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<td><strong>OTHER PARTICIPANTS</strong></td>
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<td>Luiz Barbieri, GMFMC SSC</td>
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The Sustainable Fisheries/Ecosystem Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the Hilton Galveston Island Resort, Galveston, Texas, Monday morning, October 5, 2015, and was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Chairman Robin Riechers.

ADOP\n
ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

CHAIRMAN ROBIN RIECHERS: It looks like we have a quorum. Ms. Bosarge is here and Dr. Branstetter is here. Mr. Sanchez was here and he’s getting back in his seat. Dr. Stunz is here and Mr. Walker I saw earlier. There he is and Mr. Williams and so everybody is present.

With that, are there any -- We will take any changes to the agenda or move for adoption. Hearing no changes or objections to the agenda, so moved.

Next, we will go to the minutes, which is -- The last time this committee met was in the summer of 2015, June 8, and so it was two meetings ago, Tab E-2. Are there any corrections, additions, or deletions to the minutes? Seeing no hands in the air, if no corrections, additions, or deletions, then we will accept the minutes as written. With that, that takes us to Dr. Barbieri’s presentation regarding the SSC Review of Integrated Ecosystem Assessment and Management Strategy Evaluation, Single Species. We need to come up with a better title than that. That’s it --
MR. STEVEN ATRAN: We didn’t come up with that title.

SSC REVIEW OF INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT - MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY EVALUATION - SINGLE SPECIES

DR. LUIZ BARBIERI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, committee. I am going to actually just go through a very brief overview presentation of a discussion that the SSC had at this last meeting.

We received a presentation from the Science Center on a program called Integrated Ecosystem Assessment that develops science tools in support of ecosystem-based management and they came and gave us a presentation and discussed a number of issues and requested SSC input and so I am going to walk you through that discussion and some of our recommendations.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Luiz, is the -- For those trying to follow along, has the presentation came to us as well or was it in the big PDF? No? Okay. I was just trying to scroll to find it.

DR. BARBIERI: No and I apologize, Mr. Chairman. I actually sent the presentation that I finished last night and so we didn’t have time to have it with your briefing package.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: No problem. I was just going to follow along here if I could.

DR. BARBIERI: My apologies for that. Again, the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Working Group and the Science Center has been looking into issues that integrate ecosystem factors into fisheries assessment and management and in this particular case, they came and they gave us a presentation on how management strategy evaluation could be applied to an ecosystem model to evaluate the impacts of management strategies on single species management, assessment and management.

The idea was to kind of come up with something that was in between a full-blown ecosystem perspective of assessment and management and the single species management and so basically trying to contextualize this discussion in a way that ties into existing fishery management plans and addresses some of the issues that you are trying to see addressed.

Of course, one of the issues that came to the surface regarding ecosystem impacts was the red tide events that have happened periodically over the West Florida Shelf and impacted grouper species, in particular red grouper and gag, and decreases in
abundance that were episodic.

This is something that the council has -- The council and the SSC, to tell you the truth, has struggled with in terms of finding how to integrate this into our picture of population dynamics in gag and red grouper and so this is a good opportunity to address those issues.

You may remember that at the Key West, Florida, June meeting last year there was a motion that was made by you requesting that the Gulf of Mexico Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Program work with the Standing and Ecosystem SSCs to evaluate the current red grouper harvest control rule to determine if it is robust to possible future changes in intensity and frequency of episodic events of non-fishing mortality.

This is a long-winded way to say that basically you wanted to see what the impacts of those red tide events could be having on those populations and how do we integrate that into our management framework.

The management strategy evaluation that the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment group prepared was looking at these issues and they came and requested SSC feedback on several of these issues. Developing a management strategy evaluation approach that’s beneficial to the SSC and so basically, instead of working in isolation, they are trying to develop a relationship with the SSC and the council and iterate their processes in a way that’s most beneficial to you. So, again, helping contextualize what they do in terms of Gulf fisheries management.

Also, some input on key uncertainties that the SSC faces and would like to see addressed and types of harvest control rules and how they perhaps could be modified to accommodate some of these issues and then help in identifying priority performance metrics for this exercise.

