Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report
June 24, 2021
Mr. Dale Diaz, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda **(Tab E, No. 1)** and approved the minutes **(Tab E, No. 2)** of the January 2021 meeting as written.

Summary Report from the Joint Council Section 102 Workgroup (Tab E, No. 4)

Council staff recounted the progress made by the Section 102 Joint Council Workgroup, which has met three times to date. The Workgroup has identified several alternative approaches already in use by the Councils and asked staff to outline these approaches, and others proposed, for further discussion at an in-person meeting later in 2021.

SSC Recommendations on Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule (Tab E, No. 5)

Dr. Kai Lorenzen of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the SSC's progress during its first discussion of reviewing the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule, which has been in use by the Council since 2011. The ABC Control Rule creates a buffer between the overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC to reduce the risk of overfishing attributable to scientific uncertainty. This requires separating the characterization of scientific uncertainty from the definition of a risk policy; the latter is the prerogative of the Council. The SSC aims to improve the ABC Control Rule by better characterizing scientific uncertainty (P*). The buffer between the OFL and ABC would typically increase when stock abundance is low. The SSC thinks the current ABC Control Rule underestimates scientific uncertainty, and is exploring meta-analysis methods, such as the Ralston et al. (2011) method from the Pacific, to better estimate this uncertainty. The SSC also recommends further exploration of other, conceptually different approaches such as F-multipliers (i.e., Restrepo et al. 1998).

Dr. Lorenzen continued by discussing the application of harvest control rules (HCR) as a component of the use of the ABC Control Rule to recommend catch advice to the Council following a stock assessment. He noted that the Council's current definition of the minimum stock size threshold allows a stock to be considerably depleted compared to the biomass at maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}), which can create longer rebuilding periods under which fishing effort would need to be comparably restricted. An HCR could allow for the catch limits to be buffered in such a manner to allow for ramping down of catch limits when the current biomass drops below B_{MSY}, even though the stock is not undergoing overfishing or overfished. Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC) staff said simulations would be needed to see if this approach using HCRs could supplant the need for rebuilding plans, and the Southeast Regional Office would need to explore whether this approach could administratively serve that purpose. Overall, the SSC favors simplicity and robustness for HCRs.

The SSC has requested that the SEFSC provide information to help evaluate the performance of alternative ABC control rules, past performance of the Council's existing ABC Control Rule, past performance of deviations from existing rule, and implications of alternative rules for the ABCs of Gulf stocks. The SSC will continue discussions with respect to information to help the

Council consider its risk policy, such as the risk of overfishing versus foregone fishing opportunities, the costs of overharvesting to stocks and stakeholders, consideration of phase-in of changes in catch limits, and social considerations and management buy-in.

A Committee member asked whether changes to data such as recreational catch and effort would affect the determination of scientific uncertainty. Dr. Lorenzen replied that ideally those changes would be comparable between stock assessments; however, the same data are not always available from one assessment to the next. The SEFSC added that the Ralston approach likely better accounts for scientific uncertainty, particularly compared to the southeastern U.S., since the Pacific stocks upon which that method is based on assessments that use fewer data streams over longer time periods. Further, the analysis of risk related to overfishing has likely not been properly characterized for the Council in the past, and considerations moving forward about changes to the Council's ABC Control Rule aim to directly address this.

Manna Fish Farms, Gulf of Mexico Update (Tab E, No. 6)

Dr. Kelly Lucas of the University of Southern Mississippi presented an update on the activities of Manna Fish Farms, Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Lucas noted that in 2019 she gave a presentation to the Committee on this topic. Dr. Lucas provided an overview of her presentation and proceeded to discuss a range of issues including, site suitability, species considered by the aquaculture project, data considered in the siting model, and the suitability model methodology. Dr. Lucas reviewed the proposed Gulf sites and discussed the design of storm safe submersible cages. Dr. Lucas indicated that the project will reduce the number of planned cages from 18 to 12. Dr. Lucas discussed the deployment phases and discussed feed information and a planned production timeline. In discussing next steps, Dr. Lucas indicated that permits applications have not been filed and that a best management practices plan is in development.

Committee members thanked Dr. Lucas for the presentation and for considering shrimp trawl data in siting modelling. The Committee inquired about buffers around the project and Dr. Lucas stated that discussions considering buffers are ongoing. The Committee asked about buoys to mark the project area. Dr. Lucas indicated that the buoys will be lighted and will be in accordance of all Coast Guard requirements. In response to a Committee question relative to feed, Dr. Lucas referred to the feed specifications included in her presentation and noted that cameras will be used to monitor feeding. The Committee asked about the other species under consideration for the project and about the potential for polyculture. Dr. Lucas indicated that the project plans to start with red drum and will later consider a range of species including almaco jack, striped bass, tripletail, and pompano. Committee members inquired about disease control. Dr. Lucas stated that the project plans to minimize sources of contamination and that a health and safety plan is under development.

Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (Tab E, No. 7)

Mr. Dan Luers gave a presentation on the Review of Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodologies (SBRM) for the Gulf Council's Fishery Management Plans. The SBRMs are a set of established procedures used to collect, record, and report bycatch data for each Fishery Management Plan. A review of these procedures is required every 5 years and is expected to be

completed in 2022. Mr. Luers reviewed the required components of the SBRM and summarized the bycatch method reporting programs from each FMP and component. Specific to the reporting methods for the private angling component, a Committee member requested that additional information is provided in the report along with an evaluation of the adequacy of the reporting methods for this component. Mr. Luers stated that a draft report is being developed that will included this requested information along with the other required components of the review. A draft report will be provided to the SSC and the Council at a future meeting for review prior to finalizing the document.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.