GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

Webinar

JUNE 17, 2020

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The SEDAR Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on Wednesday morning, June 17, 2020, and was called to order by Chairman Tom Frazer.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA
APPROVAL OF MINUTES
ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

CHAIRMAN TOM FRAZER: We’re going to get started. We’ll start with the Gulf SEDAR Committee. Members of that committee are myself, Lance Robinson, Martha Guyas, and Paul Mickle. The first order of business is the Adoption of the Agenda, and it’s Tab I, Number 1. Take a quick peek at that, and we’ll get it on the board.

It's a relatively short agenda, and it looks like we’ve got five items up there, and so the first order is the Adoption of the Agenda, and so, if I could get a motion to adopt the agenda as written, that would be great.

MS. MARTHA GUYAS: So moved.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: It’s moved by Martha. Do I have a second?

DR. PAUL MICKLE: All right. Second by Dr. Mickle, and so is there any opposition to approving the agenda? Okay. Seeing none, we’ll consider the agenda adopted as written. The second order of business would be the Approval of the October 2019 Minutes. Is there a motion to approve those minutes as written?

MS. GUYAS: So moved.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: It’s moved by Ms. Guyas. Is there a second?

DR. MICKLE: Second.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: It’s seconded by Dr. Mickle. Is there any further discussion on the motion? Hearing none, we will consider the October 2019 minutes approved as written, and so the next item on the agenda would be the Action Guide and Next Steps, and that would be Tab I, Number 3, and, Mr. Rindone, if you’re willing to guide us through that, I would greatly appreciate it.

MR. RYAN RINDONE: Sure thing. The first thing that you guys are going to hear is a summary of the Steering Committee meeting that was held on May 20 and 21 via webinar, and Dr. Simmons will give you an overview presentation of the materials and outcomes
discussed during that meeting, and you guys should take a look 
at the information and ask any questions and provide feedback to 
us and the Science Center, and our next meeting will be held in 
the fall.

Then we’ll go over the SEDAR schedule, and I’ll take you through 
that, and the schedule indicates the type of assessment and the 
terminal year for each species recommended, and we finalized the 
2022 schedule of assessments during our May 2020 webinar, and so 
you guys should be looking at 2023 and 2024 species and provide 
any recommendations and feedback, and, as you recall, the 
Science Center has requested that the council avoid adjusting 
its SEDAR schedule within a couple of years of when the 
assessment is scheduled to begin, just because of all the 
legwork that happens on the frontend to get ready for an 
assessment.

Just as a bit of background information, the council had 
requested an interim analysis for gray triggerfish to be ready 
for the September 2020 SSC meeting, and the Science Center has 
indicated so far that that’s going to be on time, but they can 
touch more on that if they like.

The council may want to discuss an additional interim analysis 
request for red snapper, based on the timing of the proposed 
research track and subsequent operational assessment, and then, 
if you guys have any other Other Business items to bring up, we 
can do that.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: All right. Thank you, Ryan. We will move 
right into Item Number IV on the agenda, and that would be the 
Report of the SEDAR Steering Committee, and Dr. Simmons will 
lead us through that.

SEDA R Steering Committee Report

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS: Good morning. Thank you, 
Mr. Chair. We don’t have the report yet from the SEDAR Steering 
Committee meeting, and so this presentation really focuses on 
some outcomes pertinent to the Gulf Council and what we thought 
we would like to bring to the council’s attention. If you want 
more information, this follows the outline of our briefing book 
materials from that virtual meeting we had, and that is provided 
as background to the committee and council, and that’s Tab I, 
Number 4(c).

Just to give you an overview, we’re going to talk about the 
SEDA R projects report, and we received an update on that, and
the SEDAR process review and discussions, some proposed changes
of the Science Center regarding operational assessments, and
we’ll get into the assessment schedule review in this
presentation, to get you thinking about it, and then Ryan will
go into more detail with the schedule. We had three Other
Business items that came up before the Steering Committee that I
will discuss, and then some next steps.

For the SEDAR projects report section, they provided information
on delays to SEDAR 68, which is the scamp research track, and
recall this is a joint research track assessment with the South
Atlantic Council, and they are going to be two separate stocks
after the stock ID workshop, but that is a joint effort on the
schedule.

Due to COVID-19, there are several delays in that schedule, and
the March data workshop got cancelled, and I think it’s about a
three-month delay now, and they have had a series of virtual
webinars, to try to get this data workshop back on track, but I
still believe they’re about three months behind.

Several SEDAR projects are beginning in 2020, and, so far,
everything seems to be on target, and so there’s really no
action here needed by the council, if you have any questions.

I already said that the stock ID was held by webinar, and so
there was technical chair issues brought up during the May 2019
Steering Committee meeting, and this was also still a concern
again during our 2020 meeting, and, apparently, there’s some
reluctance for the various SSC members or analysts to serve as
the chair, this technical chair, because there are so many
multiple stages and the length of time involved in the research
track, and so, after a lot of discussion, we offered, the Gulf
offered, to maybe survey its SSC again and see if we could have
an additional member serve as the technical chair.

The analysts have taken over and served as the chair in the
past, I believe, but they just felt like it was really difficult
to follow the discussion and keep track of everything that was
going on and be fully engaged while running the meeting, and so
we’re going to try that and report back to the Science Center,
and see if we can get another volunteer to serve as the
technical chair for scamp.

