

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2
3 SEDAR COMMITTEE

4
5 Webinar

6
7 OCTOBER 26, 2020

8
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

10 Tom Frazer.....Florida
11 Martha Guyas (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
12 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
13 Robin Riechers.....Texas

14
15 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

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17 Patrick Banks.....Louisiana
18 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
19 Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi
20 Roy Crabtree.....NMFS
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2

3 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

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5 Tim Griner.....SAFMC

6 Clay Porch.....SEFSC

7 Joe Powers.....GMFMC SSC

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1 The SEDAR Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management
2 Council convened via webinar on Monday morning, October 26,
3 2020, and was called to order by Chairman Tom Frazer.

4
5 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
6 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
8

9 **CHAIRMAN TOM FRAZER:** All right, and so I will go ahead and
10 convene the Gulf SEDAR Committee, and the agenda is Tab I,
11 Number 1, and the first order of business is Adoption of the
12 Agenda, and so is there any additions to the agenda or
13 modifications to the agenda? Seeing none, is there any
14 opposition to moving forward with the agenda as posted? Seeing
15 no opposition, I will consider the agenda approved.

16
17 Moving on to the second item of business, that would be Approval
18 of the June 2020 Minutes. Can I get a motion from one of the
19 committee members to approve those minutes?

20
21 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** So moved.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Motion by General Spraggins. Is there a
24 second?

25
26 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** Second.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** It's seconded by Ms. Guyas. All right. Is
29 there any further discussion? Seeing none, is there any
30 opposition to approving those minutes? Seeing none, the motion
31 carries. The June 2020 minutes are approved.

32
33 The third item on the agenda is the Actin Guide and Next Steps,
34 and that would be Tab I, Number 3 in your briefing materials.
35 Mr. Rindone is going to lead us through that. Whenever you're
36 ready, Ryan.

37
38 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** I'm ready. We'll start with an update on the
39 operational assessment process, and so we'll start with an
40 update on the operational process and SSC recommendations, and
41 we talked a little bit about this before, but we're going to
42 review it here, and Dr. Powers from the council's SSC will go
43 through that with you guys, and you guys should ask questions
44 and provide any feedback.

45
46 Then we'll go into the interim analyses, and there's a
47 discussion of timing and use for management, and Dr. Simmons
48 will go through that with you guys, providing an overview of

1 what these interim acceptable biological catch analyses are and
2 the species we can use them on. We've done two of them so far
3 for red grouper and one for gray triggerfish, that you guys will
4 hear more about tomorrow.

5
6 The presentation will provide examples of potential ways to
7 improve timing of the process and current requests for the
8 species that we have out to the Science Center and some future
9 considerations, and it has the potential to provide a lot of
10 flexibility and responsiveness that we haven't had before.

11
12 You guys should ask questions and decide if you agree with the
13 generic timing that staff has proposed for implementing
14 management changes that may come out of these interim analysis
15 requests and perhaps consider a process for doing these on an
16 annual basis, species for which they should be done, timing, and
17 just to note that these are completed between the council and
18 the Science Center, and so these are not part of the SEDAR stock
19 assessment process.

20
21 Then we'll go on to review of the SEDAR Steering Committee
22 report from earlier this month, and Dr. Simmons will go through
23 that with you guys, and then any Other Business. Mr. Chair.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. We will move straight
26 into Agenda Item Number IV, and that would be Tab I, Number IV
27 in your briefing materials, and that would be an update on the
28 operational assessment process and the SSC recommendations. Dr.
29 Powers is going to lead us through that presentation, and so,
30 Joe, if you're on, we'll get the presentation up.

31
32 **UPDATE ON OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND SSC RECOMMENDATIONS**

33
34 **DR. JOE POWERS:** Thank you. Basically, the first part of this
35 presentation is what was presented to us, the SSC, from the
36 SEDAR staff about operational assessments and how to modify that
37 process.

38
39 The overall goal for this is, of course, to increase the
40 efficiency, and particularly get more assessment advice through
41 the process more quickly, but recognizing that, to some extent,
42 this is going to result at the expense of some transparency.

43
44 If you need a more transparent process, then that's the research
45 track assessment, and that is designed to go over the types of
46 assessments that go into much more detail, and each one of these
47 are -- The more transparent and thorough assessment would get a
48 research track approach, and each one of the research tracks

1 would be followed up by an operational assessment, from which
2 the management advice would be derived.

3
4 From a practical standpoint, the operational assessment, in this
5 defined process, would be limited to updating new years of data,
6 as already used in the previous assessment, and what the SEFSC
7 recommends is to eliminate some of the assessment panels for all
8 future operational assessments. From the SSC's standpoint, it
9 was unclear if this would include all the workshop panels, data
10 and assessment and review, and so I think that needs to be
11 cleared up a little bit.

12
13 What has been suggested is to introduce topical working groups,
14 TWGs, to address very specific facets of an assessment, for
15 example something about the selectivity of a particular fishery
16 or discard mortality rates and those sorts of things. These
17 TWGs would work only within their specific topic, and they would
18 not review the assessment in total.

19
20 TWGs, this arrangement would be appointed by the SEDAR
21 cooperators, yourselves, the councils and the commissions, et
22 cetera, and it would be combined of SSC members and academia and
23 stakeholders, and it would operate using prescribed statements
24 of work, through a team-style approach, with webinars and
25 conference calls.

26
27 The TWGs would produce documentation detailing their discussions
28 and their recommendations and why they included particular
29 materials in the assessment, and it would also then be reviewed
30 during plenary sessions during the assessment. SEDAR would be
31 responsible for organizing and scheduling and participation of
32 those TWGs.

