

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

GULF SEDAR COMMITTEE

Beau Rivage Resort Biloxi, Mississippi

October 2, 2017

VOTING MEMBERS

- Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi
- Patrick Banks.....Louisiana
- John Greene.....Alabama
- Campo Matens.....Louisiana

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

- Kevin Anson (designee for Chris Blankenship).....Alabama
- Doug Boyd.....Texas
- Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
- Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- Phil Dyskow.....Florida
- Tom Frazer.....Florida
- Martha Guyas (designee for Nick Wiley).....Florida
- LCDR Stacy McNeer.....USCG
- Paul Mickle (designee for Jamie Miller).....Mississippi
- Robin Riechers.....Texas
- John Sanchez.....Florida
- Bob Shipp.....Alabama
- Andy Strelcheck (designee for Roy Crabtree).....NMFS
- Greg Stunz.....Texas
- Ed Swindell.....Louisiana

STAFF

- Steven Atran.....Senior Fishery Biologist
- Douglas Gregory.....Executive Director
- Morgan Kilgour.....Fishery Biologist
- Mary Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- Ryan Rindone.....Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- Charlotte Schiaffo.....Administrative & Human Resources Assistant
- Carrie Simmons.....Deputy Director

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3 Traci Floyd.....MDMR, MS
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1 The Gulf SEDAR Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery
2 Management Council convened at the Beau Rivage Resort, Biloxi,
3 Mississippi, Monday morning, October 2, 2017, and was called to
4 order by Chairman Leann Bosarge.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN LEANN BOSARGE:** The SEDAR Committee agenda can be found
11 on Tab I, Number 1. Are there any revisions or edits to the
12 agenda as presented? Seeing none, the agenda is approved as
13 presented.

14
15 The minutes from our August 2017 SEDAR Committee meeting are on
16 Tab I, Number 2. Were there any revisions that needed to be
17 made to those minutes? Seeing none, the minutes stand approved.

18
19 The Action Guide and Next Steps, which will guide us through
20 this committee meeting, can be found on Tab I, Number 3, and I
21 believe that the first thing on our agenda is going to be the
22 SEDAR Steering Committee Summary, and Mr. Gregory is going to
23 lead us through that discussion.

24
25 **SEDAR STEERING COMMITTEE SUMMARY**
26

27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The
28 SEDAR Committee met by webinar instead of in person, because of
29 disruptions by Hurricane Irma, and they met last week, and so
30 the meeting summary, the draft meeting summary, is in the
31 briefing book, and we have provided some comments on it. It's
32 not final yet, but, thankfully -- We appreciate John Carmichael
33 and the SEDAR group getting that out to us as quickly as he did,
34 so we could get it in our briefing book.

35
36 I will just go over, briefly, some of the topics. One was the
37 research track idea that we have discussed in the past and this
38 council has supported. The first species that's going to be
39 considered as a research track assessment is going to be scamp.
40 Recall that that's going to be an assessment where we do not get
41 management advice, but it will quickly be followed by an
42 operational assessment that does provide management advice.

43
44 Staff expressed some concerns that this research track is now
45 extending into a two-year period before we get management
46 advice. Originally, it was scheduled to be probably about six
47 months quicker, and we're concerned that it's taking up two of
48 our assessment slots with a species that's not of primary

