanish in this  
41 motion?  
42  
43 **DR. DANA:** **My preference would be king.**  
44  
45 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Camp, do you agree with the change in the  
46 motion?  
47  
48 **MR. MATENS:** I do, sir, and I'm still struggling with "Mexican

1 assessment". How do we say Mexican government the right way?  
2 Would it be official or -- Somebody smarter than me.  
3  
4 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Joint project? A Large Marine Ecosystem joint  
5 project with Mexico of the same species? Mr. Rindone.  
6  
7 **MR. RINDONE:** I think you could also just say "a Mexico  
8 assessment", because if it were the United States, you would  
9 just say a United States assessment or similar.  
10  
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** It's pretty clear to me, Camp. Is that --  
12  
13 **MR. MATENS:** Yes, sir. I could second that.  
14  
15 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Very good. All right. We have a motion on the  
16 board. Is there any more discussion on the motion on the board?  
17 **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**  
18 **carries.**  
19  
20 Ryan, do we -- Since they finalized 2017, is it a little  
21 premature at this point to talk about 2019 or not?  
22  
23 **MR. RINDONE:** Absolutely not. As far out as you guys want to  
24 discuss, let's get it in the table.  
25  
26 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** We had some discussion yesterday about gray  
27 triggerfish, as I recall. I'm not trying to lead anybody, but  
28 that might be one we could put on the list, potentially. Does  
29 anyone have any comments to that or any other species they would  
30 like to start populating 2019? Mr. Greene.  
31  
32 **MR. JOHNNY GREENE:** I was just waiting for the right time. For  
33 the 2019 schedule, I think that we are in a situation with gray  
34 triggerfish that we've got to do something. I would rather do  
35 it in 2017, but that doesn't seem like it's going to be feasible  
36 or possible, and so, unless -- I mean we're kind of in a unique  
37 situation with that, and I would really like to move that up,  
38 but unless someone can help me move it up or show me how, but I  
39 don't know how else to accomplish it. **To proposed for the 2019**  
40 **schedule, to add gray triggerfish.**  
41  
42 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Matens.  
43  
44 **MR. MATENS:** Johnny, at what level? Would it be a benchmark  
45 that you would like?  
46  
47 **MR. GREENE:** I mean I assume it would be a benchmark, but with  
48 the new terminology coming out with the cycle, I'm not sure

1 which way to go here. I mean they did an update last time, and  
2 so it would be the new research cycle or a benchmark. I'm not  
3 sure how to label it. Mr. Rindone.

4

5 **MR. RINDONE:** Perhaps just at the appropriate level?

6

7 **MR. GREENE:** Thank you.

8

9 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Blankenship.

10

11 **MR. BLANKENSHIP:** Again, I appreciate you letting me be a guest  
12 up here today, and I'm not voting on this, except to say that I  
13 think this current schedule is unacceptable, and to have to push  
14 this off to 2019 when looking at what's being proposed in 2017  
15 and 2018, I just don't think that what's there is acceptable and  
16 that we should have better.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. I have several people. I have  
19 Martha, Dr. Lucas, and Ms. Bosarge.

20

21 **MS. BADEMAN:** Just on triggerfish, I was going to say that I  
22 agree with the approach of whatever level is appropriate. I  
23 think when Dr. Patterson was here and talked about the  
24 assessment a few meetings ago, there may be some new data that's  
25 coming in that we could incorporate here, but let them figure  
26 that out, what the appropriate route would be.

27

28 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Lucas.

29

30 **DR. LUCAS:** Probably two parts. Are we doing all species that  
31 we want added or are we doing it a species at a time on that  
32 motion?

33

34 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** It might be easier to go through one species at  
35 a time. Ms. Bosarge.

36

37 **DR. LUCAS:** Then I will reserve my next species.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Okay.

40

41 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Mine is relative to the gray triggerfish,  
42 but just a question for Dr. Porch. On this gray triggerfish, so  
43 we're looking at adding it possibly in 2019, and Johnny  
44 suggested he thought it would be a benchmark. That's three  
45 years from now, before we even get started on it.

