GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

GULF SEDAR COMMITTEE

Marriott Plaza San Antonio, Texas

August 7, 2017

VOTING MEMBERS
Leann Bosarge.....................................................Mississippi
Pamela Dana.............................................................Florida
John Greene............................................................Alabama
Campo Matens...........................................................Louisiana

NON-VOTING MEMBERS
Kevin Anson (designee for Chris Blankenship)..............Alabama
Patrick Banks...........................................................Louisiana
Doug Boyd..............................................................Texas
Glenn Constant........................................................USFWS
Roy Crabtree.......................................................NMFS, SERO, St. Petersburg, Florida
Dale Diaz.................................................................Mississippi
Dave Donaldson.......................................................GSMFC
Tom Frazer..............................................................Florida
Martha Guya (designee for Nick Wiley).........................Florida
LCDR Stacy McNeer................................................USCG
Paul Mickle (designee for Jamie Miller).......................Mississippi
Robin Riechers........................................................Texas
John Sanchez..........................................................Florida
Greg Stunz..............................................................Texas
Ed Swindell.............................................................Louisiana
David Walker..........................................................Alabama

STAFF
Steven Atran.........................................................Senior Fishery Biologist
Assane Diagne........................................................Economist
Matt Freeman........................................................Economist
John Froeschke......................................................Fishery Biologist-Statistician
Douglas Gregory.....................................................Executive Director
Beth Hager.............................................................Administrative Officer
Karen Hoak............................................................Administrative & Financial Assistant
Ava Lasseter...........................................................Anthropologist
Emily Muehlstein....................................................Public Information Officer
Ryan Rindone.........................................................Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
Bernadine Roy........................................................Office Manager
Carrie Simmons.....................................................Deputy Director

OTHER PARTICIPANTS
Pam Anderson.........................................................Panama City Beach, FL
Charlie Bergman..............................................NOAA
Chris Bianchette........................................USCG
Eric Brazer.............................................Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance
Chester Brewer........................................SAFMC
Bubba Cochrane........................................Galveston, TX
Connor Cochrane.................................Galveston, TX
Susan Gerhart........................................NMFS
Shepherd Grimes........................................NOAA GC
Dylan Hubbard.........................................Madeira Beach, FL
Mark Hubbard.........................................Madeira Beach, FL
Alison Johnson..........................................Oceana
Jason Klosterman......................................Destin, FL
Jack McGovern..........................................NOAA Fisheries
Bonnie Ponwith........................................SEFSC
Lance Robinson..........................................TX
Andrew Ropicki........................................Texas Sea Grant
Jessica Stephen..........................................NMFS
Kevin Wheeler..........................................NMFS
Jim Zurbrick........................................Steinhatchee, FL
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PAGE 36: Motion to move the cobia stock assessment to 2019 with a terminal year of 2017. The motion carried on page 36.
The Gulf SEDAR Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the Marriott Plaza, San Antonio, Texas, Monday afternoon, August 7, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Leann Bosarge.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA
APPROVAL OF MINUTES
ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

CHAIRMAN LEANN BOSARGE: The Gulf SEDAR Committee is Tab I in your briefing book. I am going to chair that session, and are we ready with Mr. Rindone on the line as well, Doug?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUGLAS GREGORY: Yes.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Rindone is ready when we call on him, and so Tab I, Number 1, you will find your agenda for our SEDAR Committee. Are there any additions or revisions to the agenda as presented? Seeing none, the agenda is approved.

Next, on Tab I, Number 2, you will find our minutes from our June 2017 SEDAR Committee meeting. Were there any revisions to those minutes? Yes, Mr. Anson.

MR. KEVIN ANSON: I’m not on your committee, but I do have a few. That would be page 13, line 23, change “that” to “they”. Page 14, line 14, change “them” to “those”. Page 15, line 20, change “tell” to “take”. Page 24, line 17, change “dusky” to “dusty”.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, sir. We appreciate it. With those revisions, is there any opposition to accepting the minutes as revised? All right. The minutes from our last meeting are approved. Under Tab I, Number 3, you will find our Action Guide and Next Steps. Mr. Gregory, I will turn it over to you, sir.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: Okay. As with all the action guides, this just summarizes what we’re trying to do with this committee meeting. Agenda Item IV, and there’s no tab number to it, as far as in the documents, but this is a Discussion of the 2017 Extended Recreational Red Snapper Season. The timeline status is immediate, and we included this in SEDAR rather than under Reef Fish because it could affect the red snapper stock assessment and the schedule of other assessments.

For council input and next steps, one, the National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Administrator will present
an overview of the 2017 extended recreational red snapper season. The committee will discuss the potential impacts on the 2018 season and any necessary council actions.

Three, the committee will also discuss with the Southeast Fisheries Center the pros and cons of possibly delaying the red snapper assessment until the 2017 landings data can be incorporated or consider requesting a subsequent update assessment immediately after the 2017 landings are available.

Some things for the next steps for the council to consider is to consider writing a letter to the Department of Commerce regarding the extended recreational red snapper season expressing concern about circumventing the Magnuson-Stevens Act council process and the potential impacts on future ACLs and the red snapper rebuilding schedule. Two, consider writing a letter to the Southeast Fisheries Center requesting a delay in the red snapper assessment, so that 2017 landings can be incorporated.

Agenda Item V is the SEDAR Schedule Review, and the timeline status for that is that we need to have proposed changes solidified before the September 2017 SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

The committee will review the current SEDAR schedule and discuss with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center the feasibility of including a cobia assessment in 2018 as well as a red grouper and gray triggerfish assessment. This is a discussion carrying over from the last meeting, which this has not been resolved.

Two, identify modifications to the SEDAR schedule and direct staff to notify the SEDAR Steering Committee of any suggested changes. Now, Ryan will walk us through the SEDAR schedule review after we have the discussion about the 2017 extended red snapper season.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Crabtree, would you like to start off that discussion? I’m sure you would.

DISCUSSION OF THE 2017 EXTENDED RECREATIONAL RED SNAPPER SEASON

DR. ROY CRABTREE: I don’t have a whole lot to say about it. The Secretary determined and extended the season out to weekends for what I think became a total of forty-some days. There were a number of discussions with state fisheries departments on the course of this, and the states did change their regulations to adopt a compatible season, at least during the summer months.
There was an analysis done that showed that if this approach was employed for a short period of time that there would be a delay in the ultimate rebuilding of the stock by as many as six years. There is some likelihood that the private sector could exceed its annual catch limit this year, but the analysis shows, and Bonnie is going to go over this in a moment, that the stock would continue to grow, although at a more modest pace.

The Secretary was concerned about the drop in red snapper fishing days for private anglers and the economic impact of that, but also about the current disparate approaches to management, which, in the Secretary’s view, are undermining the integrity of the management structure, and so the Secretary determined that the more modest pace of rebuilding was a risk worth taking in order to achieve closer integration of state and federal seasons.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Banks.

MR. PATRICK BANKS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Dr. Crabtree, we were worried about the same thing when we discussed with the Secretary, or with his designee, this idea. The concerns about an overfished situation were brought up by a number of folks on those calls, but what we have found, since we brought our state season into alignment with this thirty-nine-day federal season, is we -- The staff at Wildlife and Fisheries, as well as myself, we all thought that we would be closing down our complete state waters within just a few weekends, and it was pretty clear, from our commission, that they wanted us to stick with our original self-imposed limit, which certainly had me worried at first, because I was afraid that, within a couple of weekends, we would hit that mark and we would make it illegal to hold a red snapper in state waters and our folks would be sitting at the dock watching the rest of the Gulf fish for thirty-nine days.