An example here of several things that could come up. For example, if a severe red tide event was to occur in the next three years, are we prepared for future changes in the frequency of red tide? When is a red tide too strong and when it is not strong enough? When can we measure those impacts accurately? Are there biological and economic tradeoffs that are happening? The lag time between assessments that we have, are those a factor in properly taking into account those factors?

In terms of performance metrics, they brought this in front of us and requested some input from the SSC and, as you can see
there, they have three types of criteria. This is a diagram and this diagram is showing the simultaneous integration of these factors in developing performance metrics and so you want to avoid an overfished state, avoid risk of collapse in fisheries, but, at the same time, maximize or optimize the net present value of the catch and so what combination of factors can be put together and evaluated within the context of what we just discussed to maximize those outcomes?

Later on, I encourage you to go, and I am not going to read them here, but read those little notes next to each one of those axis, because it’s something that they really tried to go to the fisheries management plans and pull explicit language there of things that could be used to address those performance.

They emphasize that they want to look at this MSE application as a process and not a product and so it’s going to be iterative and interactive, both with the SSC and with the council. We would definitely welcome council input and participation, if at all possible, to help us guide this process and help the IEA group work through.

Additional dimensions that could be incorporated into red tide MSE are magnitude and frequency. We saw this this last year and there was a massive red tide on the West Florida Shelf, but it really wasn’t strong enough and it didn’t last long enough to cause any major population level impacts and so it wasn’t really something that made a difference and how can we tell?

Taking into account the stock assessment uncertainty and the frequency of the assessments and then some of the implementation uncertainty issues that happen when you set an ACL and that ACL is really exceeded, due to implementation error. Again, just to emphasize that there are several factors here that can be added to this exercise and your input would be very valuable.

Next steps, the SSC is discussing formation of a working group to increase interaction with the IEA group and make this a more integrative type of a process. They will be back this coming year and we don’t know exactly when, but we discussed having them come back periodically and give the SSC presentations, so we can help guide this and basically the SSC would like to serve as sort of a bridge between what the science products are and how we can help you integrate into fisheries management in the Gulf and that completes my presentation, Mr. Chairman, and I’m available for questions, if there are any.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Mr. Greene.
MR. JOHNNY GREENE: Thank you, Luiz. How would you take something like this and incorporate sargassum grass into it? Amberjack and triggerfish rely pretty heavily on that and it seems like triggerfish especially is something that we’re going to be wrestling with tomorrow in great detail and how would you look at something like a triggerfish, or perhaps an amberjack that also relies on it, into something like this?

DR. BARBIERI: I think it’s very possible. There are different ways of accomplishing this, but this is the kind of input that the SSC and the IEA group is actually looking for, is this type of input of identifying what issues, like you told us last year about the red tide events and that’s moving forward and now being much more explicitly integrated into the stock assessments.

That issue of the sargassum and gray trigger and greater amberjack and trying to account for some of those factors that cannot be explicitly accounted for in the assessment. You know our routine assessments, as sophisticated as they are, they are really sort of a blunt instrument, so to speak, in terms of the ability to integrate a multitude of these auxiliary types of information and so this process allows you to align the two better, those ecological factors and those routine assessments. That is a very good suggestion.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Go ahead. A follow-up.

MR. GREENE: How far down the road is something like this? Is this something that we can be looking at in the next two to three years or is this five to ten years down the road or can you elaborate on that, to any degree?

DR. BARBIERI: This process is not short. To be done right and to take into account all the necessary steps and factors, it can take a long time and so yes, something like this can be addressed within that two to three-year timeframe to get things moving, but it is ideal to identify issues as early as possible, so you can get a little ahead of the curve and give us three to five, or perhaps longer, timeframes to identify things that are way out into the future, but, during that time, we can look into how those things can be best integrated into this process.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: I think Bonnie has a response as well.

DR. BONNIE PONWITH: Yes, the steps that I can picture in my
mind vary relative to the problem, but here is a rough cut. Either via research and monitoring or via anecdotal information from people who are on the water all the time. We have a hypothesis and we think there is a relationship between this thing and this species and then it’s a matter of understanding what that relationship is.

