

**Administrative / Budget Committee Report
January 25, 2021
Mr. Phil Dyskow – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab G, No. 1**) as written and approved the minutes (**Tab G, No. 2**) of the October 2020 meeting as written.

Discussion of Advisory Panels Due of Reappointment in (Tab G, No. 4)

In Tab G, number 4, staff presented the meeting history for the Reef Fish and Shrimp AP panels since the last appointment in 2018 and reminded the Council the Standing and Special SSCs are up for reappointment this spring. However, the Committee decided to maintain the standard timeline for the appointment process. Thus, staff will re-advertise for appointments of both the Shrimp and Reef Fish Advisory Panels so that the Council can review the applicants and make preliminary selections at the April 2021 meeting. After fishery violation background checks, final selections will be made during the June 2021 meeting.

Review 2020 Budget and Expenditures (Tab G, No. 5)

In Tab G, number 5, staff presented the funded, approved 2020 budget alongside the actual costs recognized through the end of the year. We were funded \$3,964,336 and we anticipate that there will be approximately \$848,000.00 in unexpended funds to carry forward at the end of 2020.

Most of the unspent funds were left in the travel category. This was due, in part, to the Covid-19 pandemic which curtailed travel after early March and in part due to the allocation of 39% of the travel costs to the 2019 no-cost as they were related to activities approved on that budget.

Savings in equipment and supplies were also realized due to utilizing file compression and utilizing extended replacement warranty options to increase the life of many network server components as well as the decision to lease our new phone equipment which decreased the front-end cost related to that update. Contractual cost savings included activities like training, the Council visioning exercise, and the office remodel that did not occur in 2020. Further unspent funds may still be recognized from the state liaison contracts as the final activity reports for 2020 are received throughout the end of the month. The variance in meeting room costs was due to hosting most meetings virtually and the communications savings was due to charging part of the virtual meeting costs out to 2015-2019 no-cost activity.

The Committee chair inquired about the consideration of funding a portion of the shrimp electronic logbook (ELB) program with unspent 2020 funds.

Logistics and Estimated Costs of Conducting a Gulf-wide Fishery-Independent Offshore Abundance Study on Red Drum (Tab G, No. 6)

In response to the October 2020 Committee request for information, staff presented an overview of the potential costs associated with funding a Gulf-wide fishery-independent offshore abundance study on red drum. The estimate was based on an extrapolation of cost details from a

west central Florida based red drum spawning aggregations and abundance study which was conducted from 2012 to 2014 by Barbieri et al. 2018. The annual cost of funding a similar study was estimated to be \$632,350 for each section of the Gulf studied. The Gulf would either be separated into three or four regions and the study would need to run at least three years to obtain useful data. As this would be a multi-year project, the total funding required would be \$5.6 to \$7.5 million. Discussion about the potential project included questions of the feasibility of conducting partial studies, completing the study using limited methods, and main purpose of conducting this type of study for management.

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **to strike the red drum abundance proposal from consideration in the 2021 plan.**

Motion carried with two in opposition.

Logistics and Estimated Costs of Conducting an Independent Stock Assessment (i.e., outside SEDAR) Process for Gray Triggerfish (Tab G, No. 7)

In response to the October 2020 Committee request for information, staff presented an overview of the potential costs associated with conducting or funding an independent stock assessment for gray triggerfish. The last approved stock assessment ended in 2015 and indicated that gray triggerfish was not overfished or undergoing overfishing; however, the stock remains in a rebuilding plan. An interim analysis was conducted in 2020 and the Council is scheduled to take final action to increase catch levels at this meeting. The estimated cost for conducting a stock assessment by an independent contractor was \$175,000 to \$205,000, based on a NOAA contracted “standard-track” stock assessment for sandbar sharks. Some considerations are: hiring a contractor would not relieve all of the workload from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC); and, data providers would still need to obtain complete updated indices, landings, discards and biological information. Further, outstanding research questions remain for gray triggerfish since the aborted SEDAR 62 assessment, including improved age and growth studies. Since this information would come from existing source data, any analysis, at present may not result in better-informed management advice. One Committee member suggested that staff compile a list of research priorities for gray triggerfish with estimated costs, and gather SSC feedback. After the meeting, staff contacted a member of the SSC who suggested an aging validation study on gray triggerfish could be conducted in the eastern Gulf (Alabama and West Florida) for \$250,000 - \$275,000. Staff will continue to work on this request and bring a list of research priorities back to the Committee at a later date.

Shrimp ELB program needs

At the end of the Committee meeting, the chair requested staff provide a dollar figure that could be contributed to the shrimp ELB program for effort data collection from the unspent 2020 funds. After the Committee meeting, staff contacted Dr. Benny Gallaway regarding the pilot project he is conducting for the shrimp industry using P-Sea Windplot. Based on the presentation presented by Dr. Gallaway in November 2020, the pilot program expanded to 1/3 of the shrimp fleet (about 577 vessels that are actively fishing) would cost one million dollars. If the Council would like to explore cost sharing of an expanded pilot program for the Shrimp ELB

that could be discussed at a future date. All of those vessels are anticipated to already have P-Sea Windplot software, based on the discussions they have had with shrimpers. They will be providing the software update to those fishermen and helping to install that update as needed. If the fishermen's hardware is too old or not compatible with the P-Sea Windplot software or the update, then the fishermen will need to get something newer that is compatible. The Shrimp AP and Council are slated to receive information on the pilot program study in March and April, respectively. Staff can continue to work with Dr. Gallaway to refine these values and cost estimates moving forward.

Review of 2021 Projected Activities (Tab G, No. 8a) and Budget (Tab G, No. 8b)

Staff noted that approximately 40% of the anticipated funding was received for the 2021 year, to date. A detailed review of this subject was curtailed in the interests of time. The final activities and budget will be provided for the Council to approve once the final 2021 funding is known.

Discussion of Council Funding Support for Southeast Regional Office Permit Software

Mr. Strelcheck from the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) requested financial assistance from the Gulf Council in support of modifications to the permit software programs which cover the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Atlantic HMS. He noted that the SERO budget shortfall for this item is projected to be \$475,000. The 2021 projected Council budget currently includes \$94,000 in the contracted services line in support of this activity. Based on staff's analysis of the Council's activities and anticipated 1% budget increase in 2021 the Council could comfortably provide \$94,000 to SERO at this time for these efforts. Depending on when travel can resume, this could result in less funding for other contractual projects that were discussed (i.e., gray triggerfish research and shrimp ELB). A decision would need to be made at this Council meeting before the funds are distributed to the Council by spring.

The Committee requested that staff bring to the full Council session information on the following subjects:

- a budget estimate for a reduced gray triggerfish assessment
- the dollar figure that could be contributed to the shrimp electronic logbook book effort program
- the dollar figure that could be contributed to the SERO permit software

We have attempted to fulfill the Committee's request by topic, as outlined in this report.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.