What we found is that, either through the weather scenario or just the fact that folks feel like they have more opportunity, so that they’re not rushing out to get it, our effort has been extremely low, and I say that just comparative to what we expected, and so, based on the rates right now, the fishing pressure and the effort, it looks like we’re actually going to make it to thirty-nine days, at least based on the most recent effort data we have.

This turned into what we thought was going to be within just a few weekends of hitting our self-imposed limit to we might not hit it in thirty-nine days and still have the ability to go to a fall season, and so I was curious to know, from the other
states, are you all seeing some of the same thing? Are you all seeing a lot lower effort than maybe what we all were fearing, or is what we’re seeing in Louisiana similar to what you guys are seeing in the other states?

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: We had similar thoughts too during those conversations, of the Gulf exceeding the recreational quota and such, and we’ve been monitoring, through Snapper Check, landings in Alabama, and this is our fourth year, and we noticed a dramatic shift in effort.

It’s interesting, because we have the announced three-day season now that everybody was anticipating would be the only access really to the fishing for red snapper in federal waters, and then, with the additional thirty-six days being announced, spread over a longer time period, obviously, it had a dramatic shift, and it’s approximately -- Our effort has shown, between the first three days and subsequent through the end of July, for those weekend days that occurred, transpired, after that point, the effort went down 67 percent, on average, for those weekends, for those three days, and so we have noticed a dramatic drop-off as well, and we’re tracking our landings too, to our quota that we have identified as one of the prefered that was in the regional management document, and we’re tracking that we will not reach that quota either, come the 4th of September.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Crabtree.

DR. CRABTREE: We don’t expect to have landings from Wave 3, and so through June, and we will probably get those in mid-August, and so a couple of weeks from now. There has long been speculation that, if the season was longer, that you wouldn’t compress the trips as much and some of the derby fishery -- Maybe we’ll get some insight to this.

For some time, the main thing that would get us to a longer federal season was closer coordination between the state and federal seasons, and, if we did have some evidence that the derby fishing race would cool down after that, and if the states were willing to make some changes, maybe there is a way from all of this to get to a longer federal season.

Also, bear in mind that the projections we’ve seen in the past have shown that, at least in the eastern Gulf, the stock potentially was going to go down a little bit, because of the recruitment patterns, but it’s interesting that we’re hearing
that even west of the river that the catch rates have come down some, and so I imagine we’ll have quite a bit more to look at when we get to the October council meeting.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Stunz.

DR. GREG STUNZ: I certainly don’t want to speak for Lance and Robin’s official state numbers, but, as many of you know, we’re piloting iSnapper along with their program, and have been for a while now, in a partnership, and, just like what Kevin and Patrick are saying, we’re seeing a substantial drop in effort.

I personally was one of those speculators Roy was talking about that if we could expand the season that you would get a redirection of effort, and we’ve still got time to go. Our first two weeks of that extended season were some pretty bad weather in this region, and so that was part of it. I don’t expect that to go up too much. We have school starting and people are thinking about hunting season in this region of the Gulf, and so we have definitely seen a drop, based on those numbers, but, again, we still have a ways to go.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Mickle.

DR. PAUL MICKLE: I guess Mississippi is last, but I will chime in, similar to Kevin’s comments. We had similar trip rates. They were very high in the beginning, with the three-day season, and then tapering off later on. In the past, we have expected a little rise towards the end of the summer, within our past seasons.

Before the kids go back to school, we see an increase in effort a little bit, and, interestingly, our reporting accuracy, although it’s been high the whole time, when you get into the dogdays of summer, it gets really, really high, because the real hardcore offshore anglers are participating, and we’ve seen that this month, especially in July, in the reporting.

The data increase from longer seasons is really on a bunch of different levels. You have, of course, more robust data, but then, when you have the longer seasons, you’re having those more diehard fishermen participating in the fishery and, of course, in the data programs as well.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: All right. We have heard from all five of our states, and we appreciate that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: Not Florida.
CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Oh, excuse me. Martha, we have not heard from you. Did you want to contribute?

MS. MARTHA GUYAS: I don’t have much to contribute at this point, but that’s what I have to say. I don’t have the data for what Florida has done so far.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Let me give you my data. It’s not quite as rosy. I am encouraged though to hear that it sounds like the private anglers are going to exceed their quota still, more than likely, but maybe it won’t be as bad and overrun as we thought, and that’s good, and I’m trying to find some good news. You know I like to stay positive, and so that’s good.

I do want to make sure that we stay realistic about this, and we are still going to exceed some quotas. We read that oath this morning, and one of the tenets of Magnuson that -- I realize that we did not do this. This was not the Gulf Council that did this. This was a decision by the Secretary, but, ultimately, whatever the fallout is from it, it will be our job to right it and to make sure that we have sustainable fishery for the fishery, putting the fish first, and so I do think we have to discuss it.

I had a gentleman call me, and he’s a commercial fisherman, but it’s a commercial fisherman that’s not involved in our management process. He doesn’t dabble in politics, and he doesn’t dabble in the management side of things, and very rarely does he ever call me. I see him socially from time to time, and we talk, but we don’t talk fishing very often, and so for him to call me was out of the ordinary.

He said, Leann, I just want to tell you what we’re seeing out there. He said -- Let me preface this by kind of telling you where he fishes and what he’s aiming for. He fishes from the Panhandle of Florida all the way to Louisiana, and so we’re talking about four of the five Gulf states, and so it’s not one little area that he is fishing, and they fish different spots each time. That’s the way they operate. They don’t go hit a spot hard every single time. It’s very similar to farming, where you let the field rest. You do something different and give that ground a break. They do the same thing.

They fallow certain areas, but he said that we’re pulling up at spot after spot and we’re catching lane snapper. We’re out there fishing for red snapper, but we’re catching lane snapper. He said, that tells me that we have an issue here, that we have
fished those red snapper down.

His particular boat is I guess what you would call a day boat. He goes out for one day at a time. It’s not a red snapper boat that goes out multiple days, and he said, we’re usually trying to hit about 1,000 pounds.

I know, for you recreational people in the room, they’re going, oh my God, I would love to catch a thousand pounds, but there’s only about a thousand or less commercial fishermen, and there is millions of recreational, and so try not to get thrown off by the 1,000-pound number.

That’s about what they’re trying to hit in a day’s time. He said, yesterday, we were only able to catch 360 pounds of red snapper, Leann. They are professionals. This is what they do for a living, and so, for them to go out and catch a third of what they’re out there to catch, that’s something to think about and to be weary of and to try and be cognizant of as we move forward and try and think how rosy or not rosy is this picture of what’s going on out there right now.

He said that they tried going out to deeper water. He said, you know, we’re going to go out to some spots that are deeper and maybe we can get away from a little bit of this pressure that is being put on these sites by this extended season. He said, we went to deeper water and the same thing.

He said that, really, besides that, the other major thing that concerned him were the discards that he was seeing. He said that he was seeing five to six red snapper floating behind some of these -- I don’t want to make this a recreational/commercial battle. I don’t, but I need to put this on the record, so that we’re all understanding what’s being seen out there.

He said, I see five to six snapper floating behind the boat, and I said, oh my gosh, are we to the point that we’re catching that many undersized fish before we get a legal-sized fish? He said, no, Leann, that’s why I am telling you this. They are legal-sized fish that are floating behind the boat, and so I think we’ve got keep our discards in mind as we go through this process and what effect that’s having on the stock, and I don’t say that to put some negative impetus on it, but more to look for the positive, maybe, in some of the ideas that Dr. Stunz passed around the table at our last meeting.

Some of these barotrauma devices may become much more important and much more useful if this is the road that we’re going to be
taking down, and we need to keep those kinds of things in mind, and so, again, we’re trying to find the positive in this, right?