46

47 Would this be one of the species that may fall into that  
48 research track that could be added to something earlier, to

1 years sooner, like operating in the background, like you were  
2 talking about, maybe in 2017? That way, it's worked on two  
3 years earlier. Obviously it's a longer process, but that's two  
4 years it could be being worked on, and maybe some output would  
5 come from it, so that in 2019 it didn't necessarily have to be a  
6 benchmark and take up two spots in 2019.

7  
8 **DR. PORCH:** It certainly potentially could be done. Again, once  
9 the full schedule or the proposal comes out, then we would have  
10 to consider it with the other things, such as this MRIP  
11 recalibration exercise, because that will chew up a lot of time.  
12 That takes up a large fraction of 2017 and 2018, but it  
13 certainly could be done.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I will go back to the motion. I would like to,  
16 I think, maybe add one species at a time. Then we would  
17 dispense with each species. We have the motion to propose for  
18 the 2019 schedule the following species, gray triggerfish, at  
19 the appropriate level. Is there a second to the motion? It's  
20 seconded by Dr. Dana. Is there any discussion on the motion?  
21 **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none -- Mr.**  
22 **Riechers.**

23  
24 **MR. RIECHERS:** I am trying to see what you're trying to get  
25 accomplished here. Is this the list that's going to forward to  
26 the SEDAR Committee, inclusive of all stocks that we may want to  
27 consider, given constraints, et cetera, because I am getting a  
28 little bit at the point of whether you want to do this one at a  
29 time or -- You have decided to do it one at a time, but what you  
30 want here is a complete list of those that we may want to  
31 consider, given where we are on various stocks at this time?

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Right, and so we're in committee right now.  
34 The committee will come to the full council with a report of  
35 their recommended species to fill the available slots in 2019.  
36 Then there will be more discussion at full council, and that  
37 would formulate the list that Doug and myself will take to the  
38 next meeting and put on the table for further discussion at the  
39 SEDAR Steering Committee level.

40  
41 Do we have another -- I guess we can look at potentially, in  
42 light of Dr. Porch's comments -- I guess we can shoot for maybe  
43 three species, Dr. Porch, or four species, in light of the MRIP  
44 calibrations potentially still going or occurring in 2019? I  
45 mean we can prioritize those four species, in case, as we come  
46 to that point in time, there's just not enough staff to do all  
47 species, and we will have an idea as to what is one, two, or  
48 three, or what's your recommendation?

1  
2 **DR. PORCH:** It's certainly helpful to prioritize, because there  
3 is also the possibility that we could cut back on the MRIP  
4 recalibration exercise. I haven't had any feedback to that end  
5 yet, but it's, again, balancing all these different priorities.  
6 To the extent that you can prioritize the species that you're  
7 adding to the list, it's very helpful.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** It might be premature to prioritize when we can  
10 always, at some point in the future, before the final schedule  
11 is made, readjust those priorities as needed. I don't intend to  
12 do a prioritization here in committee, but just to offer  
13 potentially four species. Mr. Rindone.

14  
15 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to remind the  
16 committee of some species which haven't been assessed in a  
17 while, and some of these, or one of these in particular, could  
18 certainly be done by the FWC, and that's spiny lobster. Also  
19 yellowedge and tilefish were assessed in SEDAR 22, which  
20 concluded in February of 2011.

21  
22 Spanish mackerel, if it's not done along with king mackerel in  
23 2018, might be one that you guys consider. That was last done  
24 in -- I think its terminal year of data was 2012. Also, cobia  
25 is in the same situation. Spanish mackerel, when it was last  
26 assessed, was mind-blowingly healthy, and cobia was also not  
27 overfished or undergoing overfishing. Mr. Chair.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Fischer.

30  
31 **MR. MYRON FISCHER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not proposing  
32 anything, but I'm just putting out on the table to discuss, or  
33 at least for the group to think about, is where do we stand on  
34 cobia? The last time it was assessed, what the data needs are  
35 and what's the potential for future assessments on cobia?

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Lucas.