If you want to look at the background information, there were
several things that were put forward regarding clarification
from the Science Center for operational assessments, and these
are some of the things that we wanted to pull out and point out
to the council, and then we’ll be bringing this to the SSC as well, for their information and comments.

One of the things that they wanted to clarify was that new data and changes in model structure must be requested by the council and approved by the Science Center, and this is only for operational assessments that we’re talking about right now. Public webinars or in-person meetings are anticipated to be rare, but they must be requested in the statement of work and then approved by the Science Center.

There is some terminology change here, and they are no longer assessment panels, but they’re going to be renamed and classified as topical working groups, and so TWG throughout the rest of the presentation, and the Science Center will provide a project manager for the topical working group.

The aim of this working group is they will be appointed by the cooperators, the council, to address specific items as needed, and we think they’re going to consist of SSC members, council staff, and stakeholders, and they will give guidance to the operational assessment lead analysts.

The intent for these operational assessments is the process change is still under development, and we’re just starting to talk about this, and we’re going to bring it to our SSC to take a look at and ask questions. We haven’t updated the SEDAR Steering Committee SOPPs, and so we need to work through that as we work through this process, and the SSC is still the review body for the operational assessments. If you have any questions, it would be a good time to ask those, and, again, we’ll brief the SSC on these changes.

Now we get to the 2022 and 2023 projects, and just to remind everybody that the 2022 schedule is finalized, and the scamp operational assessment will hopefully be finished up, and the red snapper research track will get started, the yellowedge grouper operational assessment will be finalized, the Spanish mackerel operational assessment, and then FWC is going to work on a mutton snapper benchmark assessment.

For 2023, this is the proposed and accepted list, and this we would typically bring to the council in March or April and then talk about it during the May Steering Committee meeting. However, that meeting was cancelled, and so this is a little later than normal, but we are asking that you take a close look at this and see if you have any concerns or questions, so that we can make any changes immediately, because that needs to occur
after this meeting.

We did switch the red drum research track out for the gray triggerfish research track, and we made that request during the meeting, and we will finish up the yellowedge grouper operational assessment, and Florida will start the west Florida hogfish benchmark assessment.

Then, in 2024, this is proposed, and we will finish up year-two of the gray triggerfish research track, and we asked for a lane snapper operational assessment, a vermilion snapper operational assessment, and to look at a tilefish stock complex evaluation, an operational assessment, and that means that, in the past, we tried a golden tilefish assessment, and that also looked at blueline tilefish, and that was considered BSIA, although they did have some difficulties with the data, and we’re asking the Science Center to take a look at it again and include all three species for consideration. Then, also, FWC will be working on the black grouper benchmark assessment. Again, we’re looking for feedback on the 2023 immediately, if there’s any questions of concern, and then, long-term, on the 2024 proposed species.

We had three Other Business items. The first one was a procedural workshop, a pre-proposal came to the Steering Committee, and that was best practices for combining indices of abundance surveys, and the main objective was to streamline this process, and you can read the main objective there, but the Steering Committee requested more information about this, and members requested it to be more inclusive of highly migratory species and the South Atlantic Council, and so we’ll be looking at this again in September and talking about it further, but the Gulf Council was supportive of this approach during the meeting, and we would like to see more information.

I think most people know that we’re looking at more detail for some shrimp stock assessments, and this research assessment plan was proposed during the Steering Committee meeting, and so the process that was proposed is that, during Phase 1, if you look at that first year that we have there, the SEAMAP, effort, catch, and observer process, that would involve the Gulf Council, SSC members, and the Science Center, and we’re anticipating receiving terms of reference from the Science Center shortly to put in front of the SSC during their July 21 through 23 meeting. Then Phases 2 and 3 would follow the SEDAR process, both for the assessment workshop and review, for the other two years.

Based on this schedule, the Science Center anticipates that we
may be getting new management advice as early as 2021 to look at potentially modifying the Shrimp FMPs for those status determination criteria, such as maximum sustainable yield, OY, and maximum fishing mortality, all those good things, in 2021. We do have some action here, and we’ll be working with the Science Center staff and the SSC.

The third Other Business item was we’ve been requesting kind of a feedback loop or the closing of that loop after we provide an operational assessment statement of work. We are being asked to provide these two years out, and the SSC is reviewing those, and then it’s not really clear, until we were to get to the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, whether those statements of work were reasonable or there were concerns or things needed to be tweaked.

We are asking to receive a memo, feedback, from the Science Center telling us whether those statements of work can be accomplished or if we need to make changes, and so this just provides an example of how that might work, and so, for the 2023 species that were just approved in our SEDAR Steering Committee, we would use this, and we’re going to be developing a statement of work for those, unless there’s changes at this meeting, and we would submit those to the Science Center by October of this year, and they would tell us in a memo by February 1 of 2021 if that’s possible or if we need to make changes, and then we would develop the terms of reference and get the schedule and all those other things together to finalize everything before the assessment begins.

These are really for us, just to let you know that we need to brief the SSC on these changes to the operational assessment process and the statement of work outline and process, and I have talked to Julie Neer, and she’s willing to come to the SSC, or at least remotely talk to them, about these changes as the process evolves. We also need to poll the SSC for a technical committee chair for the scamp research track.

