

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SEDAR COMMITTEE

Webinar

OCTOBER 26, 2020

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8  
9  
10 - - -  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1  
2  
3 Table of Contents.....3  
4  
5 Adoption of Agenda and Approval of Minutes.....5  
6  
7 Action Guide and Next Steps.....5  
8  
9 Update on Operational Assessment Process and SSC Recommendations.5  
10  
11 Interim Analyses - Discussion on Timing and Use for Management...13  
12  
13 SEDAR Steering Committee Report from October 16, 2020 Webinar  
14 Meeting.....22  
15  
16 Adjournment.....26  
17

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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

- - -