38  
39 **DR. LUCAS:** In regards to that -- I'm not on your committee, but  
40 I was going to suggest cobia also, because we've actually heard  
41 some testimony, and I have received some phone calls, about the  
42 concern of cobia. I mean I think even a couple of fishermen  
43 actually suggested us changing the limit just based on what they  
44 were seeing, and so there is some concern by the public for  
45 cobia.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right, committee members. Any other  
48 species names to add to the list? Mr. Greene.

1  
2 **MR. GREENE:** You want them one at a time, correct?  
3  
4 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Yes.  
5  
6 **MR. GREENE:** For 2019, to add cobia.  
7  
8 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** We have a motion to add cobia to the 2019  
9 schedule. Camp seconds. **Any opposition to the motion? Seeing**  
10 **none, the motion carries.** Anyone else want to add -- Mr.  
11 Greene.  
12  
13 **MR. GREENE:** I would like to add to the 2019 schedule Spanish  
14 mackerel.  
15  
16 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** We have a motion to add Spanish mackerel to the  
17 list. Is there a second? **Is there any opposition to the**  
18 **motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** I just threw out  
19 four, but we don't have to add four. We can wait until full  
20 council and have other members weigh in on this, but, Mr.  
21 Greene, do you have anything else?  
22  
23 **MR. GREENE:** I was going to add yellowedge and tilefish.  
24  
25 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** We have a motion to add to the 2019 schedule  
26 yellowedge grouper and tilefish. Is there a second to the  
27 motion? Mr. Matens seconds. Any discussion on the motion? **Any**  
28 **opposition to the motion? The motion carries.** Mr. Greene.  
29  
30 **MR. GREENE:** It is my intent that triggerfish will -- I know  
31 we're not setting priority, but the situation we're in, I think  
32 that we should look, and perhaps think about it by full council,  
33 to find a way that triggerfish should be the number one priority  
34 at this point, and if it can be done sooner than 2019, it should  
35 be, and it should be the number one priority in 2019 if that is  
36 not possible.  
37  
38 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Everyone at the table hears you, and certainly  
39 I think it will be brought up in the discussion. We do need a  
40 prioritization, at least at this point in time, of which of the  
41 species that are ultimately selected to carry forward to the  
42 SEDAR committee. Mr. Greene.  
43  
44 **MR. GREENE:** One other thing. When you carry the information  
45 forward to the SEDAR Committee, I would like for there to be  
46 consideration and thought of a species like triggerfish, where  
47 we're in a crunch where we have to rebuild something and we are  
48 waiting to get on a list. I think that there should be a way

1 that there should be a priority or an emergency-type assessment,  
2 where we need to get something done within a reasonable, a more  
3 reasonable, amount of time than having to wait three years to  
4 start an assessment.

5  
6 I think everyone kind of knows what I'm getting at here and that  
7 everyone at the table understands that, but I hope somehow to  
8 characterize that to move that forward to the SEDAR Committee  
9 when you guys get to that point.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** We do have a few minutes. I don't know, Dr.  
12 Porch, and I might be putting you on the spot, but do you have  
13 any comments relative to triggerfish and trying to insert it in  
14 the schedule that's currently being looked at?

15  
16 **DR. PORCH:** As I guess it's already been mentioned, it would  
17 probably be hard to insert it as a benchmark assessment, but I'm  
18 not sure that's what is really needed. We just need to add more  
19 years of data. That could be done, but there may need to be  
20 some movement in terms of how many of the MRIP recalibration  
21 assessments we do. I think there needs to be a discussion about  
22 both things in context. I will leave it at that for now.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Okay. Thank you. Mr. Conklin.

25  
26 **MR. CHRIS CONKLIN:** Thanks for allowing me to ask a question.  
27 Johnny, when you added the yellowedge and tilefish there, was  
28 that a -- Were you meaning to assess those two species together  
29 or just add them to the list? If you're looking at assessing  
30 them together, we ran into some real problems with our red  
31 snapper and gray triggerfish assessment, and I would caution you  
32 guys on trying to assess two stocks together. That's all.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Johnny.