33
34 SSC members should expect to provide guidance on which issues
35 require a TWG, what subject matter needs that sort of
36 information, and the statements of work for the TWG and to
37 participate in that TWG for assessments and then review during
38 the formal operational assessment reviews.

39
40 The number of TWGs for an assessment will vary. If the topic is
41 not covered by a TWG and needs further review, the SSC will have
42 to request such work as part of the formal assessment review.
43 Statements of work for TWGs will need to be developed two years
44 in advance of the operational assessment, and no guidance, at
45 this point, was presented on how to resolve if you discover a
46 need for a TWG during an assessment process, because, by doing
47 that, that would slow the process down.

48

1 These modifications to the operational assessment, and
2 particularly the TWG approach, were presented to us to be
3 scheduled to begin in 2022, but there are questions, as I
4 mentioned, and we'll bring up a few more questions in this
5 discussion, and so I think it was understood, as it was
6 presented to us, that the process is evolving.

7
8 This is more or less, or this is, the SSC's response to this
9 that we had at the meeting. First off is that the SSC is
10 responsive to this change in process, and, whatever this process
11 ends up evolving to, I'm sure the SSC will work with the Center
12 to implement changes and to make sure that it works as smoothly
13 as possible, but the SSC recognized that there is -- In the
14 past, there has been an interest in increasing the cooperators
15 involvement and an increased transparency and participation,
16 and, in many ways, that's how SEDAR was originated originally.
17 It was to increase this transparency and to increase
18 participation.

19
20 They recognized that this also affects issues like the
21 throughput and the amount of assessments that go through this,
22 and there have been changes made to the SEDAR process every
23 three to five years, but, by and large, these have been rather
24 incremental, and they aren't necessarily made to address some of
25 those stated shortcomings.

26
27 We also got into a discussion about some historical things.
28 Prior to SEDAR, we had assessment panels, and one of the major
29 benefits of that was, of course, some efficiencies in
30 throughput, but the major disadvantage was that this was done at
31 the expense of transparency, and, again, that was some of the
32 motivation for the original SEDAR process to begin with.

33
34 There were some members of the SSC that felt that it is unlikely
35 that the goals of quality, throughput, and transparency could
36 all be met simultaneously, given the current availability of
37 resources and the demand for assessments and data limitations,
38 and so there was some skepticism about how much all of these
39 things can be achieved.

40
41 The SSC agreed that efficiencies could be achieved by going
42 through this process, but it would be really important that the
43 statements of work be done well, and so that's important in
44 terms of planning the workflow, and particularly the various
45 TWGs, and the statements of work will be defining what those
46 TWGs -- What are the important issues that need to be addressed
47 in the next assessment via a TWG.

48

1 That also means that, if something comes up in the process,
2 identifying new items that might require a TWG, that -- If this
3 is done during that process, this, of course, would be
4 detrimental to the timing, in essence, and so the implication
5 here is there would have to be strict adherence to the
6 statements of work, in order to get that throughput and
7 timeliness.

8
9 Nevertheless, it is recognized that a TWG may be needed after a
10 stock assessment has started, and that could in fact slow the
11 process down, and so I think that there should be some thought,
12 or I think this is the SSC's conclusion, that there should be
13 some thought about, some guidance about, what to do in that
14 particular situation.

15
16 The proposed protocols that were presented to the SSC within
17 this could work well, I think, within the SSC's framework of how
18 the SSC operates, but the council needs to recognize that
19 there's going to be some limitations and shifts in priorities
20 that these changes will apply. I think that was the major
21 conclusions of our SSC. Thank you.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Dr. Powers. Are there any
24 questions for Joe? Dr. Porch.

25
26 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** Thank you, and thank you, Dr. Powers, for that
27 very thorough presentation. I did want to clarify one thing,
28 and that is that this proposal is really more of a course
29 correction than a change, per se.

30
31 The original proposal that we gave did not include assessment
32 panels for operational assessments, and they were supposed to be
33 more like update assessments, so that they could be very, very
34 efficient, and so research tracks were supposed to be thorough
35 and transparent, and it results, at the end, in a peer-reviewed
36 assessment model, and so you decide on what the best structure
37 of the model is and what pieces of data are going in there, and
38 it goes through a thorough, peer-reviewed process, and then that
39 forms the basis for operational assessments that come down after
40 it. Those were supposed to be fast and efficient, like an
41 assessment update, where you're just adding the most recent
42 data.

43
44 Somehow, there was a miscommunication, and we ended up having
45 assessment panels for all of the operational assessments, and
46 what ends up happening is folks start re-reviewing every aspect
47 of the assessment, and you almost go back to the equivalent of
48 another benchmark, and it just slows the process down

1 considerably, and so, again, we're just trying to do a course
2 correction here, and operational assessments should look like
3 updates most of the time, but, when you get into the topical
4 working groups, they are designed to address very specific
5 things that might come up in the interim between assessments.

6
7 The idea is you, as Joe explained, you develop a statement of
8 work, a couple of years ahead of time, detailing specifically
9 what new things you anticipate are coming up that really need to
10 be looked at, and then those are written down clearly, and we
11 take them to the SEDAR Steering Committee and talk about it a
12 little bit more, and maybe refine them a bit, and those go then
13 to the folks that are going to do the assessment, and then they
14 figure out how long it's going to take them to do that.

15
16 We can give an initial guess, but there are so many moving
17 pieces in assessments now, and there are so many partners, and
18 everything is interdependent, and planning is absolutely
19 critical, and so what we can't have is, in the middle of every
20 assessment, someone proposing that, oh, we need to look at this
21 and we need to look at that, because then people have to
22 recalculate things, and you get a lot of people involved, and it
23 slows the process down considerably.