We are looking forward to receiving those terms of reference for the shrimp assessment for review in July, and, again, as you get into the schedule, just a reminder to review those 2023 and 2024 assessment schedules and provide feedback, and that concludes my presentation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: All right. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. We’ll take a few minutes here for folks that might want to ask some questions, as they relate to the presentation. I see Dr. Mickle.
DR. MICKLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Great presentation, Carrie, and I really appreciate the information, and it’s a lot of hard work done by Clay and the Science Center and council staff and everybody. A lot of effort is put into the detail, and it’s a complicated process, and I do believe it’s becoming more efficient, and that’s because everybody is working together on it, and that’s great. I love to see these open exchanges, and I know it’s been a long work in progress, and so I think it’s starting to really take the shape of what we want to see as part of the efficiencies being increased.

We know the data is a bottleneck, and some of these actions, with the research track and others, are helping with that, and I think it’s great to actually identify the largest bottlenecks and take them on, head-on, in the overall process.

Before we get into the scheduling specifically, I had a question, I guess for Carrie. On Slide 6 and your second-to-last slide, you were talking about the review process coming in front of the SSC, and then going back to the SEDAR Committee, and so, those discussion points and the review process that goes in front of the SSC, will that be presented -- I’m assuming that those discussions and opinions will be presented to us at the council meeting in October, as our meeting is at the end of October, but would that material and discussion points and feedback be presented in the SSC summary report, or would it be in an actual SEDAR Committee meeting?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: I think, if I’m understanding your question correctly, Dr. Mickle, you’re referring to many of the clarifications that the Science Center is proposing for the operational assessments.

DR. MICKLE: Yes, and so the opinions of the SSC on how well those work or how big of an impact those recommendations or changes will have, and will it be presented by the delegate that’s chosen from the SSC in giving their summary report to us, or will it actually be in a formal SEDAR Committee meeting report presented to us at the meeting, because, if we could choose, I would prefer that the SSC scientists presenting those discussion points present that information, so we could discuss it with them.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Certainly, and so you’re suggesting that we have another Gulf SEDAR Committee in August, so that we can talk about any recommendations or information that the SSC provided from their July meeting to this committee?
DR. MICKLE: Yes, that works.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Sure, we can do that, and I think the plan is for Dr. Neer to brief the SSC in July on some of these changes, and is that correct, Ryan?

MR. RINDONE: Yes, and that July agenda has been under quite a bit of flux in the last twenty-four hours, but we will accommodate that.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Dr. Mickle. We will now go to Mr. Diaz.

MR. DALE DIAZ: Thank you, and I’m not on your committee, but I do have two questions and a comment, and so I’m going to do the questions first. I am seeing king mackerel, and I know you said that everything is on time, but when the council likely see king mackerel, Dr. Simmons, or Mr. Rindone, or whoever can answer that? What meeting?

MR. RINDONE: August.

MR. DIAZ: The August meeting? Okay. Thank you.

MR. RINDONE: The SSC should review it in July, and then you guys would be able to see it as soon as August.

MR. DIAZ: Okay. That sounds great, and so thank you for that. Under 2023, I know research tracks take up two spots, and we’ve got red snapper for two spots on operational assessment, and then triggerfish is only taking one spot, when it’s a research track, and I was just going to see -- The two spots for red snapper in 2023 for the operational assessment, is that correct?

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Yes, it is correct, and I think it’s a manpower issue, and I know that Clay is on the line here, and he can address that.

DR. CLAY PORCH: Sure. We actually assess red snapper as two stocks, and we manage it as one, but we have essentially two assessments, one east and one west of the Mississippi River, because it’s not a huge connection between the two, and you can see different stock trends often on one side of the Mississippi compared to the other.

Arguably, there could be even finer spatial structure, but we just don’t have the data for that, but, in any case, that’s why
it takes two slots, plus red snapper is arguably the most complicated assessment in the nation, with more pieces of data than probably any two or three assessments combined, and so it is an awful lot of work.

MR. DIAZ: Thank you, Dr. Porch. I appreciate that, and I know it is, but thank god we have the data. We probably have got more data on red snapper than just about any other species in the nation also, I would argue, or I would guess, or let me put it that way.

The comment I was going to make is I do know that we had to replace -- We took red drum out in order to make room for triggerfish, and I just want to make sure the council is aware of that, but I do remember you saying that it was doubtful that we would have had the information that we needed to actually accomplish a stock assessment on red drum anyway, and so I don’t think we’re losing anything. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Mr. Diaz, and thank you, Clay, for weighing-in there. I see next on the list here is Ms. Guyas. Martha, go ahead.

MS. GUYAS: Thanks. I had a question about the operational assessments, and so the slide that says that new data and changes in model structure must be requested by the council and approved by the Science Center, and so --

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Let’s go ahead and get that slide up, real quick, so people can see it.

MS. GUYAS: Okay. I guess my question would be, given that the people around the council table may not be aware of data that should be incorporated, what’s the process for that? Are we thinking that maybe the SSC would review the terms of reference first, and then maybe suggest changes, or make recommendations, for the council to consider, and then the council would make a decision on that and send it to the Science Center, and I’m just trying to understand the process for that. Thanks.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: I think what we mean there is the SSC, staff, council members in general, requested by the Gulf Council as a cooperator, everyone together, because staff receives the draft -- Well, we don’t receive them anymore. The scopes of work we come up with on our own, and I’m thinking of terms of reference, and Ryan is probably going to be better at explaining this than me, but we draft those, and we weigh-in on
them, and we put them in front of the SSC, and the SSC weighs-in on them, and then, after that, we write a memo, and the Chair reviews those memos, and then we send them to the Science Center.