1 importance to us, and so we had a discussion about that.
2
3 The South Atlantic Council and others had some concerns about
4 this as well, and so it was agreed that the scamp research track
5 would be a pilot before the Steering Committee actually
6 committed to doing research tracks for other species. Our main
7 concern is it might slow down the process, rather than speed it
8 up.
9
10 The other thing we talked about was the cobia stock
11 identification effort, and a lot of work has gone into
12 organizing that stock identification workgroup, primarily
13 because of some questions that was raised from the blueline
14 tilefish stock identification. It appears, at least with
15 blueline tilefish, that the genetic analysis was a higher
16 priority in decision making than other life history traits, and
17 I think that will be resolved with this new, detailed stock
18 identification effort.
19
20 The organizing committee drafted terms of reference and a
21 schedule for the workshop, and it will involve both councils,
22 including the Gulf States and the Atlantic States Marine
23 Fisheries Commissions, and it may include the Mid-Atlantic
24 Fishery Management Council.
25
26 Most of the discussion centered around the SEDAR schedule. As
27 you might recall from previous council meetings, the MRIP
28 calibrations that we were expecting in 2017 is not going to
29 happen until 2018, and so that was also taking up a stock
30 assessment slot, and, when we found that out, we tried to slip
31 some other species into the stock assessment slot, and we've
32 still got some confusion. Ryan will go over that in more
33 detail. We will concentrate on 2018, but we had to move
34 vermilion back to 2020, primarily because the same analyst does
35 red snapper and vermilion, and because vermilion has a large
36 backlog of otoliths and other data that need to be processed,
37 and it couldn't be done as quickly as we wanted in 2019.
38
39 We have cobia in 2019, which we settled on, I think, at the last
40 meeting, and we also learned, through this, that it's probably
41 more important for the Steering Committee to have a May face-to-
42 face meeting, since it looks like their planning meeting, which
43 sets who does what, as far as data collection and data analysis,
44 is made in July, and so us trying to make changes after July has
45 been part of the problem we had at this last Steering Committee,
46 and so we're going to really push to have the May meeting become
47 the main meeting where decisions are made.
48

1 Theoretically, once we make a decision on a stock assessment two
2 years out, it shouldn't change, but things do change, and that's
3 where we've had some confusion this year, and, with that, I will
4 leave that alone and let you, Madam Chair, and Ryan Rindone do
5 the SEDAR schedule discussion. If there's any questions about
6 the webinar report, please don't hesitate to ask me, either in
7 the meeting or by email later.

8

9

SEDAR SCHEDULE REVIEW

10

11 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Gregory. Before we start that
12 discussion, staff, if you can pull up our SEDAR schedule
13 document that's in our briefing book, that will probably be
14 helpful as we go through this next discussion, and I kind of
15 want to lay this out for the council before we get started here.

16

17 I would prefer to focus most of our discussion today on 2018. I
18 mean, we can have some general discussion about 2019 and 2020,
19 as time permits, but I would like to take that up in a more in-
20 depth manner in January, so that we really, today, focus our
21 efforts on that 2018 finalized schedule, and here is what we
22 need to accomplish today.

23

24 When you look at that list of species for 2018, first off, that
25 number one and number two, you see gray snapper benchmark and
26 red snapper standard continued, and so know that those are
27 already things that are ongoing and that just kind of are from
28 2017, but they carry through into the beginning parts of 2018.

29

30 We have four slots, four stock assessment slots, that the Gulf
31 Council can receive assessments from each calendar year, per our
32 SEDAR meeting last year. Right now, if you kind of don't look
33 at number one and two on that list, because that's 2017 stuff
34 that is carrying forward, and so, of those four slots, we have
35 three of them filled right now for 2018. We have gray
36 triggerfish as a standard, and we have red grouper as a
37 standard, and we have the MRIP calibration updates, and you can
38 see the different species that we're going to get those for.

39

40 That is three of our four slots for 2018 that we have nailed
41 down, and that leaves one, and so we need to nail that last slot
42 down as to what species is going to go in there.

43

44 If you remember, at our last meeting, we had -- As Mr. Gregory
45 mentioned, we had vermilion snapper listed in 2018, and it turns
46 out there is a fairly large backlog on the data. I think it's
47 actually literally reading the otoliths for vermilion snapper,
48 and, with that backlog, there's just no way that it can be done

1 in 2018, and so that leaves us with an open slot that we need to
2 fill today, because this is our last meeting of 2017, and we
3 need to have this nailed down.