24
25 I guess, to answer a couple of the questions that Joe brought
26 up, but workshop panels are really supposed to be a part of the
27 research track process, and we wouldn't have workshop panels for
28 all the operational assessments, but we do concede that there
29 are times where there's something that has come up that really
30 needs to be addressed, and sometimes our staff brings up issues
31 that we feel like really need to be addressed in the next
32 assessment, and those should be written in the statement of
33 work. Then, if we need to, we'll have either an in-person or a
34 webinar with the topical working group that reviews those
35 specific items.

36
37 As far as having a topical working group come up unexpectedly,
38 hopefully that doesn't happen much. Usually, we have a pretty
39 good idea of things that need to be addressed ahead of time, and
40 so we really want to avoid what is the question that Joe asked,
41 one of these bullet points about what do you do when something
42 new comes up in the middle of an assessment, and the short
43 answer is that shouldn't happen. We should be planning better
44 than that, but there may be some rare occasions where there is
45 some big surprise that nobody anticipated.

46
47 Then I think it's negotiable, and we could work on some
48 protocols, I suppose, of what rises to the level that it needs

1 to be addressed in the middle of an assessment, but, again, that
2 really has to be limited, because, if we have to -- If it's
3 something substantial, that we have to rework on a lot of other
4 pieces of the assessment, it's going to delay things quite a
5 lot, and that's going to have a cascading effect, and so we may
6 end up having to bump other assessments, especially if we start
7 working to the point where we're trying to really fit as many
8 assessments in the schedule as we can and there's no real wiggle
9 room.

10
11 If, all of a sudden, you introduce an unexpected wrinkle, again,
12 it could end up having cascading effects that end up in a lot of
13 delays, and so I just wanted to kind of impart a sense of the
14 need for planning here, because that has been our undoing on
15 many occasions, where we start looking at something new and
16 then, unexpectedly, it ends up slowing us down, or the
17 assessment panels want to re-review some aspect that's actually
18 already reviewed, or add something new, and it really does slow
19 the whole process down. Thanks.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, Clay, for that overview, and I
22 appreciate that the operational assessments, as you just kind of
23 laid them out, are to increase efficiency and throughput, and
24 the working groups are really, I guess, designed to, as you
25 pointed out, address very specific issues that are identified as
26 part of the statement of work, but, just for the benefit of the
27 council, could you provide an example or two of something that
28 you consider a specific issue that doesn't need, necessarily, a
29 ton of work, or it falls into that arena, as opposed to going
30 into the research track?

31
32 **DR. PORCH:** I mean, let's suppose that -- For instance, here's
33 something that could come up that's unanticipated that wouldn't
34 be that big of a deal, and somebody just conducted a study on
35 discard mortality rates. They showed, for instance, that maybe
36 the mortality rate was higher than we thought.

37
38 That's something that's usually fairly easy to change in a stock
39 assessment, and, if we felt that it was compelling enough
40 information, what we might want to do is convene a topical
41 working group, which could just be folks that the councils and
42 other cooperators feel like they have the expertise to review,
43 and they could take a look at it, and, if they agree that, yes,
44 this is a good study, and this is the best available science,
45 and then we can still kind of do a plug-and-play.

46
47 Let's say -- Like as I've seen in some statements of work,
48 someone just writes into some of the SSC's -- I think it's

1 happened in the South Atlantic a few times, where they write to
2 review all life history, any new information on life history,
3 and that can end up being a really heavy lift, and so, if we're
4 going to include things like that in the statement of work,
5 then, at the frontend, we really have to reserve extra time,
6 and, in the end, promise fewer assessments.

7
8 If you did that in the middle, and let's say that somebody had a
9 whole bunch of raw data that they said, well, this is going to
10 inform reproductive capacity of the stock, and then we suddenly
11 said, okay, we're going to convene a special topical working
12 group to look at that, that would involve a lot of time and
13 effort, and I think it would result in -- Unlike the discard
14 mortality rate example that I gave you, it could really
15 considerably delay the process, which means that people would be
16 working on that and not doing something else for another
17 assessment, and so does that help?

18
19 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Yes, it does, a lot, and, again, I just wanted
20 you to answer that question for the benefit of the council, to
21 kind of put some constraints and bounds on what you're looking
22 for with regard to the working groups, and so thank you. I see
23 that Robin Riechers has his hand up. Go ahead, Robin.

24
25 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** Thanks, Tom. Clay, obviously, you all have
26 probably, I guess, benchmarked this out, or timelined this out.
27 Thinking about the operational assessments, and, assuming we
28 don't have a lot of issues with the working groups being called
29 in after the fact, what is you all's thoughts about the change
30 in number of assessments?

31
32 Obviously, the first year you try to do this, it may be a little
33 bit different, but, as you're thinking through it, and without
34 the assessment workshops and the time used for those and the
35 fact that you have to time those, where one workshop ends and
36 there's a report, and then it gets fed to another, what do you
37 all think the time savings can be, and, ultimately, because it's
38 really the throughputs we're after and not really the time
39 savings, but what is the change in the number of assessments
40 that you're thinking you all can do, as compared to now?

41
42 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you for that, Robin. Great question, and I
43 will say the short answer is just the process change, our
44 estimates are roughly a 20 percent increase in throughput, and
45 so that's not -- It's not going to double throughput, but it
46 will result in some increase.

47
48 We have to see it though in line with some other changes that

1 we're trying to put into place, and one is that we're trying to
2 automate a lot of our data processing steps, so that we can
3 provide the data more efficiently to the people who are actually
4 doing the stock assessments, and so those should result in a big
5 increase in throughput, but it's just we're not quite there yet,
6 and we're still developing the software.