I think the part that -- This is me speaking as a council member and not as your Chairman. The thing that bothers me most about the thirty-nine-day season, or the extension of the season, is I hope that something positive comes out of it. I hope that maybe we will see that it’s okay to unroll that season back out and that effort will not be as great as it was in the three-day season and everything will be fine. That would be wonderful.

My issue is that it circumvents the system that everybody else has to live by. It circumvents the science. That should have been vetted through our scientific bodies. They should have looked at that and said, you know what, yes, we think there is some room here and they looked at all the information and came back to us and not on a whim of, well, we think it will work and it’s worth the risk. Well, what if it doesn’t, because there are more people involved than just the portion that you’re looking at that are going to have to pay the price if it doesn’t work.

I understand that getting down to a three-day season that many people feel that’s unacceptable, and I get that. That’s pretty tough. That’s a tough pill to swallow, but I would like to remind people that there were other fisheries that went down that same road.

The commercial fishery, in 1990, had a 365-day season. In 1998, it was down to sixty-seven days. In 1999, it was down to sixty-four days. In 2000, it was down to fifty-nine days, and, actually, in 1990, when they had a year-round season, in 1994, they got down to a little over a two-month season, and so they went from twelve months to two months.

Now, if we had changed nothing about the way that forecasted their season, based on their projections, if we were still managing in that same way, what kind of season do you think the commercial fishermen would have right now? Probably less than three days, but we didn’t. They said, man, this is unacceptable, and we can’t live with this. We can’t deal with a two-month season and seeing it going down further and further every year. We’ve got to try something different.

There was not a circumvention of the system. It was through this body, around this table. It was not pleasant. It was painful for a lot of people. My father used to be a red snapper fisherman. He shrimped during part of the year and he did
fishing during the other part of the year.

We implemented a system that made it where it wasn’t really economical for him anymore to fish red snapper part-time, and so he’s one of those fishermen that people say got driven out of the system, and so it wasn’t -- Now, looking back, he will tell you that was the right thing to do. We had too many hooks out there, and we had to do something.

If somebody had to survive and be able to continue to fish that species, it should have been those men that relied on it for their entire livelihood and not me who had something over here that I could fall back on, but the point is we changed the system. We didn’t circumvent it. We didn’t throw the science out the window when we didn’t like what it said.

We have no control over what happened, but I hope that we will look at it and be realistic about it and take the things -- The Secretary said that consistency -- The reasons he was doing this, right, is because consistency was important between the states and the fed. I guess I see it as the states and this council, because we’re kind of the federal entity, right? That consistency is important. We need to focus on that, and we need to make sure that gets better. That’s what I try and take away from this.

He said that there is some data issues, and the states have all implemented their own data collection programs, but he says that that’s not the most efficient way to go about it. All right. Well, if that was one of the reasons for this, and it circumvented the system for something like that, then it’s time for us to do our own data collection on the federal side around this table. If that was one of his issues, it’s an issue with the recreational public for sure, and okay. That’s it. We’re not going to wait anymore for the states to get up and do our data collection for us. We’ll do it right here. We’ll make it what we need it to be. We are going to make this better, and that’s what I took away from what he did.

It helped me to focus on what the major issues were and really light a fire to fix those, and so I hope we can do that. Our next discussion will be, unfortunately, what may come of this that we’re going to have to try and deal with and make sure that we manage by the science and get us back on the trajectory that we need to be on to rebuild this stock, but let’s do it around this table. All right. Were there any other comments? Yes, Mr. Walker.
MR. DAVID WALKER: Thank you, Leann, and I agree with what Leann had to say, too. This is my last opportunity to speak a lot, and the commercial industry -- If you look at the record, we have never tried to harm the -- The commercial fishery has never tried to harm the recreational fishery, and you can look at our voting record, and you can see that I have always supported developing APs and working forward on solutions to avoid things like what has happened with the extension of the thirty-nine days.

I think you can look and see the charter industry has tried to help the private anglers, and this council has had a bumpy road getting the APs warmed up and moved along, but I just want everybody to know that the commercial industry -- We don’t want to harm the recreational. We have wanted to help, and the record reflects it.

She spoke about some of the high-grading, and that’s been a problem, but, when the CPUE, the catch per unit of effort, has been going down -- It’s been decreasing. There’s been a lot more effort to catch less fish per trip, I’m saying. They’re taking more trips.

I think it’s important, and I have worried about this thirty-nine days and what are the uncertainties in this thirty-nine days and how it’s going to affect SEDAR 52, and one of the questions I have is are we going to include this 2017 catch into SEDAR 52 and how that affects it and what are the consequences if we don’t down the road, and I’m looking at long-term.

That’s basically what I wanted to get on the record about it. The commercial industry looks forward to working with the private anglers to develop a better system that gives it more access, and that’s basically what I had to say. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Banks.

MR. BANKS: Some of the comments that you made, Leann, leads me to a question, and, unfortunately, I don’t know that I’m very clear on exactly what legal mechanism was used to allow this thirty-nine days outside of this process, and can somebody explain that to me, please?

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: I forgot to introduce that we have Mr. Shepherd Grimes back at the table with us for this meeting. I’m sure most of you are familiar with him, but I guess I should formally introduce him, and so now to put you on the spot, sir.
MR. SHEPHERD GRIMES: Thank you, especially Mr. Banks here. I don’t know what to tell you. I was not involved in it, and there hasn’t been much involvement at my level, but, if you look at the Federal Register notice itself, like most of our rules, it cites the Magnuson-Act generally as the source of authority. There are multiple provisions in it, and so it isn’t clear as to which specific provision was intended to be the underlying source of authority.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Banks.

MR. BANKS: Spoken like a true attorney, and I appreciate that. Roy, in your estimation, or anybody at NMFS, do you think it had to do with protecting the economics of the fishery? Does that seem to be a consideration? Is that what they’re basing it on, that it was going to be of great detriment to the economics of the fishery if the Secretary did not make such a move?

DR. CRABTREE: Well, economics are always a concern and taken into account, and I can read you a sentence from the rule that came out in the Federal Register. It says that, given the precipitous drop in federal red snapper fishing days for private anglers, notwithstanding the growth of the stock, the increasing harm to coastal economies of the Gulf states, and that the disparate approaches to management undermining the integrity of the management structure, and so clearly the economic impact of the seasons was on the Secretary’s mind.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. JOHN SANCHEZ: Yes, but Magnuson also states that we shouldn’t use economics as the sole, which arguably it will be argued it’s not the sole motivation for decision-making, but it does kind of walk like a duck and quack like a duck.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: All right. I am going to turn to Dr. Ponwith now, if there are no other comments at the moment, and I will let you give us a little bit of your information.

DR. BONNIE PONWITH: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to pull up some slides that will make it easier to walk through. We were asked what the implications of the longer season might be on this stock, and so we ran some projections on that.

Just to tee-up the conversation, what we did was use the most recent stock assessment model and updated it with 2015 and 2016 data. We used a forecast for the population with two scenarios for 2017, what it would look like in a three-day season with
total recreational landings of a little over 800,000 fish and then a second one with a forty-five-day season with total recreational landings estimated to be a little over two-million fish.

The estimates for both scenarios, again, projections were estimates that were generated by our colleagues in the Southeast Region. For the commercial, we worked under the assumption that the commercial landings in both of these scenarios would be about 99 percent of the commercial quota.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Bonnie, I noticed that last slide says fish, and my brain works in pounds, because we have quotas and ACLs that are in pounds, and so can you give me an average weight on that 2,159,623 fish, so that, in my mind, I can convert that to pounds?

DR. PONWITH: No, I can’t give you that off the top of my head, but I can talk to the analysts and get that number. I don’t have that number. If we go to the next slide, this is what the expanded red snapper season looks like, and so you will see, in the next slide, three lines there.