Let’s just use, for example, sargassum. You’re saying that there’s a relationship between sargassum and triggerfish and it’s a matter of then looking at the dynamics of that relationship and understanding. Is it linear? Does it go in one direction? Is it a bell curve or what are those relationships?

Once you understand those, so you can plug them in numerically, then it’s a matter of understanding sargassum and how it responds to currents and wind and other things that influence its dynamics.

Then, once you understand those two components and its relationship on the stock, you have got a more holistic approach to be able to at least describe the relationship and potentially predict it. For that particular example, my sense is it could take a good while.

There may be simpler examples of features or oceanographic events that have a measurable influence on the health of a stock that we already have the data in hand and we just need to understand that that relationship exists and model it. Again, I think the answer is it would vary with the problem, the question that’s being asked, but if we have the data in hand, it will be a lot faster.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Luiz.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes and, to that point, Mr. Chairman, I just couldn’t emphasize enough, just to add to what Dr. Ponwith just brought up, you know the fact that your participation in this process is critical and so your SSC, of course, would be working with you, hand-in-hand, in trying to guide the development of this process, but you know as many of you that are interested in this topic and would like to help us bring the more holistic management perspective that you have in identifying those issues early on and working on those, the better.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Any other questions or comments? Leann.

MS. LEANN BOSARGE: Luiz, I saw in the minutes where you all had
actually spoken about that specifically, where you said the
SEFSC was forming and MSE advisory committee and you suggested
that perhaps there could be a council representative on that
committee and so that would be a way that maybe we could be
there at the ground level and seeing exactly what these inputs
are and what we may want to see as outputs and, therefore, what
we need as inputs.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Luiz.

DR. BARBIERI: Yes and that’s exactly it. We are actually
planning to develop this more in our January meeting, in more
detail, that working group and how we’re going to integrate the
council and the SSC and the Science Center in this working group
and how we’re going to make it work and so yes, this is the
time.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Luiz, I mean I see this as -- Bonnie, you
may want to chime in as well. I mean obviously there was some
money for some of the environmental work that we did some time
back or these influences -- We had a grant for ecosystem work, I
should say, and this is just a furtherance of that discussion,
in some respects. When you do have these bigger episodic
events, how can we relate them to some of the things going on in
stocks?

I mean we’ve been working on it for a while and it’s not new and
it’s just sometimes it’s, as you said, Bonnie, the availability
of the data that would actually allow us to look at those
causations, in some respects. Any other comments or questions?
Thank you, Luiz.

DR. BARBIERI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: With that, that turns us to our next agenda
item and that’s the NOAA Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management
Policy and Mr. Jason Link will be presenting that. Maybe Dr.
Link and, if so, I apologize.

PRESENTATION - NOAA ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT POLICY

DR. JASON LINK: Call me whatever you want, but just not late
for dinner. While the slides are being loaded, thank you, Mr.
Chairman, and thank you, everybody, for allowing me to speak to
you this morning. What a great segue into this talk with the
example of the work you’re already doing.

Before I start, can I tell you a story real quick? Bonnie has
heard this story and so I will let her ignore it, but when I was a kid, I used to visit my grandfather out of Fort Walton Beach and we would go fishing for king mackerel and he had a billy-club on this boat for when we caught the big ones, to kind of knock them on the head.

I remember my brother would pick that thing up and it had a little lanyard and he would spin it around like this and he would spin it back and spin it back and I remember one time my grandfather was driving the boat and he bent over to grab a cup of coffee and whack, he got hit on the head.

I will never forget, to the day I die, what he said. He said, what did you do that for, to my brother. I have taken that lesson and oftentimes throughout the agency, over my career, I have said, why are we doing that? What did we do that for? It’s within that vein that I want to give a talk to you about, real quick, what we’re doing with respect to ecosystem-based fishery management.

Here is the take-away and, on behalf of the agency, let me just say that NOAA needs to, can, and is committed to doing ecosystem-based fishery management. Part of the reason we developed this policy is to make that commitment clear and so we want to make sure that you know that. We also want to recognize, and I won’t get into it too much this morning, unless you want to talk about it, but there are many benefits for ecosystem-based fishery management.