7
8 We have several other initiatives like that, where we're just
9 trying to make the process more efficient in multiple ways, and
10 hopefully we get to a point where we're at least doubling our
11 current capacity, but we're still a ways out from that, but,
12 like I said, just the process change, if we really execute it,
13 which we haven't really been doing yet, but, once it really gets
14 in full swing, I would expect that we could get -- If we do five
15 assessments -- If we used to do four assessments for a
16 cooperator, then we can increase to five or so, just from the
17 process change. That will also solve a lot of headaches and
18 frustration on the part of our staff.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Clay, for addressing
21 Robin's question there. I am not seeing any other hands up, and
22 so I think we'll go ahead and -- Go ahead.

23
24 **DR. POWERS:** I was just going to interject here that, also,
25 issues like -- Methods like interim analysis, which you'll be
26 discussing next, those sorts of things are also designed, in my
27 mind, to kind of increase the efficiency and to scale down the
28 parts of analysis needed for certain kinds of decisions, and
29 this is just tantamount to management procedures which are used
30 in things like southern bluefin tuna and so on, and so, to me,
31 that also is one of the mechanisms that the Center is attempting
32 to increase this throughput, in general, for the decision-making
33 process. Thank you.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Joe. It looks like we have Leann.

36
37 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Porch, I just
38 wonder -- If you go to the topical working groups, and, as you
39 actually get into more of the assessment process, and so the
40 topical working groups would be a year or two prior to the
41 assessment, but, as the scientists are going through that
42 operational assessment process, the current framework we have
43 will involve some stakeholders in that, and so, if we move to
44 the topical working groups, what avenue will the stakeholders
45 have to give feedback or be participating or at least listening
46 to the actual hands-on assessment process going forward?

47
48 **DR. PORCH:** The topical working groups -- That's another great

1 question. The topical working groups will still be public
2 webinars or public workshops, and so, to the extent that the
3 topic is something that fishermen or other stakeholders want to
4 contribute to, they can, and we're very happy to listen to them.
5

6 The other thing we talked about at the SEDAR Steering Committee
7 meeting, the last one we just had that Carrie will report on, is
8 maybe modifying the process a little bit to have listening
9 sessions that are geared specifically to communicating with
10 stakeholders that kind of avoid all the jargon that you normally
11 would get in some of the topical working groups or an assessment
12 panel, and they're really focused on communicating in a way that
13 is more intelligible, more reachable, for non-technical experts,
14 and providing a venue where fishermen and others can share their
15 observations, and we can listen, and we can figure out -- It's
16 sort of like, if you say fishing mortality rate, that doesn't
17 mean much to many people, but, if I say the fraction of fish
18 that the fishery is taking out of the population each year, that
19 makes a little more sense.
20

21 I think some kind of venue where we're very careful to avoid
22 jargon, and we spend a lot of time allowing people to just
23 explain their observations, and then can figure out how to
24 interpret it and whether it actually will affect -- Or if it's
25 something that we can incorporate in the stock assessment model,
26 and so we are thinking about trying to find ways to better
27 listen to stakeholders.
28

29 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, Clay, and I think that gets back to
30 the issue, really, of trying to increase throughput without
31 compromising, to a great degree, transparency, and so the goal,
32 or the intent, here is to make sure that every opportunity is
33 provided for that participation in the process, and so thanks,
34 Leann, for that question.
35

36 I am not seeing any other hands up for this particular agenda
37 item, and so we'll go ahead and move to Agenda Item Number V,
38 which is interim analysis and a discussion on the timing and use
39 for management. Dr. Simmons, if you want to lead us through
40 that, go ahead.
41

42 **INTERIM ANALYSES - DISCUSSION ON TIMING AND USE FOR MANAGEMENT**
43

44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I
45 have a presentation, and then we probably should circle back
46 with Dr. Porch and see if he has some additional comments and
47 then take questions and feedback.
48

1 In thinking about how to use this great tool, these interim
2 analyses, ABC analyses, that the Science Center has proposed, I
3 think Dr. Porch provided a presentation to the council, about
4 this time last year, about how this could be used, and so we're
5 trying to think about taking this great tool and how can we more
6 holistically think about what species do we want to apply it to
7 on an annual basis, and is there anything that we can do on the
8 management side to increase throughput, if the council chooses
9 to make changes to the catch levels.

10
11 For the overview, I'll just talk a little bit, again, about what
12 an interim ABC analysis is and remind folks what species we may
13 be able to accomplish those with. I'll talk a little bit about
14 a management strategy evaluation under that. Then timing of
15 these requests and how long it takes to implement them, and I
16 will walk through red grouper, and also gray triggerfish. Are
17 there things we can do to improve upon this? Then some of the
18 current requests we have and future considerations.

19
20 What is an interim ABC analysis, or an acceptable biological
21 catch analysis? It's a quantitative method of adjusting catch
22 advice, and it's done outside of the SEDAR stock assessment
23 process, as I think Dr. Porch and Ryan have already mentioned,
24 and it does require an accepted stock assessment, and,
25 typically, it uses a defensible fishery-independent index. My
26 understanding is a fishery-dependent index can be used, a catch
27 per unit index can be used, in some cases, and I believe it has
28 been done for highly migratory species.

29
30 Just a reminder, and this is a slide from Dr. Porch's
31 presentation last year, and these are the species that it was
32 suggested that this could be applied towards and some examples
33 of the fishery-independent index that might be used for those
34 various species is on the right side of the column.

35
36 Just to talk a little bit about management strategy evaluations,
37 an MSE can be used to help evaluate proposed approaches, in
38 terms of allowable harvest and compliance with Magnuson, and
39 it's not required to be done, and I think one was done for red
40 grouper, but one could not be done in time for gray triggerfish.