4
5 For that reason, I would really like to focus most of our
6 efforts on this 2018 schedule and what we're going to put in
7 there. Dr. Ponwith has been kind enough to kind of look at her
8 schedule and her staffing and such and come up with some species
9 that would fit well into that, so that we're not shooting blind
10 here and just throwing out species, that she knows that
11 hopefully the data prep can be done in a timely fashion and
12 slide it in there. She is helping us out with that, and we
13 appreciate that.

14
15 With that, I will turn it over to Mr. Rindone, and he can
16 elaborate further, but that's where I would like us to focus
17 today, guys. Mr. Rindone, before you get started, Dr. Ponwith
18 has some feedback for us.

19
20 **DR. BONNIE PONWITH:** Thank you, Madam Chair. At this stage, I
21 can say that 2018 is right around the corner, and we -- I think
22 one of the biggest disruptions to the schedule that created sort
23 of a domino effect of changes was the movement of those MRIP
24 calibration assessments from this fall to next fall.

25
26 I am still confident that that was a good decision. That was a
27 good decision. It was a decision that we weighed-in with our
28 state partners and with the MRIP people and with our colleagues
29 in the Northeast for their stocks in the Mid-Atlantic and the
30 Northeast, and I remain confident that that was a good decision
31 to let those data stabilize and do that once, as opposed to
32 creating an interim calibration and then revisiting that a
33 second year after the final dataset had been evaluated.

34
35 It did create a wrinkle in our schedule, and that wrinkle is --
36 Basically, moving those calibrations to 2018 creates a
37 perturbation to the rest of 2018. I will say, at this point,
38 that I don't hold out any hope for the ability to put another
39 assessment into 2018.

40
41 Right now, our focus is on finishing up the gray snapper and the
42 red snapper assessments and getting those done and getting those
43 projections ready so that they can be used for management advice
44 and initiating the gray triggerfish and the red grouper stock
45 assessments in 2018 and being well prepared for those
46 calibration assessments in the fall of 2018, once those data are
47 ready, and being prepared means having an active role in getting
48 those data ready with the MRIP folks, so that we can incorporate

1 those into those calibrations.

2
3 To conduct a stock assessment, it really takes managing three
4 sort of work streams. It's a project management approach to
5 three work streams. It's the biological sampling, which is the
6 age composition, the otoliths, the gonads for fecundity and
7 things like that, and it is the data preparation, which is
8 working with the state agencies and the interstate commissions
9 to get the data from our data collection partners and get our
10 own data -- Get them folded into the system and conditioned, so
11 that they are prepared for the analysts for the assessment.
12 Then, ultimately, running that assessment, and that's the third
13 group, the actual stock assessment analysts.

14
15 It actually takes those three enterprises cogging together very
16 closely to be able to build this schedule and to be able to
17 accommodate changes in the schedule. At this point, I don't see
18 our ability to be able to put another assessment into 2018, and
19 so I think the most constructive use of the conversation is to
20 be looking at 2019 and 2020, and even into 2021, to understand
21 what this council's priorities are and be able to look at those
22 across those three components of the enterprise and make sure we
23 land on an assessment schedule that we're all comfortable with
24 hits our highest priorities.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Dr. Ponwith. Ryan, do you want to
27 pick it up from there?

28
29 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** If I understand correctly, we are going to go
30 straight to 2019, Madam Chair, as opposed to 2018?

31
32 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** That's what it sounds like. I didn't realize
33 that. Mr. Riechers.

34
35 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** I understand the complication with maybe
36 now trying to put something in 2018, but we just had a
37 discussion about how this is supposed to work, and, when we set
38 it out two years earlier, I expect the Southeast Center to be
39 thinking about who is doing what and how we try to make sure we
40 have the appropriate staffing in place to be able to do those
41 things.

42
43 I don't know that I am ready to completely give up on a 2018
44 slot of some sort, or some activity regarding stock assessments
45 in 2018 that may help us get further down the road, and whether
46 it's a slot for an assessment or whether it's -- We've talked
47 about a lot of things around this table in the past, but some
48 way to create some of these indexes, so that we don't have to

1 reinvent the wheel every time. I think there may be some
2 opportunity for something in 2018 that might be helpful to us.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Dr. Ponwith.