Our aim of doing this is ultimately to provide a menu of options for all of the councils, all of our partners, all the work that we need to do to address these ecosystem considerations. The reason we’re doing that is these issues are not going away and they are going to increase over time.

The key thing that we are realizing is that making EBFM operational is challenging, and we just heard a discussion about that, but we can’t do it without partnerships and so that’s one of the things we want to emphasize and why we’re developing this policy.

If you look at the next slide, one of the great examples of that is gag grouper. It was difficult estimating mortality and spawning stock biomass and we thought red tide might be associated and you have all heard of this example, but it was incorporated into the assessment and it basically improved the results and improved the performance of the assessment model and resulted in not only increased understanding, but improved
status of the stock.

This is the type of thing that we’re looking at and we were just talking about an example that Luiz did a moment ago. The other thing I would mention, as another example, are coral reefs and their associated fisheries. I understand you will be discussing that tomorrow, but the reality is that there’s a changing climate and not only is that having thermal effects, but it’s having chemical effects and bleaching and we’re seeing that.

There are some events going on south of Florida right now and that impacts coral health and if we impact coral health, that can trickle through to impact reef fish and production and that can then trickle through and impact local sport fisheries and recreational fisheries and even diving and tourism and there is a lot of economic impacts on that and we’re seeing this around the country as an increasing impact.

One other thing that you might not be thinking about that I would point you to is kind of a systems-level approach, an overall look, and here is an example of that.

If you look at the blue there, that’s the total landings and this is from national landings statistics. That total landings there in the blue, in metric tons, has gone down over time, but if you look at the total value, in the dashed red line there on the right axis, it has actually bounced around, but it’s been a lot higher and actually has been increasing the past few years.

I would think that this might be another thing that we’re looking at, at a system level, to get to that holism look and to evaluate, perhaps, within this context, what are some trade-offs that we might want to consider.

Let me give you this blue infographic and the reason we show you this is there is different levels of ecosystem-based management and a lot of my erudite friends say it better than I, but there is a lot of linguistic uncertainty about ecosystem-based management and oftentimes people will be at this top level talking about it, when the reality is they are at the bottom level, or the next bottom level, where we’re talking about the gag grouper example or the red grouper example, where we’re trying to incorporate red tide or other environmental parameters into a stock assessment.

We just want to flag that we’re realizing there is different layers and nuances to this and largely where we’re focusing our efforts with this ecosystem-based fishery management is this
second level, where we’re trying to incorporate other factors and decrease uncertainty to give us a better understanding at the stock level, but also at the EBFM level, this third level here, where we’re managing all these species at once, as in the example that I just showed you, and taking into account there is dynamics as a system.

What we have is we’ve developed this policy. I was talking to someone earlier and my boss, who is the Chief Scientist for the agency, said develop an implementation plan for ecosystem-based fishery management and I said, yes, sir. He said, make sure it’s consistent with the EBFM policy and I said, yes, sir. Then we looked around the room and we said, what policy?

We realized we needed to take a step back and develop this policy and that’s what we’re presenting to you here in really, really quick terms, but the policy has a statement of what it is, and I will show you that in a moment. We give some background and definition is a key part of it and there is context and the legal basis and then the guiding principles.

Really, the policy statement is what you can see here and it’s really trying to show our support of EBFM as a way to better inform decisions and help achieve and optimize the benefits from the fisheries and it also recognizes all the other factors that are associated with the marine fishery context and tries to take those into account and so that’s our policy statement.

We define EBFM as a systematic approach to fisheries management in a geographically specified area that ensures the resilience and sustainability of the ecosystem. It recognizes the physical, biological, economic, and social interactions among the affected components of the ecosystem, including humans, and it seeks to optimize benefits among a diverse set of societal goals.

We wrestled with that as a committee. There is over forty different definitions of EBFM in the literature and we tried to capture some of the best facets of each of those, but this is in the policy and the key thing with the policy are these guiding principles.