35  
36 **MR. GREENE:** I believe the last time they were done together,  
37 and I was just building off of that. However, if it -- I don't  
38 know that we're going to get to four in one year, and I was just  
39 throwing it out there. I guess maybe potentially we're adding  
40 five, at your recommendation, but what we're -- We've just got  
41 to try to get something in there, but I would like to ask Mr.  
42 Rindone if that's possible or what his thoughts would be on  
43 that.

44  
45 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Greene. Even if you're doing them  
46 together, it's still probably going to require the time of two  
47 analysts for however long the assessment is carried out, whether  
48 it's done as an operational style assessment that takes four or

1 six or seven months, it's still probably going to require two  
2 people, and so that might give you some insight into that.

3  
4 Just as a follow-up with gray triggerfish, since you guys have  
5 expressed that that should be a priority, it might be useful if  
6 you recommend to the Steering Committee terminal years for some  
7 of these, especially those that are very important to you, just  
8 bearing in mind that if you're -- For instance, if you're going  
9 to assess gray triggerfish in 2019 and you want to use data from  
10 2018, that assessment likely cannot begin until the fall of  
11 2019, to make sure that all the data from 2018 have been  
12 received and the QA and QC processes have been followed and  
13 those data are vetted and available.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Swindell.

16  
17 **MR. SWINDELL:** I guess I'm a little confused. Maybe I just  
18 don't understand what I'm looking at here on this chart. What  
19 is the terminal year? What does that mean to me?

20  
21 **MR. RINDONE:** The terminal year means the last year of data that  
22 are included in the assessment. It would be say the landings  
23 data through -- For example, for gray snapper, it would be all  
24 landings data through 2016.

25  
26 **MR. SWINDELL:** Then what is the start date and end date?

27  
28 **MR. RINDONE:** The start date refers to about the time at which  
29 the assessment begins, from data gathering and data compilation,  
30 when we have our initial conference calls and webinars to talk  
31 about what's needed and who has it and what needs to be done  
32 with it prior to a data workshop, all the way through the end of  
33 the review workshop, before it goes to our SSC.

34  
35 **MR. SWINDELL:** That's good. Then what about all of these that  
36 are listed in that first list, gag grouper, greater amberjack,  
37 and especially the poor data ones, like red drum, for instance?  
38 Is there anything being done to look at red drum at all? I  
39 don't see anything in the follow-up data schedule for SEDAR that  
40 tells me that they're even looking at it now.

41  
42 **MR. RINDONE:** Red drum is going to be assessed in 2016, under  
43 the data-poor project. That project is actually underway, and  
44 you guys haven't specified another year after red drum's  
45 assessment concludes, along with the other seven species in the  
46 data-poor project, for it to be assessed again, and so if you  
47 wanted to make that a priority down the road, you certainly  
48 could do so.

1  
2 **MR. SWINDELL:** I don't know that I want to necessarily make a  
3 priority, but I was just wondering what's happening with all the  
4 poor data -- You know like lane snapper and yellowmouth grouper  
5 and so forth, fish that I've heard about. Red drum, of course,  
6 I've heard about a lot, and I was just wondering where are we  
7 with this fish? I mean, it's been a long time that the council  
8 has taken any action on red drum, and I'm just wondering where  
9 are we, and so thank you.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Ryan.

12  
13 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Swindell, the council  
14 had taken up an action, I guess about eighteen months ago or so,  
15 to look at reopening a portion of the EEZ to red drum harvest in  
16 the northern Gulf of Mexico, as well as some other options, but,  
17 since we didn't have an assessment on the status of the offshore  
18 stock, we had very little information to go on to biologically  
19 justify opening any area of the Gulf to harvest, and so, by  
20 conducting a red drum assessment, and that's really the first  
21 and most critical step to being able to gather the necessary  
22 information to figure out where that adult offshore stock  
23 stands.

24  
25 We do know that, at least in 2014, inshore state-water  
26 recreational landings of red drum peaked almost to twenty-  
27 million pounds, for 2014, and those recreational landings have  
28 steadily increased over time since the commercial closure.