5

6 **DR. PONWITH:** I am glad you brought up the index approach,
7 because this is something that we are working on in earnest in
8 the South Atlantic, and that is looking at using an index or a
9 combination of indices as a leading indicator of a stock's
10 response to management measures and being able to use that to,
11 number one, measure that stock response of is the stock
12 responding in the direction that we expected it to, at the rate
13 that we expected it to, and then, ultimately, is there a way to
14 convert that information into something that could be used for
15 fishing level advice?

16

17 We're forced into that right now with red snapper, because we're
18 having difficulty generating ABC advice, given the changes in
19 the MRIP methodology at exactly the time where we really do need
20 adjustments to that ABC, but, in the process, our analysts from
21 both shops are in conversation and looking at that as sort of an
22 annual specification approach to be able to look at these
23 indices and use those as a monitoring approach to lend
24 themselves to generating that catch level advice.

25

26 They are exploring that right now, and I think that that is
27 going to be a good way to go into the future, and I'm glad to
28 hear the Gulf is interested in this. The South Atlantic has
29 expressed interest over the last several meetings of using an
30 index approach, and, again, what it is, it's lining out what
31 would that look like analytically and what are sort of the
32 statistical features of that index approach and then how would
33 you convert what you're seeing in those trend lines into actual
34 catch level advice, how would you do that and how would you set
35 that up, because it's quite different from the way that we're
36 operating right now.

37

38 We would have to likely make changes to our ABC control rule to
39 be able to incorporate it, but, in a way, it would start to look
40 a lot more like the way they do things in the Northwest, where
41 they will do a major stock assessment at roughly the same
42 periodicity that we're doing down here, but, in those interim
43 years, they're using that monitoring approach to sort of take
44 the mystery out of how the stock is responding to that
45 management measure in those interim years.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Mr. Anson.

48

1 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That is interesting,
2 Dr. Ponwith, that you bring that up, in regards to using indices
3 to help. At the very least, maybe more quantitatively identify
4 species that we should be putting some efforts into doing a
5 full-fledged assessment, but the additional potential for maybe
6 coming up with some management advice, or catch level
7 information, could be helpful as well.

8
9 Going back to the discussion regarding 2018 and looking at the
10 suite of species and also considering your comments, Dr.
11 Ponwith, on some of the challenges or the work that's involved
12 with doing an assessment, and I also have some concerns or
13 believe there is some opportunity in 2018 to plug in another
14 species, perhaps one that may not be where the top of what the
15 council wishes and desires to do, but maybe one that is a little
16 easier, as far as the data compilation.

17
18 You mentioned processing the samples, the biological samples,
19 the otoliths, as being one of the major hurdles in prepping for
20 an assessment, and, when you look at the remainder of the
21 species that are listed currently as the final in 2018, we have,
22 after Quarter 1 is completed, if the schedule goes through as
23 it's written, when we get done with Quarter 1, there is just
24 three slots that are filled, remaining in 2018 to start, and one
25 of those doesn't have any otolith processing that's going to be
26 associated with it. It's simply just a data exercise.

27
28 I kind of find it a little perplexing that we can't move forward
29 with another species that might be a little light on the
30 biological sampling side, as far as samples that went in there,
31 to occupy that slot.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Dr. Ponwith.

34
35 **DR. PONWITH:** I have taken a good hard look at 2018, and I don't
36 see anything that we can add in at this time. The one wild card
37 that we have for 2018 is this. I know how eager you are to have
38 a cobia stock assessment done. We have had long conversations
39 about that in June and in August, and I know how important that
40 stock is.

41
42 We are in the middle of getting ourselves teed-up for the stock
43 ID workshop, and we have spent a lot of time making sure that we
44 line that out and understand what's in the terms of reference
45 and agree on how we're going to run that. The one thing that we
46 don't know is what the outcome of that stock ID workshop is
47 going to be, and there is the possibility that the stock ID
48 workshop will say that the way you've been approaching things is

1 the way you should approach things.