The blue line is the rebuilding plan line, and so that’s the line that is smooth and slightly sloping downward. The gray line is the line that has the dip below in 2017, if you are having trouble with the colors, and then the red line with the big spike in it is the forty-five-day season.

Those are the total retained yield in millions of pounds, and so what you will see is, in the forty-five-day season, the result is a total yield of 20.1 million pounds of Gulf of Mexico red snapper, and so this represents an increase of 8.3 million pounds over the yield predicted to be the result of the three-day season, and it’s a six-million-pound increase over the yield specified under the rebuilding plan.

If we take a look at the lower slide, what you’re seeing there are reductions in average weight due to the forty-five-day season, and so you see on the top are the years, running from 2014 to 2022, and then you will see different colored lines. You will see the different colors represent the different gears or sectors of the fleet.

Essentially, the model predicts that the increased fishing pressure in 2017 will result in an 8 to 12 percent decrease in the average weight of red snapper in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and so that’s what this slide is. Then, if we go to the last
slide, the last slide is essentially the punchline, and so how do all of those changes influence the status of the stock?

What this is, it’s the X-axis is years, going from 2015 out to 2039, and the Y-axis is the spawning potential ratio, and so what these lines show is the spawning potential ratio under those three scenarios. The blue line is the rebuilding plan, the gray line is the three-day fishery in this year, and the red line is the forty-five-day fishery, and so, essentially, these are projections. If you catch this, this is what the rebuilding plan or this is what the stock status would look like as a result of that.

The bottom line to this is that the forty-five-day season was predicted to delay the rebuilding of the stock until 2036, which is four years later than the rebuilding target of 2032, and it’s six years later than the predicted rebuilding assuming the three-day season, which would have carried us out to 2030.

Those are the predictions that we have, the projections that we have, based on the last stock assessment and plugging in assumptions about what would be landed in 2017 under this assessment and how it would influence the stock in the long-term.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you, Madam Chair. Did this incorporate discard mortalities? I am assuming it did.

DR. PONWITH: Yes.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Dana.

DR. PAMELA DANA: Thank you, Chairman Bosarge. Dr. Ponwith, this is just looking at this year’s forty-five days, correct? In subsequent years, if there were a repeat of any number of days, thirty days or forty-five days, then would that -- I’m assuming that would impact the rebuild timeframe, too?

DR. PONWITH: That’s correct, Dr. Dana. The projections are based on what the SPR response would look like in response to the forty-five-day season this year, and one of the things that you have to keep an eye on is the change in average weight, and so the change in average weight changes because of the extension of the season, and one thing we know about red snapper is, the bigger they are, they more productive they are, and it’s not a linear relationship. It’s a cubed relationship, because of the
relationship between volume and weight and length.

Essentially, if you start trimming back the number of larger fish in your population, the productivity of that population eventually starts to decline, and so, essentially, that’s what we’ve been trying to do in our rebuilding, is round out from not just the number of fish but make sure that that number of fish represents a broader number of year classes, including some of those older, more productive adults.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Crabtree.

DR. CRABTREE: If you look at this, if this is a one-time deal and if these estimates of what the anticipated catch are -- When we get to the end of the rebuilding plan in 2032, rather than being at 26 percent SPR, we would be at 25 percent SPR.

Bear in mind that projections into the future have huge amounts of uncertainty to it, and the levels of recruitment we see and all sorts of other things have a lot of bearing on this, and so it slows rebuilding down a little bit, but we were a couple of years ahead on the rebuilding schedule, and now we’re maybe a couple of years behind, but it’s subject to a tremendous amount of uncertainty when you start projecting fifteen or sixteen years out into the future.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Gregory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: I remember the early days of red snapper, when Dr. Goodyear and I sat around the table with the model, and it was running different scenarios. If we had a scenario that got us to our goal one year too late, the lawyers said, no, no, no, no, no, you can’t do that, despite all the uncertainty, but a question and a follow-up.

In your forty-five-day season, I guess you assume that the state seasons would end on September 4 and would not continue throughout the year? Was that factored in or --

DR. CRABTREE: I think they -- I would have to ask, Doug, exactly what was assumed about that. I am guessing they assumed that Louisiana would catch their share, and I think that it was assumed that Texas would reopen after this was over and that Alabama and Florida would remain closed, but I would need to ask to be certain about that.

Bear in mind that the projection of what would be caught is an extremely uncertain thing, because, as we’ve heard, there was a
lot of uncertainty about how the level of trips would change without the derby fishery and how much and to what extent the stock would be fished down closer to shore off of Alabama and Florida and how that might affect catch rates, and so it’s -- There is a great deal of uncertainty in the projections of how many pounds of fish would be caught, and we’re just going to have to wait until we get some actual numbers to look at, which we should have by October, and see what really happened.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Ponwith.

DR. PONWITH: Thank you, Madam Chair. Dr. Crabtree is exactly right. There is a huge amount of uncertainty, and, the farther you get into those projections, the more uncertain they are. The one thing that it does do is create a scenario where, if you treat the three-day season and the forty-five-day season exactly the same and change only those two things, that’s how different the result would be, and so that gives you a relative change to be able to look at this.

In terms of their raw numbers, absolutely, because the estimates of what are going to be caught are essentially that. They are a prediction of the future based on fishermen behavior in the past, and those things can change very, very quickly, but it does give you a good comparison of one relative to the other.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: I have Mr. Atran.

MR. STEVEN ATRAN: Thank you. The 2032 target date that we have right now, that’s what the SSC and the SEDAR assessment is going to use when they come out next year to do their ABC projections, and so, if you want to exceed that 2032 target date, we would need to start a plan amendment to change the target date, because that’s a fundamental part of the rebuilding plan, and, right now, that is the maximum that is allowed under the National Standard 1 Guidelines, and so we would have to exceed the guidelines in order to do that.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Crabtree.

DR. CRABTREE: Yes, and that poses a problem to try and do that. If you want to look at it, we can look at it, but we did -- When we put the rebuilding plan together, we chose Tmax, which is the maximum amount of time.

It may well be that there will have to be an adjustment to the F rebuild estimate that’s used, and it may be that the TAC will be somewhat lower than it otherwise would have been when we get the
new assessment. It’s just hard to estimate what effect this has until we see what was actually caught, because that’s what is going to drive it.

The new assessment though is also going to factor in the recruitment levels and all of those things, and so we would expect that the TACs would have changed anyway, but we don’t have any way of knowing whether the TACs would have gone up or down or what they would do.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: But, by new assessment, you mean the one that we’re going to get the results of in 2021, because the assessment that we have on the table right now is not going to take any of this into account.

DR. CRABTREE: Well, I think we need to talk about that, because I don’t -- I think, with the new assessment, even if we don’t delay it, when you do the projections from which the catch levels would come, the projections can take into account the preliminary landings estimates, and so I think there are ways to factor this into the catch level recommendations, and I know Bonnie has talked to her staff about that and can address that, but there are ways to handle that outside of delaying the assessment.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Robinson.

MR. LANCE ROBINSON: I had a quick question for Bonnie. When these projections were done, where did the forty-five days come from?

DR. PONWITH: The forty-five days was put forward as a hypothetical.

MR. ROBINSON: Is there any talk about rerunning this under the forty-two days that we saw in 2017?

DR. PONWITH: It could be rerun, but, quite honestly, I think it would be more informative to actually -- Since the fishery underway, let it play out and see what the actuals are and then plug those actuals into the projections going forward. That, I believe, would be a much more informative analysis.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Greene.