41
42 It's useful for gauging efficiency of management actions, and
43 the Science Center might consider doing these, depending on how
44 long it's been between full stock assessments, how much buffer
45 may need to be used between the ABC, due to uncertainty, or the
46 SSC may comment on this, when combining multiple indices, and
47 how to best adjust the interim ABC advice to balance competing
48 objectives, and we may need to include more stakeholders in the

1 process.

2
3 MSE evaluations can be revisited periodically, to address
4 specific questions, but, as I mentioned before, they have not
5 been used every time that we have asked for this from the
6 Science Center, and it's really on a case-by-case basis.

7
8 The Science Center first proposed this concept of interim
9 analysis I think it was in May of 2018, as you can see here from
10 the timeline, and we were having a lot of concerns expressed by
11 fishermen and stakeholders regarding red grouper, and so, during
12 the rollout of this, during the SEDAR Steering Committee, we
13 said, hey, this would be great for you to use this tool and roll
14 out this process and see what it says regarding red grouper,
15 because we have all these concerns with the stock.

16
17 After the council requested this, the SSC first got some
18 information about this process in August of 2018, and then the
19 completed interim analysis went to the SSC in early October and
20 the council in later October, and, basically, the SSC agreed
21 that there was a decline in that index, and there was great
22 concern for red grouper, and they recommended a lower catch
23 level, and the council concurred with that.

24
25 Based on that request, in October, for both an emergency rule
26 and a framework action, the Regional Office -- NMFS was able to
27 publish a rule to withhold the red grouper IFQ allocation, so it
28 wasn't released before January 1 of 2019, and then, in March of
29 2019, the proposed rule was published, and the final rule was
30 published in May.

31
32 At that same time, both staffs were working on a framework
33 action to make final that emergency rule change that reduced the
34 catch levels, and that final rule became effective for the
35 framework action in October of 2019.

36
37 In this example, it took us about two years to complete this
38 process, one year for the framework and about seven months to
39 implement the emergency rule, and so, when we're asking for
40 these, it may not always meet the requirements for an emergency
41 or interim rule, and so we need to think about that as well,
42 but, due to this being an emergency rule, the Regional Office
43 was able to withhold that IFQ allocation before the release of
44 it, and, so, in this case, it was able to be accomplished.

45
46 Is there anything we can do to the management side of things, a
47 council approach for trying to take this tool and make
48 management changes, catch level changes, in a more timely

1 fashion? What can we do to improve that process?

2
3 Possibly we could look at our framework procedure and try to
4 develop a better closed framework procedure to change those
5 catch levels after the SSC reviews the stock assessment and it
6 goes to the council and they concur.

7
8 We could look at automating our ABC control rule, and I think
9 the New England Management Council is looking at this, and we're
10 in the process of starting up our working groups again to look
11 at our ABC control rule, and, basically, what they are proposing
12 is using existing alternatives that have already -- That range
13 of alternatives for the NEPA side of things that have already
14 been reviewed, and, if it's within those ranges, not having to
15 do a whole new NEPA document, but trying to streamline that
16 process on the hind-end.

17
18 Then we can just continue using our framework action approach
19 and just try to get ahead of this, and we know that there's a
20 request up there for this interim analysis, and we can get a
21 better handle on what that might say with being involved with
22 maybe the draft report early, the council staff and the Science
23 Center, before it goes to the SSC to see what it might be doing
24 when it goes to the SSC, if it's going to be increasing or it's
25 going to be decreasing, and try to start work on something
26 earlier.

27
28 Currently, we're going to get, tomorrow, the SSC review of gray
29 triggerfish, and they recommended a change in ABC, and that was
30 reviewed during the September 14, 2020 meeting, and that was an
31 interim analysis. We have an outstanding request for red
32 snapper, and that's anticipated to be available in the spring of
33 2021. Then we have a standing request for a red grouper interim
34 analysis at the start of every year.

35
36 If you take the example of gray triggerfish through the process,
37 in January of 2020, the council received the information that
38 the operational assessment for gray triggerfish could not be
39 completed, and, at that time, Dr. Porch suggested that the
40 council request an interim analysis, and so we did, following
41 that January meeting, in February, and that was completed. As I
42 mentioned, it went to the SSC in September, and then you're
43 going to see the results of this in October.

44
45 Is it possible for us, after you tell us what to do, to take
46 action in a final action document in January, and perhaps that
47 final rule could become effective in June? Then, if the
48 increase that we saw for this particular analysis -- Could that

1 be realized later in the year by both sectors?
2

3 The timing of that is not ideal, and so you have a fixed closed
4 season in June and July, and you may be able, towards the end of
5 the year, to open back up again, based on that increase, later
6 in the fall, if all goes as planned in 2021.
7

8 Perhaps a better process would be to consider high-priority
9 species that the council, maybe every other year, would want to
10 request these interim analyses for, and, if we ask for those in
11 January, it goes to the SSC in March, and then the council in
12 April, and, if we can, come up with a final action document in
13 June, and then have it become implemented in December, so that
14 any changes can be realized in January of the following year,
15 and so that's the ideal timeline. Is that going to be possible
16 all the time? It's probably not likely, but, if we can try to
17 schedule this and think about this more holistically, it may be
18 possible in the future.
19

20 Just some considerations. This is a great tool, and it has the
21 potential to provide managers a lot of flexibility to respond to
22 recent trends that may not be considered in the last stock
23 assessment, like red tide events and hurricanes, and the Science
24 Center has indicated that it is possible to modify the
25 overfishing limit proportional to the ABC, which is good when
26 we're getting ABC advice where there is perhaps an increase, and
27 that could be also be considered for the OFL and be reviewed by
28 the SSC at the same time.
29