2
3 It's also possible that that stock ID workshop could come back
4 and say you are dealing with one homogeneous population, and,
5 again, it's hard to anticipate what the outcome of that one is
6 going to be, but, if indeed that is what the stock ID workshop
7 reveals, one of the things that we would have to think about is
8 how do we react to that with respect to the Gulf of Mexico, and
9 my view is, in that situation, we may be looking at
10 incorporating the Gulf of Mexico data and those biological
11 samples into the assessment that's going to be led by the people
12 in the South Atlantic. Right now, they are lined up being the
13 lead.

14
15 That, again, would start as soon as the stock identification
16 workshop is completed, but it would be one possible way to move
17 cobia up in the process, because, again, what you wouldn't want
18 to do is have your stock ID workshop come back saying that that
19 is one uniform stock and then assess them sequentially without
20 the benefit of kind of collaborating on that methodology, but,
21 in terms of adding a new assessment into 2018, I have looked at
22 this, and I have talked with our biological people, and I have
23 talked with our analysts, and I've talked with the assessment or
24 the data preparation people, and, between the bottlenecks that
25 we're looking at with the data preparation and with the otolith
26 and biological sample preparation, I just don't see how, at this
27 stage, we can add another stock in there.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** I have a question, Dr. Ponwith. Bonnie, on
30 the schedule, we have cobia in 2019, and I am looking at the
31 SEDAR Summary Report, the very last page of it, in case anybody
32 wants to know where I'm about to get this info. I see where the
33 South Atlantic has cobia slated to start it looks like around
34 June of 2018, and so the middle of 2018, and so I want to make
35 sure that I'm understanding what you're saying.

36
37 Are you saying that it is possible for the Gulf -- I know you've
38 mentioned in the past that, if both of those assessments were on
39 the same schedule, the same track, the South Atlantic and the
40 Gulf, it could be helpful, depending on the outcome of that
41 stock ID workshop, and so what you're suggesting is that the
42 Gulf could possibly, right now, this week, bump cobia up to
43 2018, so that those would be in line, and that would free up
44 some room in 2019? That's not what you're saying? Okay.
45 That's what I wanted to make sure.

46
47 **DR. PONWITH:** Thanks for the request for clarification. If we
48 are looking at one homogeneous stock and the stock ID workshop

1 says this is one stock, then it really begs for one stock
2 assessment that uses one sort of standardized methodology to be
3 conducted.

4
5 In that situation, the smart thing to do would be to take the
6 Gulf of Mexico data and consolidate it with the South Atlantic
7 Council's data, the data we have used from that side, and
8 incorporate it into one assessment for the continuous stock.
9 Whether that's going to happen or not, I don't know, but that's
10 one possible outcome.

11
12 In that situation, we would have a lead analyst, and we would
13 likely want an assist analyst from the Gulf to be engaged in
14 that, and the Gulf Council would certainly want to be watching
15 that assessment along with the South Atlantic Council, because
16 you've got an interest in what those outcomes are, but, if the
17 stock ID workshop comes back and says these are two stand-alone
18 stocks and you should be assessing them in a stand-alone way,
19 again, there is still benefits by understanding how each entity
20 is going to -- What approach is going to be done, but that would
21 still be a stand-alone assessment.

22
23 Then, in that situation, you would have a stock assessment
24 scientist from the Gulf be the lead for the stand-alone stock
25 assessment, and so we can't let that cobia slot for the Gulf go
26 until we know what the outcome of that stock ID workshop is
27 going to be.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Thank you. Mr. Rindone, you've been very
30 patient. Go ahead, sir.

31
32 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is for Dr.
33 Ponwith. If cobia were to be -- If it were to be appropriate to
34 move cobia into 2018, what is the cost of doing that on the
35 schedule that we currently have up on the board?