MR. JOHNNY GREENE: Well, this is a tricky situation, and I really don’t know what to say or how we’re going to move forward with it, and we’ll get into the scheduling part of this here in
a few minutes, and I’m going to have some more comments about it at that point, but, since we were here last, I have missed only five days of fishing since we were here.

I fished through some of the tropical storms and it was pretty nasty, and it’s been a rough year. All in all, it’s been three to four foot and fifteen knots out of the southwest and a lot of rain and a lot of dirty water and a lot of rain. The fish were moving a lot, and it kind of ties into what Leann said earlier.

I have covered everywhere from twenty-miles off of South Pass to south of Destin and off of Panama City, and fishing has been tough. I am not going to lie about it. I’m just telling you the facts. I have not seen a lot of recreational boats on the weekends, probably due to the weather, probably due to some of the effort, or lack of effort compression, or whatever you want to call it there, but just spreading it out and not being such a derby, and so I do agree with that.

Now, what will happen from now until September 4, who knows? I hope it continues to be low, because, as a charter/for-hire fisherman, I am obviously worried about a payback fishery and numbers like 8.3 million pounds over quota, because it does affect the charter industry moving into next year.

I sincerely hope that this works, and I hope that we don’t go over the quota, and I truly hope that we don’t go over the quota in such a manner that it affects another industry, because, if the shoe was on the other foot and it was the other way around, how would that go over?

While we’re around the table, and I think we’re all trying to be very cautiously optimistic, and I am just telling you the facts of what I’ve seen, and I’m not trying to embellish them. I am just telling you the boats I’ve seen and the boats that I haven’t seen.

I saw charter boats this year that came in without a limit of snapper that could have had twelve or fifteen and maybe they only had seven or eight, and a lot of them weren’t all that big, and so those are good things. Those truly are good things, and so there was not a lot of charter boats that were running two trips a day. I didn’t see a lot of them in the afternoons.

Now, other areas of the Gulf might tell you a little different story, but, at your angle of trajectory to Orange Beach, Alabama, I have covered a pretty good range of geographic area, and I haven’t seen a lot of boats, but I just want to point out
the facts, that there is another component to the recreational
dfishery, and I hope that we take this into consideration,
because, when we get into scheduling stock assessments here in a
dfew minutes, how do we handle this -- I hate to call it a
bombshell, because that sounds kind of bad, in Leann’s spirit of
trying to remain positive, but how do we handle this surprise
that was dropped on us?

Now, I do think that, with a three-day season, you’re going to
have a lot of people take off of work, and you’re going to have
everybody in the world there loading up, and I do think that the
thirty-nine days will spread it out, because I can hear my wife,
in some sense, say, well, you can go next weekend and you don’t
have to go this weekend.

If she is listening, she will probably kill me for that, but
it’s one of those things that is a true fact, and so I think
that trying to find something good coming out of this -- I think
that maybe having the season spread out over time might be a
good thing, but I do want to weigh into concerns that I have
laid out before you.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Anson.

MR. ANSON: Dr. Ponwith, I might put you on the spot, and you
can certainly confer with staff if you need to, but one of the
issues I find that will need some attention during the
assessment, red snapper assessment, coming up is this issue of
here in the recent years and recent trend of information that
will be available for the next assessment.

We’ve had these short derby seasons, and that has an impact on
fishermen behavior. When you couple that with the reduction in
the availability of species, at least in the eastern Gulf, when
you’ve taken away amberjack and triggerfish in that same time
series, and so people are now, at least off of Alabama, people
are spending the least amount of time and money to go and access
the open red snapper fishery, and so they are not traveling the
distances like they used to, and they are fishing those spots
that are much shallower, much closer in, and typically will hold
a younger, smaller fish, and so, in light of our reduced funding
through the FIN, through the commission, for otolith collection
and the potential for there being holes in that data over this
same time period, and that you have mentioned in the past the
importance of having age data to help kind of reconcile some of
this information that potentially is going to be lacking now for
the recreational fishery, do you anticipate there will be much
discussion on that topic, or I hope there will much discussion
on that topic and how to address that in the next model.

DR. PONWITH: Certainly the assessment is strengthened by the fact that it is an age-structured model, and age matters a lot in the way the assessment is done, and so, to that extent, good, solid, reliable, unbiased age composition data is really important to the assessment, and so, yes, I anticipate that will be a topic of conversation in the assessment.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: All right. I see our conversation is starting to kind of delve into the schedule and the stock assessment, and that is the next item on our agenda, but, before we move formally on to that, were there any other comments that anybody wanted to make regarding the extended recreational season? All right. That sounds good. Maybe we’ll be consulted as a group next time. All right. Mr. Gregory, would you like to lead us into the next topic, or maybe is Mr. Rindone going to lead us through that?

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE SEDAR SCHEDULE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: In this section, before we went to the schedule as a whole, I had included some discussion of the red snapper assessment independently of the overall schedule and cobia and gray triggerfish, and I think Dr. Crabtree and Dr. Ponwith may have answered that, and that is I get the impression there’s not an interest in putting the assessment off until we can get 2017 data, but rather that there is some way to accommodate this by including the 2017 data in the projections, because it’s really critical to try to get an understanding of the effect of what this year’s harvest is going to have on the rebuilding schedule.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Ponwith.

DR. PONWITH: Thank you, Mr. Gregory. Yes, and so it’s a simple question about 2017 or 2018 as the timeframe for the stock assessment. The answer is anything but simple. It’s quite convoluted, and you’re absolutely right.

Typically, the way we would accommodate landings information in an assessment that’s already been done is to use the landings information -- Well, let’s just say, for this assessment, if we did the assessment as scheduled, we would be conducting it right now, and the data workshop is in -- We’re in the middle of it right now.

Essentially, what we would do is have a result, and then we
would generate the projections. When we did the projections going forward, instead of including assumptions about what was caught in 2017, we would put the actuals of what were caught in 2017. Therefore, the impact of the extended season would be incorporated into those projections.

It is different than actually doing the stock assessment with the 2017 data already in the assessment, because one is you kind of drop them in after the fact and the other one is they are an inherent part of the assessment at the onset, and so the real question is should -- Is there something to be gained by postponing the red snapper stock assessment to next year?

Let me walk through -- As always is the case, there are some costs to that, and there are some benefits to that, and what I will do is walk through what I view and what I have gathered from my team and from the SEDAR staff of what some of the costs are and then what some of the benefits are.

First of all, we are actually in the stock assessment right now, and so, if we were to postpone the stock assessment, we would have to cancel a meeting venue, and we would lose money, because we’re close enough to the date of that meeting that we wouldn’t be able to recover the funding, and so those are real dollars.

We have staff who are working on the data analysis to support the stock assessment right now, and some of that analysis, of course, can be put on the shelf and then dusted off and continued next year, and some of that analysis you would have to essentially start all over again, and so you have a team of people who have been working to prepare for the assessment that’s underway right now that would have to do parts of that all over again next year, and so you will lose some efficiencies in that.

It’s too late to add another assessment, and so, if we took this year’s red snapper stock assessment and moved it to 2018, you don’t get another assessment, because it’s too late to start one, essentially, the lead time that it takes to get the data prepared and the otoliths read and everything, and so, essentially, that would be an empty slot.

It would also potentially cause a perturbation to the schedule in 2018, because the red snapper assessment is too big to kind of just shoehorn in. It would have to bump something to be able to make the room, and so those are the costs of moving the assessment that I could think of. There may be more, but those are the ones that came to mind.
Now let’s talk about the other side of the equation, and those are the benefits. One of the benefits is, instead of incorporating the impact of the prolonged season in the projections, the impact of the prolonged season would be part of the initial stock assessment, and that’s a benefit. It would be because you would know if selectivities changed or the locations of the fishery.