29  
30 It appears anyway, and according to the states, which have all  
31 reported healthy red drum stocks, and that they, for the most  
32 part, that they have been achieving their escapement rates, the  
33 inshore populations appear to be doing well, and so those data  
34 will be, of course, considered in the red drum assessment being  
35 done by SEDAR as part of the data-poor project, but the council  
36 will learn more about the full picture once that assessment is  
37 completed.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Ms. Bosarge.

40  
41 **MS. BOSARGE:** Dr. Porch, based on what you were saying earlier,  
42 which is a little bit of a game-changer for us on certain stocks  
43 that may not necessarily need a benchmark, even though it may  
44 have been a long time, I was looking at 2017, and I don't know  
45 when the dates are for that gray snapper, when the last time we  
46 assessed it was or why we -- I don't remember the conversation  
47 about why we decided we needed a benchmark on it, but is that  
48 something that we possibly could get away with something that's

1 not a benchmark on? To make more room in the schedule is what I  
2 was thinking.

3

4 **DR. PORCH:** In that case, we've never done an assessment on gray  
5 snapper, and so yes, it would have to be a benchmark.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Any other -- Dr. Simmons.

8

9 **DR. CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Another  
10 complicating matter, I think, with the terminal year information  
11 is for the stocks that we have under rebuilding plans -- For  
12 example, for gray triggerfish, the terminal year of information  
13 that was put in the assessment was 2013.

14

15 That's not even a year from the time the rebuilding plan was put  
16 into place, and so we only had changes in the catch limits.  
17 There was really no way to identify any of the other management  
18 measures, based on the time that that stock assessment was done,  
19 based on the terminal year of data.

20

21 I think we need to think about like greater amberjack and  
22 triggerfish and some of those stocks that we have rebuilding  
23 plans for. We're looking at changing the rebuilding plans, and  
24 we're asking for the updates in information based on how long  
25 those have been in place, because I don't know that we're truly  
26 seeing the impacts of those, based on when we're getting the  
27 updated information. That's something we need to try to work on  
28 with the Science Center staff and NMFS staff on a little bit  
29 more, I believe.

30

31 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Doug, we're going to have the SEDAR Committee  
32 meeting in May, and is that correct, and so this is the time we  
33 need to come with a list of species to throw out there for 2019,  
34 is that correct, and we can't postpone it until the fall  
35 meeting?

36

37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** The earlier we get it up there, the  
38 better, but nothing is going to be definite until maybe even  
39 next year as far as the SEDAR setting the schedule.

40

41 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Relative to what Dr. Simmons just stated, I am  
42 just trying to think of the timing of getting the list up there  
43 and the importance of having the list earlier or such, but yet  
44 having some information that the council can look at to make  
45 some of those priority decisions based on when changes were made  
46 in the fishery management plan for a respective species and then  
47 how many years of data we would have available under those major  
48 changes in the plan.

1  
2 I'm just wondering if -- You mentioned the Science Center  
3 getting some of that data, but I'm just wondering if maybe it  
4 can be gathered, for the species we've already picked, for  
5 tomorrow, for discussion at full council during the committee  
6 report.

7  
8 **DR. SIMMONS:** Certainly, and so that would be for greater  
9 amberjack for tomorrow. Is that correct?

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Yes, it would be gray triggerfish, greater  
12 amberjack, yellowedge, and tilefish, all the ones that we just  
13 voted on.

14  
15 **DR. SIMMONS:** Okay. I think it's primarily a concern with the  
16 ones that are in a rebuilding plan, but we can certainly try to  
17 get all that information together for all of those species.  
18 It's just something I think to keep in mind when we're asking  
19 for another assessment right after we just got one and we are  
20 starting a rebuilding plan, but yet we may or may not have  
21 realized those impacts from the last rebuilding plan, based on  
22 when the stock assessment was done. It just complicates the  
23 process even further, I think.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I understand. Thank you. Any other discussion  
26 on the topic? That takes us to the last item, Other Business.  
27 There was no other business when we started the meeting. Any  
28 other business to discuss? We will adjourn the SEDAR Committee  
29 meeting.

30  
31 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m., April 6, 2016.)

32  
33 - - -