36
37 **DR. PONWITH:** The highest impact would be on the data analysts,
38 to be able to make sure that they can get those Gulf of Mexico
39 data conditioned and ready as an input in time to be able to
40 conduct that assessment, and so that, I think, is my major
41 concern on that one.

42
43 If indeed cobia -- If indeed we did one large stock assessment
44 in 2018 for one continuous stock, then it does create some scope
45 in late 2019, and I think, in that spot, we could take a look at
46 bringing in greater amberjack or gag grouper as an update stock
47 assessment in that slot, and, when I asked our analysts, given
48 those two, which one do they believe would be the one that is

1 the best fit, in terms of the need, I think the answer was to
2 look at a greater amberjack update in that cobia slot for 2019,
3 if indeed we consolidated and did one cobia assessment.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Dr. Ponwith, and we're running
6 short on time here, and so I'm going to look around the room to
7 the council. Dr. Ponwith has told us that in 2018 we're going
8 to have three slots that we get assessments out of, and we're
9 going to have our MRIP calibration updates, red grouper, and
10 gray triggerfish.

11
12 I have heard feedback from the council that says, okay, so we
13 have some data input constraints on getting another assessment
14 out of there, but we would like to see something come out of
15 that slot, whether it be some sort of indexing or possibly
16 getting a head start, maybe, on reading some otoliths for some
17 of these upcoming stock assessments in 2019 and 2020. Is there
18 any further feedback we would like to -- Yes, Mr. Greene.

19
20 **MR. JOHNNY GREENE:** I don't see anything in 2018 for HMS
21 species, for something along the lines of Spanish mackerel, and
22 I think we need to do something there. I see an HMS assessment
23 in 2019 for king mackerel, and I think that's something that we
24 should consider moving, having an HMS analyst look at that. In
25 the consideration of time, I'm probably going to bring that at
26 Full Council as a motion.

27
28 My biggest comment right now is that, when I sit here and I look
29 at this schedule, and I'm looking at 2018 and I see MRIP
30 calibration updates, with all the uncertainty that Dr. Ponwith
31 has laid out with the cobia, I don't know that it wouldn't be
32 prudent to just take the MRIP calibration update for cobia and
33 wrap it up into the assessment when it comes due in 2019.

34
35 If you stop and you look at it and you do an MRIP calibration
36 for Spanish mackerel through HMS, you could also possibly roll
37 the calibration into the stock assessment as well. You're going
38 to do red snapper in 2019, and you could possibly roll the MRIP
39 calibration into that.

40
41 That leaves gag and greater amberjack, which are scheduled for
42 2020, which basically would push you back one year of delivery,
43 because, for start/end date, it says start in Quarter 3 of 2018
44 and end in Quarter 1 of 2019, and so, potentially, you could
45 push it back.

46
47 I think what we should possibly be looking at is what is the
48 best utility of our time? Is it better to just go ahead and

1 have the MRIP calibrations done species-by-species-by-species as
2 they come forward, or do we wait and do all of this?

3
4 I don't think that waiting is going to be that big of a hurdle.
5 I think that it may take a little longer for each individual
6 stock assessment to be done, when you factor in the MRIP
7 calibration updates, but I think that that's going to be the
8 biggest bang for our buck at this particular point, and that may
9 open up the door to allow us to move cobia up and then move
10 greater amberjack and gag up, and that would certainly eliminate
11 a lot of the pressure that we seem to be under.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN BOSARGE:** All right. Let's pick this back up at Full
14 Council. Between now and then, I would like everybody to be
15 thinking about the specific ask, if there is one, that we want
16 to put forth to the Science Center for 2018 for that one
17 assessment slot that's not going to be completely filled. I am
18 sure the Science Center has plenty of things that they could
19 stick into that time, but, if there's something specifically
20 that the council wants to see, we need to have some motions and
21 make that very clear at Full Council. All right. That will
22 wrap up our SEDAR Committee.

23
24 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on October 2, 2017.)

25
26

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