All of those things about the way the fish were caught and all of the things about the fish themselves could be incorporated directly into the stock assessment, and that creates a more sound assessment than just dropping in the poundage into the projections. Both are good, but doing it in the assessment is better.

The other thing, which I think is one of the strongest benefits, is that the MRIP calibrations are slated to be ready next summer, and so, if you remember, the reason we scheduled the stock assessment for red snapper in 2017 in the first place was so that we could incorporate the calibrated data into the assessment, but then we made a decision to postpone those calibrations to make sure we had the most possible data and they had adequate time to run through peer review, and so those calibrations won’t be ready until next year.

One of the strongest benefits of waiting until next year is that, instead of doing the assessment this year and then modifying it to incorporate the calibrated data, we could do the assessment with the calibrated data at the onset, and so that is a strong gain.

The third benefit is, because of that, we would gain some efficiencies. If we finished the assessment this year, get it started and have it ready next spring, we would follow it with an update-lite, which is essentially you take the stock assessment that you just finished and you take the calibrated data, only the calibrated recreational data, and substitute the calibrated data in for the original data and hit the go button and run it again, and it tells you how big of an influence the calibrated data had on the assessment.

Instead of doing that in two steps, the calibrated data would be used at the onset of the assessment, and that would be done all at once, and so there may be other gains and benefits by postponing, but those are the ones that jumped off the page to me, and so there are costs to postponing and there are benefits to postponing. That’s the list, and I think it would be worth
having a conversation about.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, Dr. Ponwith. Mr. Walker.

MR. WALKER: I am not on your committee, but, to Bonnie, if you’re looking at the long-term health or sustainability of the fishery, which one is going to give you the better accuracy to project all these different uncertainties that you have in it? Would you feel more comfortable delaying it? You said there was a cost and benefit, but a lot of people want better data, and so I would just kind of like for you to weigh in on that.

DR. PONWITH: You know, it’s a -- Even there, it’s a cost and benefit. Incorporating these two big changes, the MRIP calibration and incorporating the impact of the longer than expected season, into the assessment sort of organically will give you a very strong stock assessment and understanding the impact of those two things on the assessment.

Of course, continuing the assessment as scheduled gets you information on the stock of the stock sooner, and so, essentially, we would, as soon as the assessment is started being run, you would have indications of the status of that stock, and I have heard from a couple of people saying that not only is the effort lower, but potentially the catch per unit effort is lower, and that may drive you to want your answers sooner, and so, again, it’s a cost and a benefit.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Gregory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: I would like to just ask the Center and the Region what do you all want to do? What do you all think is the best approach forward? I don’t think it’s -- I mean, we make the request to explore this, but, if -- The most feasible thing to do, I think, I think is more of a science question and management question combined, but I really like the way you described the different pros and cons.

DR. PONWITH: We have spent a lot of time discussing this since you sent the request, and it is something that we have discussed almost daily. The answer is not a simple one. If it were, I would have come right out and said that the Science Center essentially says this is what we should do and we hope you take this advice.

The bottom line is that the assessment is underway, and postponing is a perturbation to the SEDAR process. I have had discussions with staff, and we will lose the money. Somehow or
another, we will make do on that, but the main concern is I want
to be careful that we don’t commit a process foul, and so, if
the decision is to postpone, I need to consult with our SOPPs to
find out whether technically we can execute that decision before
the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, because, if we wait until
the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, we’re so deep into the
assessment that it actually makes things worse.

I am struggling with this answer, and we all struggled with this
answer. There are some very good benefits of getting this thing
done right, and there are some very good benefits and logical
benefits to waiting, and, to me, the one you brought up in your
message to me, the concern about the extended season, to me is
probably the second-best benefit. The first-best benefit is to
be able to incorporate the calibrated data at the onset, just
because, that second benefit, you can actually capture what
happened in the fishery via the projections.

If you’re asking me for an answer of what my advice to you would
be, I am willing to give it to you, but I will tell you that
it’s a neck-and-neck race right now.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Greene.

MR. GREENE: Well, I am sitting here looking at the schedule,
the one that’s on the board in front of you, and red snapper is
a 2017 standard with a terminal year of 2016, and it starts the
fall of 2017 and ends in the spring of 2018.

I am going to assume that we’re going to get that sometime in
the spring. Knowing how our council meetings fall, it could be
around that April council meeting that we typically have.
Depending on when that is delivered, that may only leave one
meeting, or potentially no meetings, before the 2018 season
comes about, and so, most likely, the only way we’re going to be
able to use this would be for the 2019 season for management for
us to handle what they bring out and lay out before us.

I am kind of leaning that we back up and wait, because, no
matter what we do, it’s going to be the 2019 fishing season
before we can do anything, and, with some of the changes that we
have before us and the skepticism that everyone seems to have, I
think that’s kind of the way that we need to go.

Now, obviously, if we wait, then that’s going to push our
schedule back to 2018, and we’re going to have to take some
action there, but, trying to stay specific to red snapper, I
think I’m going to go ahead and make a motion at this point, and
I’m sorry. It’s just kind of happening on the fly right at the moment, but I think that the motion would be to delay the current red snapper standard assessment to 2018 and make 2017 the terminal year.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Okay. We have a motion on the board to delay the current red snapper standard assessment to 2018 and make 2017 the terminal year for that assessment. Is there a second to the motion?

DR. DANA: Second for discussion.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: It’s seconded by Dr. Dana. Dr. Crabtree.

DR. CRABTREE: If we delay this, Bonnie, when would we expect to have the assessment results before the council? We would be in 2018, and so we would see them -- When do you think?

DR. PONWITH: I would have to do some back-calculation. The wildcard on that are the calibrations, because what we wouldn’t want to do is delay so that we could incorporate the calibrations and then miss using those calibrations.

I think the whole timing of when we would finish will be driven by when the commercial and the recreational 2017 data become stable enough, final enough, to be able to incorporate into the stock assessment and when those calibrations are done and peer reviewed and able to be used to adjust those landings. This is a standard, and it would be sometime in the spring of 2019.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, Dr. Ponwith. Mr. Boyd.

MR. DOUG BOYD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am not on the committee, but a couple of observations. One is we all want better data, and we all want new, current data. One of the problems I see is that, this time next year, when we’re ready to do this assessment, we’re going to need more and better data, and so are we going to postpone it again next year because there is some looming data out there that we don’t have?

It just stands to reason that you need to go with the calibrations, with the estimates with what you have to go with, and then you do either an update or you incorporate that data.

The other observation is what Dr. Crabtree just said. If you wait until next year, you’re not going to have this available until 2020 or 2021 to put into the quota calculations. It seems like, the more we wait, the worse it’s going to get.
CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Ponwith.

DR. PONWITH: Just more specifically, the stock assessment right now started August 1, and so that was the data deadline for bringing the data in for 2017. The report is scheduled to be available for the council in March of 2018, and so it’s reasonable to expect that if you postpone to be able to gain those two big benefits, having the actual 2017 data incorporated instead of projecting it after the fact and having the calibrated data to be able to be used, and it follows that same schedule, it would begin in August of 2018 and be ready for the council in March of 2019.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Crabtree.

DR. CRABTREE: This is how it seems to me. So we would get the assessment in March of 2019, but it would be difficult to implement a new TAC in 2019 then, because the commercial fishery would already have gotten their quota and be operating, and there wouldn’t be time to go through the normal process.

That’s assuming the TAC is going down. If it’s going up, obviously that’s a different circumstance, and so we would then be looking at setting new catch levels for the beginning of the 2020 season, and so then the question becomes, all right, if we do hold off, that’s the scenario, but what do we do in the meantime?