Then we’re asking for a memo back of are those scopes of work reasonable, and that’s a new process, before we get to the Steering Committee meeting. Once we decide on that, then we will develop terms of reference and scheduling, and Ryan correct me, or Dr. Porch, if I’m not getting this correct.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: I will give Ryan an opportunity to weigh-in here for a minute.

MR. RINDONE: Sure. Dr. Simmons has it pretty well spot-on. When an assessment is upcoming, staff considers some of the research that is coming through the pipelines, and we might put some of that in front of the SSC to consider, and we also look at things from the previous assessment that were not done, for whatever reason, and communicate with the Science Center to try to figure out if any of this can be accomplished this time around, and so there’s initial communication between us and the Science Center before the SSC reviews that scope of work.

Then, after that point, we send that scope of work to the Science Center and SEDAR, and we’ll get terms of reference back at that point, and there really shouldn’t be any surprises, because we’ve been communicating with the Center, and we know generally what they’re going to be able to pull off, and so the terms of reference should be more of a formality at that point, because we do most of the legwork now on the frontend.

Our SEDAR approval process for that rests mostly with the Executive Director and the Chair, for ultimately saying, all right, we’re going to send this scope of work and these terms of reference off, but, at any point, we can certainly share those with anyone who is interested, and they are reviewed in public at the SSC meetings.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Ryan. Dr. Porch, did you want to add anything from the Science Center perspective?

DR. PORCH: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to clarify some things about the operational assessment, and the idea behind them ultimately was that we already had a peer-reviewed assessment approach from the previous benchmark or research track assessment, and so the only things that actually need further review are the proposed changes to the assessment that
are listed in the statement of work.

The original proposal actually for operational assessments did not include assessment panels that would review the entire assessment, and, as this started to get implemented or whatever, we started to see that the SEDAR coordinator was appointing assessment panels, and it was converting all the operational assessments essentially into either standard assessments, or even the equivalent of benchmark assessments, and that was slowing the process down considerably, and so all the assessments were late, basically, because we’re just turning over every stone again, and that wasn’t the original intent.

The idea of operational assessments was to make the whole process more efficient, and so you have the research track or the previous benchmark, where we did that work of overturning all the stones, and now we have a peer-reviewed assessment, and then you have some changes that might be proposed that the SSC agrees they feel comfortable reviewing, and so then we might add those to the statement of work to an operational assessment, but there’s really no need to review all the aspects of the assessment all over again. We just need to review the new things, and then, ultimately, it’s going to go to the SSC for a final level of review.

Again, the original proposal didn’t include assessment panels, and they were just supposed to focus on the new things, and we’re just kind of correcting that. Formerly, there were no standard operating procedures put in place yet for the operational assessment and the research track, even though we were kind of moving forward and sort of testing the waters, and I think there was general support for the approach, and so I guess what I’m saying is we’re not really changing the procedure, and we’re kind of correcting it. Again, the idea is to be transparent, but also efficient, so we can get more assessments out. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thanks, Clay. Again, I appreciate the input there from Carrie and Ryan and Clay, and, Martha, are we good? Do you think you got your question covered?

MS. GUYAS: Yes. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Okay. Clay, it looks like you might have had your hand up for a separate issue. Do you want to tackle that, or are you good?

DR. PORCH: No, and that was it.
CHAIRMAN FraZER: Okay. Next on the list would be Ms. Bosarge, Leann.

Ms. Leann Bosarge: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to say thanks to staff for giving us that slide on the shrimp research assessment plan. I understand it a lot better now, and I think that’s going to work pretty well, and I did have one question.

I like the idea of presenting it to the SSC, to help with that statement of work, or to review a statement of work, and will we allow some of the SSC members to volunteer for this assessment team, the way we do for all the other assessments, and I ask that because I know we have one SSC member that used to work in the Galveston Lab on those particular models, and it seems like his input and assistance would be valuable in this process, all the way through the process and not just during the one SSC meeting.

CHAIRMAN FraZER: Ryan, do you have your hand up?

Mr. Rindone: Under the way that the Science Center intends for the operational assessments to work, the SSC members could be nominated to these topical working groups in the future, which are going to take the place of any formal assessment panel, and so it will scale back SSC involvement in the assessment process, as opposed to the way that it is at present, and then the SSC will ultimately be responsible for the review of the operational assessments, like they are now, and so they will -- For some of them anyway, it will be the first time that they will see certain aspects of the assessment, as opposed to have them walk through it throughout the assessment process, the way that they are now.

CHAIRMAN FraZER: Ryan, thank you for that, but I just want to make sure that we’re on the same page here, Leann, and I think you’re actually talking about participation in the topical working group on the shrimp research assessment, and is that correct?

Ms. Bosarge: Yes, I’m sorry, and I used the wrong vocabulary.

CHAIRMAN FraZER: Okay, and, again, I think there will certainly be that opportunity to participate, get the appropriate representation on the topical working groups, and Clay was one of the folks that put this particular slide together, and, again, I’m going to invite him to talk about participation in
those groups.

DR. PORCH: Thank you, Chair. To Ms. Bosarge’s question, we’ll have these four different topical working groups, and we’re actually in the process now of putting together statements of work, which we’ll submit to the July SSC, and we certainly would like the SSC member that you mentioned to participate in multiple of these working groups, and I think that would be really important.

Also, some of the working groups, such as effort and catch estimation, ideally, we would have some industry representatives participate, and probably Benny Gallaway and folks like that as well, since they’ve been working with this data for a long time, and so that’s the idea.