30 Right now, the ideal time to request these interim analyses for
31 most species appears to be in January, but, obviously, there is
32 limited resources, and there is limited staff resources in the
33 Science Center and our staff and the Regional Office, and so
34 what's the best way to use this tool, if the Science Center can
35 in fact conduct three or four of these per year?
36

37 The other thing that we might need to consider is that we have a
38 couple of species, such as greater amberjack and king mackerel,
39 that we probably need to consider different timing for, because
40 of those different fishing years, and so, as I mentioned before,
41 this is what we're proposing as the ideal scenario, maybe
42 staggering them, thinking about what high-priority stocks we may
43 want to consider this tool for, and, obviously, we can't be
44 making catch level changes every year. We just can't implement
45 those in management quickly enough, and so maybe we want to
46 stagger those.
47

48 If you have concerns about the health of the stock, such as for

1 red grouper, perhaps this tool would best be used to ask for an
2 interim analysis every year, to see where you are with red
3 grouper, and so that concludes my presentation, Mr. Chair.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I am just
6 looking at -- Clay, I will give you an opportunity, if you
7 wanted to weigh-in, before I get to the questions from the
8 council.

9
10 **DR. PORCH:** Sure. Thank you, Dr. Frazer. I think that the big
11 thing to consider here is that there are certain species, like
12 red grouper, or even red snapper and a few others, where the
13 best index is probably a longline survey, and that one can be
14 updated within a month or so.

15
16 A lot of the species, like gray triggerfish, actually are
17 probably best monitored with our video survey, but that takes us
18 about a year to process all that information, because it's a lot
19 of video reading, and we just don't have that many personnel to
20 do it, but we are working on artificial intelligence to read the
21 videos, and we're hoping that, within a few years, we actually
22 can train that automated video reading to where it has a high
23 reliability. Then that would speed things up considerably.

24
25 As it stands now, for some species, actually the data would
26 still be about a year old before we actually can do the interim
27 analysis, and so you would probably end up, as we did with gray
28 trigger, doing it later in the year, probably closer to the
29 summertime, and then you would have the data from the previous
30 summer survey, whereas things that use the longline survey for
31 the interim analysis could be done much quicker, and January
32 would be fine.

33
34 We are looking into how we can automate the whole process and
35 make it as efficient as possible and provide it on our website
36 and provide it to the council, and so, even if you weren't using
37 it for an interim analysis, you can actually see what our survey
38 trends are, in as close to real-time as possible.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. There's a couple of
41 hands, and we'll start out Ms. Bosarge and then Mr. Diaz.

42
43 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Carrie, I thought that
44 was an excellent presentation, and you made some really key
45 points on timing, and also on the fact that, you know, we fuss
46 at the Science Center a lot of times, because we want more
47 throughput, and we want more assessments, but you're quite
48 right, in the sense that, once we get them, it takes us a long

1 time to actually enact management upon them, and there's some
2 give-and-take there, and I don't think we need to fuss quite so
3 much sometimes, and we need to look inward.

4
5 On this particular topic, I think it might behoove us to -- If
6 we think it's possible for the Science Center to give us two or
7 three interim analyses per year, then we should start putting
8 that on our SEDAR schedule. That SEDAR schedule, to me, lays
9 out the expectations and what our wish list is from the council,
10 and then that goes into your SEDAR Committee meetings, and
11 that's where you really start working through the nuts and bolts
12 of things.

13
14 If we can start putting our ideas down a year or two, or three
15 years, in advance, and it's on this schedule, which goes out to
16 2024, then hopefully we can work on the timing, and we'll get
17 this thing perfected down to an art, where it comes out at the
18 right time for us to be able to implement in a reasonable
19 timeframe on our end.

20
21 Just from a macro view, to connect this presentation with the
22 last presentation that we had on trying to increase throughput
23 on the operational assessments, to me, this whole interim
24 analysis, that is really, in my mind, where we are going to get
25 the most bang for our buck for what we need for our purposes as
26 a council on getting updates more frequently on species.

27
28 I don't know that we necessarily really need to reduce a lot of
29 the transparency in the operational assessments to try and
30 increase throughput there, and I think this is where we get our
31 timeliness, and maybe we leave the operational or research
32 tracks like they are, and I think they're functioning pretty
33 well, and this will get us our timeliness. Thank you.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Ms. Bosarge. Mr. Diaz.

36
37 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** I agree with Leann. That was a very good
38 presentation, Dr. Simmons. The whole reason we're trying to
39 look at these interim analyses is for efficiency, and, you know,
40 we gain efficiency whenever we can actually take that interim
41 analysis and use it for catch advice, and so, for us to try to
42 time it, where we get it to where we can use it for catch advice
43 in the most efficient fashion, that's something I think we
44 should strive for.

45
46 I did hear Leann's comment about including it with the SEDAR
47 stuff, and I know it's supposed to be separate from SEDAR, and I
48 don't know what Dr. Simmons thinks about that, but, Dr. Simmons,

1 I guess this question is for you.
2
3 Should we -- I know that you said that we need to request it in
4 January, and our January council meeting is usually at the very
5 end of the month, and can we have a standing agenda item on the
6 October council meeting every year just to review the stocks
7 that are eligible, or that are in need, of these interim
8 analyses? Would that be a good idea and a way for us to get us
9 automatically set up to take advantage of these interim analyses
10 the most efficient way?

11
12 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Dr. Simmons.

13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think
15 October would be a good time. I was thinking we would come up
16 with kind of a standing request, like we have at least for red
17 grouper, and maybe a couple other species, where the Science
18 Center has a good idea what's coming down the pike a little bit
19 earlier, because they're going to -- We don't want to ask them
20 in October, with the holidays, to get it to us in January, and
21 so I think we could start there.