Now, I suppose you could take the current projections that we have and factor in the actuals into those and rerun that and take it before the SSC. That has a lot of issues with it, because you don’t know what the recruitments have done and those things, but that would be the only way I can think of to somehow factor this into the setting of catch levels in a way to allow us to take action for the 2019 season.

Even if we did that, assuming we won’t have all the landings, we’ll already be into next year, and so we could do that and get it in front of the SSC sometime next year, and then we could put in an adjusted catch level for 2019, but it’s hard for me to see how we could make an adjustment in the 2018 catch levels to factor this in under just about any circumstance.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: So delaying it may not have that big of an impact either way. We’re probably going to have to wait a while to get something in place to address -- If there is a problem, to address it.
I like this idea. I will speak in favor of it, because, right now on our schedule, red snapper is not going to be -- If we continue with the schedule as it is, that means we would continue with the red snapper assessment that we have on the board, on the table, right now.

We won’t get any more updated science, assessment science, on red snapper until spring of 2021, and, based on the discussion we just had, that means we wouldn’t be able to actually do anything until 2022. This is 2017, and so that, to me, not seeing the true impact of -- Yes, this is updated data, but this is something outside the norm that we’re about to see right here.

We’re talking about 8.3 million pounds in excess of what we thought on -- What is our quota, thirteen-point-something-million? That’s a pretty big outlier that we probably need to see what impact this is going to have. We probably don’t need to wait until 2022, when we really dig a hole for ourselves, to start going, uh-oh, okay, well, we see what happened now and this is where we’re at and this is the hill we’ve got to climb.

I would rather know sooner than later, and, if knowing sooner means that we delay it until 2018 and get those results and are able to take some action and know where we stand in spring of 2018 and adjust the 2019 season, that, to me, is a better option than making adjustments in 2022, when we get the next assessment that actually incorporates that information organically into the assessment. Mr. Gregory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: I just want to point out that, for 2019 and onward, the SEDAR schedule is proposed. It’s not fixed. The 2018 is pretty well fixed, and so we could probably do another red snapper stock assessment say at the beginning of 2019, using 2017 data. Another one. Not postpone until then, but have a second assessment in lieu of scamp or vermilion or yellowedge or tilefish, which are fisheries that are not as controversial or as big in landings or fishing effort.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Ms. Guyas.

MS. GUYAS: I guess that’s kind of where I was going. I was going to ask Bonnie -- If we move forward with this assessment now, as scheduled, when would we actually be running this assessment-lite? Is it really a slot, or is it just plugging in these calibration numbers and adding 2017? What is the time like on that, and when could we expect a product?
DR. PONWITH: The assessment-lite is a slot, and it’s because it’s for more than just red snapper. It would be -- Sort of the model that we created for it was for all stocks that have significant recreational landings that have been recently assessed you would do the assessment-lite, and the reason for that is because all you do -- It’s not a true update assessment.

An update assessment, you take the exact same model that you used the last time and you add the terminal year to the fishery-independent index and you add the terminal year of landings data from commercial and recreational and everything else stays the same. All the assumptions and everything else stays the same, and so you just add in those terminal data.

For the MRIP-lite, you wouldn’t touch the fishery-independent, and you wouldn’t modify the age structure, adding in new otoliths. All you would do is take the same data that you used the last time around and substitute in for those data the calibrated data and see how the model results compare. That gives you a baseline and then sort of an experimental line, by putting those calibrated data in there, so you understand how the changes in the recreational landings, driven by the change in methodology, influenced the outcome of the assessment.

That’s what the update-lite is, and the species we would do are the ones that meet those criteria. They have been recently assessed and they are a significant for the recreational, and we would do all of those.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Mickle.

DR. MICKLE: Thank you. I’m not a member of this committee, but I guess I will weigh in as well. I would like to point out Director Gregory’s idea of pushing the standard, finalized standard, in 2017 and then 2019 as well. It just works out. We all talk about red snapper, and it’s obviously a priority, and I just don’t see the problem with doing two full standards. I am a state employee, and I work on red snapper, arguably more than a lot of state species, which I’m not real happy about, but it’s the way it goes, and so making the justification to do two full standards -- I do want to weigh in that what we’ll walk away with with these standards, set up in these ways, will allow us to manage the fishery like we’re doing and to keep doing it without having bigger black boxes come before us. It allows us to really grasp what the harvest is going on in all the sectors, and it gives us the information we need, and I would like to
support that, of two standards in 2017 and 2019.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Ponwith.

DR. PONWITH: Thank you, Madam Chair. The repercussion of a standard for red snapper in 2019 is that bumps vermilion, and it’s because the analyst that works on vermilion, kind of our vermilion expert, is also the red snapper expert, and so we can’t do those two in the same year.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Greene.

MR. GREENE: Well, two of the reasons that I changed my mind, because I have never been one to ever push anything or kick the can down the road, as some people like to say. I have just never been one of those type of people, but the two things that caught my attention were incorporation of the MRIP data and then the potential positive impacts that may come out of this longer recreational season.

If that can somehow be captured in the assessment as a positive thing, then it may set a trend moving forward, and I think those are some things that we should really consider. I appreciate the vigor of the conversation around the table and everything, and I just -- Having the net benefit of the MRIP in there, I think Bonnie had mentioned that that was one of her big topics that she was really -- One of her big bonuses to doing that, and, while I don’t want to wait, I do think this is right thing to do, but, regardless of how this goes with the vote, I can see both sides of it, but I think we’re better off to just wait and get some better information.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Dana.

DR. DANA: Thank you, Chairman Bosarge. In the interest of time, and knowing that we at least have two of the three members of this committee that are going to vote for this motion, we should probably call the vote and then, over the next two days, the Full Council can have discussions on it.

At least we have a placeholder with this motion for it to be brought up again in Full Council, and then, if someone on the Full Council chooses to make a motion to keep it way it was or to have two standards or whatever Bonnie wants to call it, then that can be brought up at that time.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, Dr. Dana. Because it is important, are there any comments outside just the members of
this committee that anybody wants to make before we vote? Okay.
All right. The motion on the board is to delay the current red
snapper standard assessment to 2018 and to make 2017 the
terminal year. All those in favor, signify by saying aye; all
those opposed, same sign. The motion carries.

That is going to take us to our next agenda item, which is a
bigger picture of the overall schedule. Mr. Gregory.

SEDAR SCHEDULE REVIEW

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: We have Mr. Rindone on the line
also to help with this, but we left the last council meeting
with us requesting to have a cobia stock assessment and a gray
triggerfish stock assessment in 2018, and the Southeast
Fisheries Center indicated, late in the discussion, that that
would be a problem, since the same assessment scientist is doing
both and they can’t do both in the same year, which is the same
problem that was just highlighted with vermilion and red
snapper.

We need to -- It seems to me, and this is my opinion, that we
need to work around that somehow. We’ve got a prioritization
program for determining when we’re supposed to do assessments,
but yet the council wanting assessments for various reasons at
various times, and that seems to be a real constraint, and I
just am recognizing that, but the real question at hand right
now is the issue of doing the cobia stock assessment in 2018 and
whether that can be done or not, or should it be put off until
2019? I will let Ryan pick it up, if there’s any questions or
if he has anything to comment on the council discussion from
here on.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Rindone, did you have any feedback for
us?

MR. RYAN RINDONE: I’m just listening right now, Madam Chair.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, sir. Dr. Ponwith, you wanted to
chime in?

DR. PONWITH: Yes, and thank you, Madam Chair. On the issue of
cross-training on the stock assessments, there is certainly some
strong logic to having expertise in the hands of more than one
analyst for a species. It’s that real knife-edge of having
someone who is an absolute expert on it and understands the data
and understands the history of the fishery and can dive right
into it very, very efficiently, versus the box you get into if
that person leaves or becomes ill or for any other reason, or double-booked.