We’re putting together working groups now, and some things, like the SEAMAP index working group, that probably would be primarily internal, since we run the survey, and the idea there is basically what’s the best way to use the SEAMAP data for an index of abundance, since that’s what it’s intended to do, and, if we have that, there may not actually be a need to use fishery catch per unit effort information, at least for the most recent period, but there’s also the best way to estimate effort, which is in contention right now, and how do we get catch, just from the state trip ticket systems, and is there anything else that we need to do.

Then there’s a lot of issues with how we develop estimates from the observer data, and this will spill over into bycatch estimates, since we use that data for the other stock assessments, and so I think it’s really important to have SSC involvement in at least three of the four groups, and maybe even also in the SEAMAP group, and, also, like I said, industry, and, of course, that particular member who was involved in these assessments.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Clay. I appreciate that. Okay. Are there any other questions? I don’t see any hands at the moment, and I will give everybody a second.

MS. BOSARGE: Mr. Chairman, I thought I put my hand back up, and I tried to lower it and put it back up, and maybe I messed that up, and may I ask another question?

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: You sure can. You’re just quicker than I am.

MS. BOSARGE: Thank you, sir. Clay, that sounds wonderful, and
you touched on the other thing that I was going to mention relative to shrimp, and that was the industry participation. It was a little worrisome to me, just because the Shrimp AP, as you know, we ended up having to make some changes to that meeting, that was going to happen, where we would have reviewed the last shrimp stock assessment and given some input on these things on this slide right here, but, with COVID-19, we weren’t able to do that, and we have some pretty savvy AP members.

I would say they’re all savvy, but we have some that are former council members and have seen the transition of the shrimp stock assessment models over the years and are very familiar with that history, and so I definitely think making sure that we present it to the AP and get that feedback to you and involve the actual fishermen, just like we do in some of our other assessments, as it progresses, and please pull them in where you can, to get input, even if it’s just to listen in on a webinar as you’re discussing certain data topics, and maybe they will have relevant feedback for you that could be helpful, and so I appreciate that. Then, on a different topic, if I may, Mr. Chairman, and I had one question.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Go ahead.

MS. BOSARGE: On the new SEDAR process, the only thing that I had a little reservation about, that made me hesitant, and I understand that we need to be more efficient, especially on something that would have ended up being just an update, where we’re going to plug-and-chug, and, therefore, there would not be very many public webinars, and I’m okay with no in-person meetings and it being a webinar, but it seems something always comes up, and it’s never quite as easy as what we thought, and it’s a little bothersome to me that the webinars wouldn’t be at least open to the public to listen in to, so that we can follow the process and understand where maybe a stumbling block is.

I feel like that’s always a good thing to happen, because somebody comes up with a good idea, or realizes that there is research that needs to take place there, and communications happen, and you never know where it leads, and so could we speak to the public webinars?

DR. PORCH: Mr. Chair, can I speak to that?

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Go ahead, Clay.

DR. PORCH: To the last point, the webinars actually would be public. We just are saying we don’t need to have ten of them
for an operational assessment, but they certainly would be public, and, potentially, there can also be in-person workshops, but it’s just that the in-person workshops should focus on the new things that are being added to the assessment and not rehash every single point of the assessment, because that just basically makes it a benchmark and slows things down unnecessarily.

The workshops would be public, and I would anticipate, if there are substantial changes to the assessment, that we might actually have a couple, and one example is what’s going on now with the South Atlantic red snapper, in that they’re going to have a topical workshop that’s actually run by the State of Florida, but will have a lot of experts on selectivity participating, and then that information, whatever comes out of that workshop, will be worked into the assessment, and then there will be a couple of webinars, and maybe a very brief in-person workshop, although I doubt it will happen, because of COVID-19, and, at that workshop, they will review how the information from the topical workshop was actually incorporated into the assessment, and so we’re not saying there is no public webinars.

Then, to the first point about participation from the industry, of course, we welcome it, and, in particular, Ms. Bosarge, we hope that you will participate in those working groups.

MS. BOSARGE: Thank you, Clay. I would be honored.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: All right. Thank you, Leann, for asking the question, and thank you, Dr. Porch, for continuing to emphasize that we value the public participation in all aspects of the process, and so I think everybody would agree with that.

The next item, and I don’t see any other hands up at this point, and so we are going to take a quick look at the SEDAR schedule, particularly the 2023 and 2024 years, and so if I can get Mr. Rindone back on the line.

REVIEW OF GULF OF MEXICO SEDAR SCHEDULE

MR. RINDONE: You have your schedule in front of you, and you can see the things that are being finished up for 2020, and so, at the July SSC meeting, the SSC is going to review the assessments for cobia, Gulf kingfish, and yellowtail snapper, and we will have the gag operational assessment, which is getting geared up here, and that will have an in-person workshop, hopefully, in February of 2021.
We’ll still be working on the scamp operational assessment in 2021, and the timing of that may adjust a little bit as we figure out exactly where we’re at with that process, and we’ll be starting the red snapper research track assessment, and the planning team for that assessment, that helps develop the terms of reference and figure out the schedule and whatnot, we’ve already had our first meeting, and we have another one scheduled, and we’re working through that process now. Then FWC will be running a benchmark assessment for mutton snapper, which we haven’t done in a little while.