We always start with the end in mind and unpack it and so at the top you have the outcome and we want to maintain resilient ecosystems. Then, to do that, we have to have that predicated on a very solid and strong science basis, as we’ve just been discussing.
We want to advance our understanding of the science, but then build up from that to what are the objectives. We just heard a process that can speak to that in the prior discussion, but implement some ecosystem-level planning and a lot of places around the country are developing FEPs and this is an area where that might be useful. That also comes into play in what are the priorities and really take a proactive look to prioritize vulnerabilities and risk to different components of the ecosystem.

A lot of the work that we’re doing in our stock assessment prioritization efforts and a lot of the work that we’re doing in our climate vulnerability analyses and the National Climate Science Strategy has a regional action plan. A lot of those efforts were considered as we developed this policy, to tailor around ongoing work and not to start from scratch, but to really build on that and to emphasize what our main priorities are.

The fourth point then is what are our options and we want to explore and address tradeoffs within an ecosystem. One of the key ways to do that is management strategy evaluation, so you have a solid basis for that already, as you’ve seen in the prior discussion, and then what is the advice and we want to ultimately incorporate these ecosystem considerations into the management advice we give, as in the gag grouper example, so that that advice better handles and better takes into account the dynamics going on in the system.

The next steps for the policy, it’s open for comment and we ultimately would love to have everyone’s comments by the middle of December. That’s one of the things we want to make you aware of. Any comments are welcome and send them to myself or Heather Sagar.

The other thing I would point out is, in addition to this policy statement, we are developing that implementation plan, that roadmap that I mentioned, in parallel. It’s a bit lagged behind the policy statement and it will come out a couple of months after, but we wanted to make sure that we developed the policy and that we were able to get appropriate comments and our aim is to publish this in the early part of next year.

The last thing I would like to show you is just a whole host of efforts that we have ongoing that I think really do support what we’re trying to do with ecosystem-based fishery management. A lot of what we’re doing may not be widely known and we just want to make sure that -- Again, we’re not doing anything new and we’re not doing anything different and this isn’t a changing
course. This is building upon a lot of extant efforts.

The Climate Science Strategy I mentioned, that’s a big part of ecosystem-based management, dealing with climate issues. Also, just looking at how the stock assessment can be improved. We are updating our stock assessment improvement plan aware of some of these factors.

As I mentioned, we’re developing a roadmap and then next year, as another highlight, all of our labs around the country are having an ecosystem program review. I forget the dates of yours, Bonnie, but sometime next spring. We are going to be looking at this in greater detail. With that, Mr. Chairman, I will stop and take questions and thank you all for your time.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Any questions or comments from the committee or others? Obviously, Dr. Link, we thank you for coming and presenting. You know it does dovetail in with the previous conversation quite well and after you all get past the point of your comments being received and you all go through the reviews, obviously that’s going to shape what you do, in some respects, but could you give us any insight into how you plan on -- Obviously absent of comments that would change your mind, how you plan on then pushing the policy forward and integrating it into the regions?

DR. LINK: Are you asking me in not so many words what our implementation plan might look like?

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Yes.

DR. LINK: Okay. Thanks. We want to make sure that we do have opportunity to revise the policy based on comments that you all and others might provide and so let me reiterate that, first of all.

Second of all, similar to what we did with our climate effort, we’re trying to come up with a roadmap, and this is partly internal to NOAA Fisheries, so that we can align our resources and efforts and so forth as well, and maybe take a look at some of our programs or things of that nature. There is a fair bit of that type of thing, but we’re also trying to ensure that each of the Regional Offices and Science Centers has the emphasis and focus and the tools to do this and so there’s that aspect.

What we’re hoping, at the end of the day, is that this gets regionalized and we have the regional teams working on this. One of our recommendations is to develop points of contact in
each Regional Office or Center and largely we know who those are, and you probably do too, but to coalesce that and form some of those groups more rigorously or in a focused effort than we have already and so things of that nature. I can elaborate further, but I think you get the idea.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Mr. Gregory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY: Thank you, Dr. Link. That was very good. A couple of things. One is I guess in the strategy is there’s a definition of resilience versus sustainability and I think that would be very important.