We can make an investment in cross-training. It does take time. Essentially, what it would take is to have a lead assessment person and then someone working as their assist, so that they become familiar enough with the assessment that they could do it on their own if there was a requirement. We can talk about that, and maybe bring that to the SEDAR Steering Committee, to talk about the merits of that, and I am certainly open to that as an option.

The issue with gray triggerfish and cobia is it is abundantly clear to me how crucial it is, from the council’s perspective, to get those done as soon as possible, and so I understand the pressure. Right now, the analyst who is the expert on those is currently the one who is working on the gray snapper benchmark.

The other complicating factor is that cobia is -- There are some stock ID questions that we have on cobia, and, as you know, in our SEDAR Steering Committee, we made a commitment to making sure that as much is understood about the stock structure before we dive into an assessment, so we don’t have situations where we do an assessment and then after the fact ask, wow, did we actually assess that properly, given what we know now about the stock structure.

We have a stock ID workshop scheduled, and it’s scheduled to start this winter. We had originally talked about doing it in the fall, but there are actually some studies that are ongoing right now that we want to reap the benefits of, because this is such a crucial issue to getting the assessment correct for this stock. We’re going to wait for those studies to be completed and be able to incorporate them and be informed by them in the stock ID workshop that will be scheduled for this winter.

We can watch the way that stock ID workshop unfolds. The expectation is that the results would be reviewed come next summer, right around in the June-ish or July-ish timeframe, I think, and, at that point, we’ll have enough resolution on how we should be assessing that stock that we can commence.

My concern is I would not want to start anything here in the Gulf until we reaped the benefits of that stock ID workshop, because, again, it’s going to be really important. It will help us to know whether we should be conducting the assessment exactly the way we’ve been doing or whether this should be assessed as one large intermingling stock, and I think that’s a
really important question.

My recommendation for 2018 is to really focus on gray triggerfish first and then to have that followed by cobia, for those reasons. Cobia then could be conducted with the benefit of the results of the stock ID and after gray triggerfish is completed, so that we know that that analyst has had a chance to finish the gray triggerfish assessment.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, Dr. Ponwith. Is there feedback from the committee? What I am hearing you say, Dr. Ponwith, and we kind of left this open-ended at the last meeting, is we had both gray triggerfish and cobia on the 2018 schedule, even though you had pretty much told us that that is kind of impossible, because it’s the same person.

What you’re saying is that, if we really want to get the most useable information, we need to wait for that stock ID workshop on cobia and let that feed into the assessment, which does that mean that cobia moves to 2019? Is that what you’re telling us? I am not saying that’s a negative thing, but I just want to make sure that I’m hearing what you’re saying.

DR. PONWITH: It means that -- What I am doing while you’re talking is looking for the end date for the gray trigger assessment, because the timing of the start of cobia would be driven by having the results of the stock ID workshop in hand and having the gray triggerfish assessment completed.

Now, if we discover that cobia is one giant interwoven stock, then it would be -- The stock assessment would be conducted in conjunction with analysts from the South Atlantic Council, and it remains to be seen whether the Gulf would be the lead or the Gulf would be the assist on that assessment, and that could influence our ability to get started earlier, because I know, just as you are eager to get going on cobia, so is the South Atlantic. If the South Atlantic has the opportunity to be the lead, it’s possible we could get started a little bit earlier.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Greene.

MR. GREENE: I remember the last meeting, and we were really -- The cobia issue was a pretty hot topic at that point, especially with some of the Atlantic states and all of the issues that were going on with cobia up and down the eastern seaboard, and we had talked about Beaufort potentially assisting along with that as well, but, pending the findings of the stock identifier, I don’t know that it’s prudent, at this time, to keep the cobia in 2018.
I think that, based on what we’ve talked about doing, and not necessarily what we’re going to do, regardless of that, we’re going to have to do something with the cobia, and I really don’t want to move cobia at all, but I think that that stock identifier that you outlined is huge, because, if it is one stock, it may be more than the South Atlantic and the Gulf. It may be the Mid-Atlantic Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and just a whole plethora of things that I think we need to wait on.

That’s why I am pulling -- I am going to make a motion in a moment, but that’s why I am pulling cobia to 2019, as opposed to one of the other fish. It has just got some extenuating circumstances that is kind of out of our control that I do think is prudent that we wait on, and so, with that, I will make a motion to move cobia to 2019 with a terminal year of 2017.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Okay. We have a motion on the board to move the cobia stock assessment to 2019 with a terminal year of 2017. Do we have a second for the motion? It’s seconded by Mr. Matens. Any discussion on the motion?

That does seem to follow our prior discussions as well, with triggerfish really being higher on our priority list as a concern to get assessed than cobia. We have some concerns with cobia, but, right now, I think triggerfish are outweighing it at this point. Okay. Is there any other discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favor of the motion, signify by saying aye; all opposed, same sign. The motion carries. Mr. Diaz.

MR. DALE DIAZ: Does that leave a vacant slot in 2018 that needs to be filled now?

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Mr. Gregory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: I think we have filled it with red snapper.

MR. DIAZ: We’ll see.

MR. RINDONE: Madam Chair, if I could pose an idea to everybody. In 2018, we have the MRIP calibration updates listed as something that we’re trying to get done, and something that does remain an option to the council, as opposed to having that effort conducted there, is to have the updated MRIP information included whenever that species is assessed next on our schedule.
Dr. Ponwith could weigh in on the impact of doing this on her staff’s time and deliverables and whatnot, but I would be interested to hear what the Center has to say about doing that as opposed to trying to get all of those calibration updates done in 2018. For instance, instead of getting the MRIP calibration for gag done in 2018, it would be done when we update gag in 2020.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Dr. Ponwith.

DR. PONWITH: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s an idea that we have spoken about before, and, in fact, it’s the default approach for stocks that have assessments that are old. We talked about how it’s important, one of the important criteria, for being appropriate for an update-lite, and it’s that the stock assessment is fresh, and that is because all you’re doing is substituting those data. If you have a really old assessment, you don’t want to substitute the data and then say, well, what about all the rest of that stuff that could have changed, and so you really want a fresh assessment. That would be one of the criteria.

It is possible to wait and incorporate the calibrated data in the next assessment for all stocks. What that does though is postpones you as a council’s awareness of how big of a difference the calibrated data make on what the actual recreational landings are, and that has implications for potentially the status of the stock, and it has implications for the allocation, to make sure that your allocations are playing out in the spirit that the council intended them to, and so what it does is postpones that awareness. It’s an option, but there are risks associated with the option.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, Mr. Rindone, for that insight. We’re a little over schedule, but not too bad, and we can always work late, right? It’s Monday.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: That’s right. We have fresh coffee.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Yes, we have fresh coffee, Mr. Gregory says. All right. Is there any other discussion on the schedule as we have amended it thus far? Is there anything else that we need to address on this priority list of our schedule here?

MR. RINDONE: Madam Chair, part of the reason why I brought up what I did is that, by moving red snapper into 2018, it’s going to eat up a lot of resources, just like it does in any year that
we would assess it, and so, by redistributing those individual MRIP calibrations across years, like Dr. Ponwith said, it does delay our temporal awareness of what is actually going on, but it doesn’t deprive us of it completely. It would also make more time to have red snapper done in 2018, and it would decrease the probability of us losing red grouper in the process.

Just, generally speaking, as we move these different species around, it will change the way that the schedule looks, and other species will likely also have to be moved around accordingly. That’s it.

CHAIRMAN BOSARGE: Thank you, sir. All right. Seeing no other discussion, that will bring our SEDAR Committee to a close.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 7, 2017.)