22
23 I know there's going to be things that come up where we have
24 certain concerns about various species, but, if we had a couple
25 of maybe standing requests, then I was thinking that would be
26 helpful, but maybe Dr. Porch has a good suggestion for that.

27
28 As far as including it on the SEDAR Steering Committee schedule,
29 I think it's outside of the SEDAR stock assessment process, but
30 we could certainly note it on our schedule as a request, and
31 just supply an official memo, perhaps, to the Science Center
32 with the council's desire for these ABC interim analyses, but we
33 can work that out.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I see that, Clay,
36 your hand is up.

37
38 **DR. PORCH:** Yes, although Carrie basically said the things that
39 I was going to say. I don't really -- I don't mind if we keep
40 track of it as part of SEDAR, but it's really an extra SEDAR
41 process, and so I wouldn't want to administer the interim
42 analyses through SEDAR, and I think that's something that we do
43 separately, as Carrie said.

44
45 I think we would all really appreciate putting things on a
46 fairly predictable and regular schedule, and that would be,
47 ultimately, my goal, is to, like I said, automate the index
48 process, and then, along with it, pretty much automate the

1 interim analyses, and so, I mean, the council can use it or not,
2 depending on what the need is, but we would have it available,
3 but I do agree with the strategy of starting slow, with some key
4 species, as has been suggested, three or four a year, and, as
5 the process matures, we'll conduct MSEs, where we might refine
6 techniques a little bit.

7
8 People will grow more comfortable with the approach, and we
9 might start doing it a little more often, but I think the
10 strategy, as it's emerging, sounds good. The only other thing I
11 would add is we do, for some of these species, like king
12 mackerel and amberjack, where we don't have the best fishery-
13 independent indices, we'll have to think a little bit more about
14 whether we want to apply this approach to them.

15
16 I am looking at trying to work with our partners to retool our
17 entire fishery-independent survey process, our whole enterprise,
18 but that's going to take some time, but hopefully, at some
19 point, we'll have better fishery-independent data for all of our
20 species, taking advantage of things like the things we've
21 learned from the Great Red Snapper Count.

22
23 There is a whole lot of money that's going to be spent on an
24 interim -- Well, a fishery-independent assessment of the number
25 of amberjack out there, and no doubt we'll learn a lot about
26 that, and we'll basically be able to change our whole survey
27 enterprise, to take advantage of those kind of technologies, and
28 we'll just move to having more informative fishery-independent
29 surveys, which means we can have more frequent and better
30 interim analyses.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. Leann.

33
34 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wondered if, maybe
35 at a future meeting, staff, working with the Science Center,
36 could bring us maybe a proposed schedule, like a proposed list
37 of species, for 2021, 2022, and 2023, and let's get started at
38 looking at what that revolving schedule, or reoccurring, for
39 some species, would be.

40
41 Then the council could take that and revise it as we see fit.
42 Like, oh, we don't think that's a high priority or whatever, and
43 we'll start to work through the kinks. I think, if we don't
44 ever put it on paper and have it presented to us, this is going
45 to be a very reactive, rather than proactive, process.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thank you, Leann. Okay. Are there any other
48 questions? I will wait just a second, because there seems to be

1 a little bit of a delay here. All right. I am not seeing any
2 more hands, and so we will go ahead and try to keep on schedule
3 here, and we'll move to Agenda Item Number VI, which is the
4 SEDAR Steering Committee Report from October 16, 2020, and that
5 was a webinar meeting, and that is Tab I, Number 6 in your
6 briefing materials. Mr. Rindone, if you want to help us with
7 that. Dr. Simmons, go ahead.

8
9 **SEDAR STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT FROM OCTOBER 16, 2020 WEBINAR**
10 **MEETING**

11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thanks. I have a short
13 presentation, and then Ryan is going to walk us through the
14 changes to the schedule, if that's okay. I am just going to
15 focus on the Gulf, versus the South Atlantic and Caribbean, and
16 we're just going to focus on the Gulf for this.

17
18 In the background materials, I have included the briefing book,
19 and it's Tab I, Number 6(b), and, if you go to that, there are
20 several attachments that were also available to us from the
21 SEDAR website, and, if anybody needs those, or can't find them,
22 let me know. I will be referring to them during the
23 presentation.

24
25 Just a quick overview of the presentation, we got an update on
26 the SEDAR projects report and the process, and we talked a lot
27 about the operational assessment process, which there is a
28 motion that the committee passed regarding that, and there are
29 some changes to the assessment schedule, based on the COVID
30 pandemic, and there were two Other Business items.

31
32 First, we received a projects update. For SEDAR 70, the Gulf
33 greater amberjack, it was only delayed by one month, and so we
34 are on track for that to be reviewed by our SSC in January of
35 2021.

36
37 We also received an update on the impacts of ongoing projects
38 and COVID-19. Specifically, we first talked about the research
39 track for SEDAR 68, which is the Gulf and South Atlantic scamp
40 research track assessment schedule. Just to provide a review,
41 again, there was an in-person data workshop, and it was
42 cancelled, in March. Then there was a series of webinars that
43 were held, and we had several SSC members that were involved in
44 that.

45
46 Then there were several webinars held in April and May, and then
47 the assessment was placed on hold for three months, due to time
48 constraints from data providers, and then the final data

1 workshop webinar was held in September, this last month, of
2 2020.

3
4 We also received more information and an Attachment 3 from Dr.
5 Neer on the operational assessments. Just, again, and we've
6 been through this, and this is really for the Science Center to
7 streamline the process, and the proposal is to eliminate the
8 assessment panels for all future operational assessments and
9 instead use these topical working groups, and we've had a lot of
10 discussion on this.

11
12 There was a lot of questions from the committee, the Steering
13 Committee, and just asking more about transparency and how the
14 topical working groups would be used moving forward.