I inferred from what you said about the difference between ecosystem management and ecosystem-based fisheries management. That was important to me, because it helps me to focus. All along, in talking with people about what is ecosystem-based management, my inclination was, well, let’s get the environmental parameters built into the stock assessments and I think that’s the direction we’re going, because the whole concept of ecosystem management is mind-numbing. It’s like trying to grasp -- It’s almost like trying to grasp what is the universe.

That was good for me and any comments that council members have we will provide and, if the council is willing, any comments that the staff puts together from this conversation, if we could submit a letter, working with the Chair, that might be a way forward, if we want to submit comments.

The other comment I have is about the reference you said about the health of the coral reefs and fisheries. I came from the Florida Keys and I’ve heard this for decades, but I want to point something out that, to me, is an enigma about this. Most of our fisheries in the Florida Keys that we manage are healthy. Hogfish is not healthy at this point, but gray snapper and yellowtail and mutton snapper and black grouper, but the coral reef is deteriorating greatly and has been since the early 1980s.

There is a disconnect there and what I am beginning to think is the other components of the ecosystem, the seagrasses and the mangroves, are probably as important or more important to the overall productivity of the Florida Keys -- Whatever the concept is, bioherm or I don’t know what the current ecological terms are for that whole region.

They are not dependent on coral reefs. Even spiny lobster,
which lives in the rocks, or yellowtail, which are found exclusively on top of the coral reefs or on top of coral, seem to be flourishing while the corals are dying and so it’s important to understand, I think, that corals aren’t everything to fisheries.

Now, the tropical fish are deteriorating, the moray eels and that sort of thing, but the major components of the South Florida ecosystem that we manage are doing fairly well.

The other thing about the thing that has perplexed me about trying to grasp with ecosystem management in general is, and this goes back to the assessment prioritization and looking at the value of species in an ecosystem, is no one would have ever guessed that the longspine diadema was the critical keystone-type of species in the coral reef environment in the Caribbean, but when that died, the coral reefs deteriorated greatly, because of the interchange between the sea urchins eating the algae and that sort of thing.

Predicting things like that are impossible, except after the fact, and so we don’t know what the value of particular species are, but going forward with the fisheries-based part of it, I think we can make great strides and I think we’re going to be doing that very quickly and so thanks for this introduction to it and anything our staff can do to help, please let us know.

DR. LINK: Do you want a response or are you good?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: I welcome it if I said something that was wrong. I welcome that.

DR. LINK: Thanks. I think the -- I mean we might have a little difference of opinion on predictability and modeling, because I am a modeler by training and so I think you can model anything. That caveat aside, I think the point you’re making is there are parts of the ecosystem that we need to pay attention that we don’t always in a management context, but it would be useful to at least keep tabs on those and bring that into the discussion. If that’s what you’re saying, I am totally onboard with that and that’s basically what I am saying, too.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Any other comments or questions? I would ask the committee, is there any reason why we wouldn’t have Mr. Gregory work with Kevin and write a letter regarding the plan itself? Everybody is shaking their head no and so I assume that’s a yes response. I think we’ve got enough opportunity to even send that out for some review if you would like to, if you
get it done in time.

With that, thank you, Dr. Link. We appreciate you coming and presenting that to us. With that, that takes us to Other Business. Steve, do we have any other business to come before the committee?

MR. ATRAN: Not that I am aware of.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Anybody else have any other business to come before the committee? Ms. Bosarge.

OTHER BUSINESS

MS. BOSARGE: Just a question. The SSC was speaking about possibly forming a working group to work with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center on this, as they have their discussions. Did they need anything from us in order to do that, Doug, or can they push forward with that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: Not really. I think the real question is how to proceed from here. You know what Johnny mentioned about the sargassum is, I think, the kind of thing the SSC was suggesting and maybe having the same presentation given to -- Starting with the Reef Fish AP and seeing what feedback we get from them before we go forward with a working group, because this is going to be a multiyear process and I think we need to sit back and try to figure out a game plan for how to move forward with it, because it could be complex, but running this by the advisory panel and seeing what comments this presentation would stimulate from them would probably be the best next step.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Doug, I definitely see that as the next step, but at least what I am hearing Luiz indicate was that it was kind of a linkage between the Center and then the assessments that we then have to review as a council, just so that the SSC may start to -- Hopefully it’s a feedback loop.