In 2022, we’ll finish up that scamp operational assessment and continue work on the red snapper research track, and then we’ll also start operational assessments for yellowedge grouper and Spanish mackerel, which should hopefully be pretty straightforward, and we’ll finish up that mutton snapper assessment with FWC.

In 2023, at least what we have listed in 2023 was accepted by the Science Center for moving forward, but these assessments haven’t been formally scheduled yet, and we’re finishing up the research track for red snapper and doing the operational assessment, and we’re starting the research track for gray triggerfish, and then we’re tying off the yellowedge grouper operational assessment. Then FWC will take up west Florida hogfish, as well as the other populations of hogfish, but that doesn’t pertain to the Gulf, and so I just listed west Florida.

Just as an aside, FWC still operates under the benchmark/standard/update framework, because it works better for their processes.

Then, in 2024, we have proposed finishing up the gray triggerfish research track, which would, in 2025, be followed by an operational assessment, and we would also do an operational assessment for lane snapper and vermilion snapper and do an evaluation of the tilefish complex, to see what’s possible to be done with those species.

The last time we tried to assess tilefish was data through 2009, and the review workshop for that was in February of 2011, and so that assessment has got a nice thick layer of dust on it, and so it’s time to figure out what we can do with the tilefish species. Then FWC will make another attempt at black grouper, depending on the progress that they and the Science Center, perhaps, are able to make in figuring out some of the misidentification issues that plagued the assessment the last
time around and caused it be prematurely terminated. Any questions?

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: We will give people just a few seconds to assess that schedule.

MR. RINDONE: Just to clarify, for 2023 and 2024 especially, what I have listed as far as when things will start and when they will end, those are purely estimates, and we don’t know precisely at this point when things will start and end, and that may result in some adjustment of the terminal years that you see in that center column there.

Typically, if an assessment starts in say around September or later, we can include data from the previous year, but, if it starts earlier in the year, it’s more difficult to do that, just based on when data are finalized and available.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Mr. Rindone. It looks like we have a question from Mr. Swindell.

MR. ED SWINDELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ryan, I keep looking at this whole chart, and we keep -- There is no red drum anywhere in this whole thing, and, yet, we’re still also working on vermilion snapper, and the SSC says the vermilion snapper is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring, and so I don’t understand truly, and I will have to get somewhere into this vermilion snapper thing, as to why we’re doing anything with the vermilion snapper and we’re not doing anything with the red drum, and here we’ve got a fishery resource that’s out there that we’re not paying attention to it, and we’re not able to utilize it, and I thought, as a fishery management council, we were supposed to at least make use of the resources that are available, and we’re not doing anything.

I really believe we are doing a disservice to the Magnuson Act by not giving some attention, some way or another, to red drum, and I understand that it’s difficult to do an assessment, but don’t tell me that it can’t be done in some fashion, and I believe there are ways to get it done, and that’s just my opinion. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Mr. Swindell. I think one of the comments that was made earlier, as we were going through the SEDAR report, was that there was -- The red drum was originally on the schedule, and it was replaced with gray triggerfish, given the urgency, again, with that particular fish, and so your point is well taken, and there is no harvest, as you know, of
red drum in federal waters at this time, but your comments are
noted, and we’ll see if anybody else has anything to say about
that. In the short-term, we’re going to go ahead and go to
Martha.

MS. GUYAS: Thanks. I was going to say that I think putting
triggerfish on the schedule in 2023 and 2024 was the right move.
I think that assessment self-imploded recently, and we need to
figure out what’s going on there, and clearly we need a research
track, given all the issues.

I was going to circle back to the question that Ryan brought up
in the action guide regarding red snapper, and so we have the
operational and research track assessments starting -- Well, I
guess going on -- Starting in 2021 and continuing through 2023,
and I wanted to have some discussion about whether we need an
interim analysis or would like to see an interim analysis for
red snapper.

I think the last assessment maybe came out in 2017, and I’m not
sure how old the data was from that, and, Ryan, do you know off
the top of your head?

MR. RINDONE: 2015.

MS. GUYAS: 2015, and so it’s been five years, and I would just
put that out there, and I know we have Great Red Snapper Count
stuff coming out soon, and so I don’t know if there’s a way -- I
mean, there’s a lot happening, and I’m trying to figure out
what’s the best course of action here.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thanks, Martha. I think that’s a good
question, and particularly in light of some of the discussion
we’ve had over the last couple of days. I know that Clay has
his hand up.

DR. PORCH: We are planning to conduct interim analyses for the
2021 and the 2022 seasons, anticipating that the research track
assessment for red snapper will be completed sometime between
eye 2022 or the 2023 end date.

Just keep in mind that research tracks are intentionally
flexible, and so that 2023 date reflects sort of the longest
possible time we think it would take, and it’s possible that,
given the information that comes in, that we’ll complete the
research track sooner, but, again, it’s intended to be a
flexible process, and so we schedule a long amount of time for
it, but, in the interim, we plan to do those kind of interim
analyses, and, as I discussed yesterday, there is two possible approaches.

We can use the approaches that we’ve shown you in the past, that hinges on our most reliable survey information, or, depending on what Greg Stunz’s group delivers with the Great Red Snapper Count, we could potentially use those abundance estimates directly to derive an ABC.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Clay. I guess it all sounds good, and there are, as you pointed out, a number of options moving forward, and so, if it’s the intent of the council, I guess we would just emphasize the desire to have those interim analyses and realize that they could incorporate any number of data, and is that correct?