15
16 After that discussion, there was more feedback from Dr. Porch
17 and Dr. Neer, and the committee passed the following motion, and
18 they requested that the Science Center and SEDAR staff develop a
19 guidance documents for the operational assessment process,
20 including the use of topical working groups, to ensure the
21 process will remain transparent, while still meeting the needs
22 of the Science Center to streamline the current process, and
23 this guidance document should be presented to the committee in
24 the spring of 2021, and that was approved by consensus, and so
25 we'll be hearing some more about that and providing information
26 to the SSC as well in the coming months.

27
28 We also received some information about changes to the stock
29 assessment schedule for next year and in 2022, and there has
30 been a lot of issues regarding challenges of getting into the
31 lab and being able to age the various fish species, where the
32 assessments are scheduled next year, and catch estimates, which
33 we're going to talk a little bit more about tomorrow, to reduce
34 the backlog of ageing of hard parts of the fish, the spines and
35 otoliths, and basically a lot of the federal staff can't even
36 get into the buildings or laboratories.

37
38 The Science Center proposed prioritizing gag for the Gulf of
39 Mexico, specifically for the Gulf, and delaying the gray snapper
40 SEDAR 75, the start date of that one year, from 2021 to 2022,
41 and we're also expecting that would push back the yellowedge
42 grouper operational assessment one year and delay the gray
43 triggerfish research track assessment one year. Ryan will talk
44 a little bit more about that next.

45
46 There were two Other Business items that were reviewed. In May,
47 we had received some information on a methods and procedures
48 workshop, which to combine indices of fishery-independent

1 surveys across space and time, and you can read the objective
2 there of that workshop, and we received quite a bit more
3 information on this, and the committee concurred that they would
4 like to see this indices procedure workshop move forward as it
5 was proposed in Attachment 6, and that was approved by
6 consensus.

7
8 Then we also heard a nice presentation from SEDAR staff
9 regarding research recommendations. They put together a search
10 tool and a searchable PDF, and I think folks have been really
11 looking forward to doing something like this for a long time,
12 and so I commend the staff for doing this, and I think it's a
13 really nice tool, and you can go to the link down there at the
14 bottom of the presentation.

15
16 It has research recommendations by council, and also by species,
17 and then they have a really big all research recommendations,
18 and so it's really a nice tool to use when we're getting ready
19 to do the next assessment, and we can look at, hey, what were
20 the gaps from the previous assessment, and so we really
21 appreciate that. That concludes my report, and you may want to
22 add in any other details on this, Dr. Porch, before we get to
23 the schedule.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Any questions or any missing parts, Clay, that
26 we need to add?

27
28 **DR. PORCH:** No, and I think that was a great overview.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you. I am not seeing any hands,
31 and so we can go ahead and move into the assessment schedule
32 with Mr. Rindone.

33
34 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, sir. We fiddled this with last during
35 the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting. For 2020, we're finishing
36 up greater amberjack, and we're starting gag, and we're
37 continuing with the scamp research track, and we will be having
38 the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs review projections for the
39 yellowtail snapper benchmark assessment that was concluded
40 earlier in the year, and those SSCs are going to meet on October
41 30 to talk about that.

42
43 In 2021, we keep going with the gag and scamp research track,
44 and we begin the red snapper research track, and then the scamp
45 operational assessment, which is where the management advice
46 comes from, that will also start, or is anticipated to start, in
47 2021. You see there that the gray snapper assessment has been
48 pushed back, and then we also have an FWC assessment of mutton

1 snapper that kicks off.

2
3 In 2022, the scamp operational assessment should be concluded,
4 and the red snapper research track will be continuing. We also
5 have a Spanish mackerel assessment that will be conducted by the
6 HMS Division, and we haven't looked at Spanish mackerel in quite
7 some time, and so it will be good to wipe the dust off of that
8 one.

9
10 Then we moved the gray snapper operational assessment down
11 there, and we'll clarify timing on that more after the Science
12 Center looks at its workflow and its workload. The mutton
13 snapper assessment should finish up with FWC in 2022. That's as
14 far as we have things finalized, with the exception of gray
15 snapper.

16
17 For 2023, these assessments -- This part of the schedule has
18 been accepted by the SEDAR Steering Committee, but actual start
19 and end dates, and even the terminal years, haven't been set in
20 stone just yet, and so the red snapper research track should
21 wrap up, and we should kick off the operational assessment,
22 which is where we get that management advice, and we're also
23 looking at trying to start a gray triggerfish research track in
24 2023, and then we'll do a yellowedge grouper operational
25 assessment, which is also another one of our more dusty
26 assessments. This one was done last, or was finished, in 2011,
27 with data through 2009, and so it's definitely time. Then the
28 FWC will kick off the west Florida hogfish benchmark assessment
29 also in 2023.

30
31 Moving on down to our proposed part of the schedule here, in
32 2024, we'll keep pushing with the gray triggerfish research
33 track, and we'll do operational assessments of lane and
34 vermilion, and then we'll look at the tilefish complex, which is
35 also another one of our older assessments, and then FWC will
36 look at doing a black grouper benchmark, and this is contingent
37 on some resolution of the previous data issues that we
38 encountered last time we tried to take a swing at this species.

39
40 As for putting the interim analyses on there for each year, we
41 will certainly do that, and it will expand out to just more than
42 one page, but we can certainly add those. Mr. Chair.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Rindone, for that
45 run-through. Are there any questions from the committee with
46 regard to the schedule? Okay. I am not seeing any, and so are
47 there any other business items that we need to consider at this
48 time? Okay. Seeing no other business items, I will go ahead

1 and bring this committee meeting to a close.

2

3 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on October 26, 2020.)

4

5

- - -