If we can identify certain parameters that we would like to have factored into assessments and can do that early enough, we can tell the Center and then the SSC is on the frontend of that discussion, or at least a little bit more in the communication link as we do that. At least that’s what I am hearing, in some respects. Bonnie.

DR. PONWITH: What you just said, Robin, feeds into something that we’re going to be talking about a little bit later in the day, during the SEDAR Committee meeting. It is an issue that we
discussed at length at the SEDAR Steering Committee involving a
pretty dramatic change to the way we do assessments and that it
creates the mechanism for incorporating these more research-
oriented components into a stock assessment.

I won’t go into it now, because it’s not the right time, but
what I would like you to do is make a mental bookmark of this
conversation, so when we do talk about it that you can see how
that links up.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Thank you, Bonnie, for that. That helps
some, in some respects. Leann, based on Doug’s comments and
those comments, I don’t know that we have to have our path
forward. Let’s just create that mental note and then try to
figure out how, as we move forward, how we would want to address
that and how we create that transition or that feedback loop.

Steven.

MR. ATRAN: Thank you and I think this might be a question for
Bonnie. I guess as far as that working group is composed of, my
understanding is that we wouldn’t be going outside and that
would be primarily SSC members and maybe a council member plus
this Management Strategy Evaluation Advisory Committee that the
Southeast Science Center is going to form.

Also, we were told that the Center is in the process of hiring a
MSE expert. Each Science Center around the country is doing
that and so my question is what time table are we looking at for
hiring that expert and for forming that working group or that
advisory committee, because that would affect our timing on
forming a working group.

DR. PONWITH: We are in the process of developing the paperwork
to go to workforce management with that recruitment right now.
The recruitment process, the way our system is running right
now, is fairly long, but we’ve got a -- Just to give this some
context, the stock assessment peer review that we went through a
year ago, one of the results from that was a strong need for
management strategy evaluations.

Just to kind of footprint what we’re talking about, it’s using
simulation approaches to answer complex questions and so you
don’t use trial-and-error out collecting data in the field and
take twelve years to answer something. You use patterns you’re
seeing in the data, use simulations, and use those simulations
to help drive you to better answers, more precise answers, the
first time around.
We are recruiting for that position and when we bring that person onboard, the structure that we envision is using that position as a corporate resource and so rather than assigning it to this stock assessment group or that stock assessment group, they won’t even be in a -- They will work for the directorate and they will tackle -- Because of those broader-scale issues, they will lead the work on those issues, but it will take multiple people across the Science Center and probably beyond to do the work that actually has to be done. They will be the one in charge of it.

I will tell you that I think first dibs on the first management strategy evaluation that we do is already taken and it’s because it’s such an influential question and that is to take a look at fishery-independent data collections across the Gulf and the South Atlantic and the Caribbean and to use a simulation approach to determine where are the biggest gaps across the species we're responsible for, in terms of having adequate fishery independent information and how could we potentially restructure our data collections to get at the most dire of those gaps.

I can imagine you can picture how valuable that type of an analysis would be, because right now, that is our absolutely most expensive data collection that we do, but the flip side of that is there is no input to a stock assessment that has that high of an influence in the assessment itself than the amount and the quality of those data, but these are the types of questions that we’ll be answering.

Once we get past these first candidates, obtaining council and SSC input on other candidate MSEs will be valuable. The short answer to this is there is time. We still have to recruit the position and, frankly, I think the first slot is taken and so there is time to watch to see how this unfolds and think about what is the best way of obtaining council input, from a management standpoint, and SSC input, from a science standpoint, into these MSEs.

CHAIRMAN RIECHERS: Any further comments? Hearing none, we stand adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned at 9:15 a.m., October 5, 2015.)