DR. PORCH: Yes, that’s correct.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I would just try to get an idea of when we thought that interim analysis might be ready, if the Great Red Snapper Count could be included, and I think it was discussed a little bit yesterday, and is that something that may be available you said in early 2021 for the SSC to review?

DR. PORCH: Yes, I think so, and a lot depends on when we actually get the estimates from the Great Red Snapper Count, and so the last I heard from Greg was potentially by the end of June, and he may want to comment, but I have also heard that, because they lost their lead analyst, it could actually not be completed until fall, and so maybe he can further enlighten us there. If the estimates do come in June or July, we should have plenty of time to incorporate them in a potential interim analysis in time for the SSC to review and then the council to implement it for the 2021 season.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Dr. Stunz, do you want to provide some comments?

DR. GREG STUNZ: Clay is right, and we’re looking probably more like the July timeframe, and so thanks, Clay, for swiping our lead analyst, or, actually, it wasn’t Clay, but he went out to a NOAA lab in Hawaii.

DR. PORCH: If it was me, I would have let him work on it.
DR. STUNZ: Exactly, but, as I mentioned yesterday, we’re working just as fast as we can, and we do have some procedural things to go through, as far as the source of that money was from Congress, and briefing their staff and others, and so there’s some things -- I don’t really know what that’s going to look like, but, as far as the actual real work of getting the numbers in, it looks like it’s going to be a July timeframe, and so hopefully that will help you out, Clay, to do that, but just rest assured that we’re not sitting here. We’re working as fast as possible, and especially this COVID stuff didn’t help us out any, but we’re working through it right now.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thanks, Greg. It looks like you had your hand up for something else, and I will circle back to you here at the end.

DR. STUNZ: That was it.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Okay. Great. Ryan, you had your hand up?

MR. RINDONE: I was going to speak to Mr. Swindell’s comments about red drum, but it may be better to yield my time to Clay, if Clay wants to comment on that instead.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Okay. I will give Clay an opportunity if he wants to address the red drum issue.

DR. PORCH: Okay. Do you want me to take it up now?

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Yes.

DR. PORCH: All right. Thanks. The big issue with red drum is that, ideally, we would do a Gulf-wide assessment that incorporates all the state data, since really the juveniles grow up predominantly inshore, and most of the states have assessments for them already.

Then, when they go offshore, there is some degree of mixing throughout the Gulf, and basically populations in Texas can conceivably go all the way to -- Members can go all the way to Florida, but, for the most part, the movements are somewhat limited, so that the genetic research we have shows that populations in Texas are more similar to the ones in Louisiana than they are in Florida, and vice versa.

What we really need is to get a comprehensive sampling program that uses essentially purse seines, which is a non-selective gear, to get the age composition of the population throughout
the entire Gulf, especially the northern Gulf, since that’s
where the bulk of the fish are, and then we can compare that to
the similar work that was done in the 1980s and 1990s, and then
we have a basis for the assessment.

If we get something like that, I would actually advocate for
doing a Gulf-wide assessment, and then we would probably have
some spatial structure that incorporates the state data more
directly, just simply because they don’t move that much when
they are younger animals and they’re in the estuaries, and so I
think it would be a great idea, and we would love to do it, but
we do need the data to populate it.

Otherwise, we would have to use some data-limited approach, and
that didn’t work so well the last time. I mean, we could review
it again and see if we can find some other data-limited approach
to apply that would be informative, but, ideally, we would just
collect the data that we need to, but it’s just expensive, and I
don’t think that anybody has quite pulled it off yet.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thanks, Clay. We’ve got a little bit of time
here left, and I’ve got three people still on the board, and I’m
going to try to walk through them in order. Crabtree, Anson,
and then Simmons, and then Ed Swindell will get an opportunity
as well. Dr. Crabtree.

DR. CRABTREE: Just to follow-up on red drum, I mean, we talk
about the fishery being closed, but, really, it’s one of the
largest recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico, and I
think we harvest eight or nine million pounds a year, and so,
more than anything, we’ve made a management decision to use a
large closed area, which is the EEZ, as part of the way to
manage red drum, and we have decided to keep it a state-water
fishery on the juveniles.

I know that not everyone is in agreement with that, and we also
decided to have it be a recreational fishery. People have
different opinions on that, but I think you could change that if
you wanted to, and, I mean, you shouldn’t assume that, because
you don’t have a stock assessment, the fishery has to be closed.
I would point out that the largest recreational fishery in the
South Atlantic is dolphin, and there’s no assessment for
dolphin, and we manage it, and the EEZ is open, and so I think
it’s just more of a choice as to how we’re managing red drum,
and I’ve been on this council an awful long time, and I think,
generally, the majority of members are satisfied with it and
haven’t wanted to change it.
CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Dr. Crabtree. Kevin Anson.

MR. ANSON: In regard to red drum, and Roy’s comments specifically, I guess one could argue that it’s a choice, but, if the council wanted to move in the direction of opening up harvest in the EEZ, we have to do that with science, or, as Clay pointed out, we need information on the core area of its range, and that’s in the northern Gulf, and that was my question, is I thought that Dr. Sean Powers had some MARFIN money to do some research, and I can follow-up with him, but I’m just curious if either Ryan or Dr. Porch has any information about the status of that research and how it plays into providing that information that would be needed to conduct an assessment.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Either Ryan or Clay, to that point, real quick.

MR. RINDONE: Clay can correct me if I’m wrong, but Dr. Sean Powers has been working in the northern Gulf, and Dr. Sue Barbieri in the eastern Gulf, with generally similar techniques, to try to survey the red drum population, and I don’t know if Sue’s research is still continuing or if she’s wrapped up field sampling, and I think she has wrapped up the field sampling portion of her work, and we haven’t seen the results of any of those data yet, to know how they could be used to better explain things that we currently don’t know about the stock, but it isn’t just those areas that need to be examined, and it’s really a Gulf-wide issue, like Dr. Porch mentioned.

DR. PORCH: I am not fully up-to-speed on the breadth of Dr. Powers’ survey. I was under the impression that it didn’t really include that much of Louisiana and Texas, and, of course, Louisiana is the teeth of the fishery, but I could be wrong on that, and it’s certainly a point worth following-up on.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Okay. Thank you. We’ll get some information and get back to folks on that one. Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It sounds like we could just go ahead and work on a letter to the Science Center just requesting that interim analysis for red snapper, and it sounds like they’re already working on it, but just so everyone is aware, and the staff can do that, but, taking a step back and thinking about the interim analysis, the bigger picture, and I know that Dr. Porch provided a presentation to the council a while back on this process and what species were good candidates.
We had originally planned, in March and April, the March/April
council meeting, that we would work with the Science Center
staff and come up with that list, and not only talk about the
timing of when the analysis could be presented to the SSC, but
what species the council may want to request every year, or
every other year, and the intent of that request.

Is it just a health check, or is the council’s intent, perhaps,
to make actual management changes and then putting that out to
the management process and seeing how long it takes us to
implement those changes and when, again, we may want to request
another interim analysis, and so we’ll plan to do that for the
August council meeting with you, Dr. Porch, and try to work
through that process a little bit further and put that out to
management, if that’s possible.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thanks, Carrie. We have two more, and then
we’re going to take a break, if we don’t have any other
business, and so first will be Ed Swindell and then Leann
Bosarge.

MR. SWINDELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If you need purse seine
data, have you talked to the purse seine operation that used to
operate for bait out of Apalachicola? I believe he was on the
council at one time, and, also, the bait operation in Louisiana
might could help you with purse seines, although the one in
Apalachicola is a single vessel purse seine operation, instead
of a twin purse seine operation for the menhaden industry, which
is the way that the one in Louisiana works.

I just know there are large, large schools, and the fish
spotters in the menhaden industry see enormous schools of big
redfish swimming the Gulf of Mexico off of Louisiana and
Mississippi and Texas, and I would recommend that, some way or
another, and I think it would behoove us all to at look at this
resource with some more detail.

Yes, I agree with Roy that it probably is helping some with the
abundance of the resource in the Gulf states, in the inshore
waters, where most of the redfish are being caught by the
recreational people, but, to not have any knowledge, and we just
cannot assume that that is the right way to manage this
resource.

I think we need to do a stock assessment and see how big the
stock is, and we know all that we can harvest of the resource,
but I just think that we’re hiding our faces here a little bit,
just because this was placed on the no-fishing list years and
years and years ago, and I don’t know how long it was, but I
think it was the wrong way to do it. The resource is there, and
it should be utilized to the best of the ability for the people
of the nation. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Mr. Swindell. I think we’ll go
ahead now to Ms. Bosarge.

MS. BOSARGE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ed said a little bit of
what I was going to say, and I will mention one more port, port
of call, and Pascagoula also some vessels that are purse seine
vessels, and Pascagoula also has a National Marine Fisheries
Science lab located in it, and so that may be logistically a
viable spot for that research to take place, but I will say
that, if that research is going to take place with that gear
type, which I understand what Dr. Porch is saying, that you need
to compare apples-to-apples, as far as the year classes and what
age structure looks like in that offshore population.

The last real hard data that we had on that was when those fish
were being collected in that purse seine fishery, and so, to
compare to that, you need to collect them in that same fashion
again, to really be able to understand what changes may have
transpired, based on the way that that fishery is prosecuted
now, the inshore fishery that is.

I will say this, that I believe the scientists that want to
conduct that research will have to reach out to the industry.
It probably will not happen vice versa, just because it is a
very politically-charged topic, and so I hope that will happen,
if for no other reason than we need a stock assessment on that
offshore population for the states, so they can understand the
health of that overall stock.

I know they do some things on the statewide level, state-by-
state, but we need to see what the whole stock is, and it’s one
big stock, and we need to understand what it looks like and if
it’s healthy, regardless of whether we open any federal fishing,
which that’s probably a long shot, but we need to know what it
looks like from a science perspective, to make sure that even
the inshore fishing is sustainable.

CHAIRMAN FRAZER: Thank you, Ms. Bosarge. Some really good
discussion surrounding red drum, and so I think, certainly
before the next council meeting, and there’s a number of folks
on this call, staff, that can round up some information that
would allow us to kind of get an update on the latest data, the
science, as it relates to red drum.
I do know that, in Florida, there’s a number of folks that are interested in doing that research, and they have reached out to the fishermen in Apalachicola Bay, Ed, and so there are other opportunities, and so we’ll try to get an update, again, on the status of the research as it relates to that species for the next meeting.

In the short-term, I’m going to try to adhere as close as I can to the schedule, and so, if there’s not any other questions with regard to the schedule itself, is there any other business to come before the committee? Seeing none, we will adjourn the SEDAR Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 17, 2020.)