

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2  
3 MACKEREL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

4  
5 The Lodge at Gulf State Park Gulf Shores, Alabama

6  
7 April 10, 2024

8  
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

- 10 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 11 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 12 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
- 13 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 14 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
- 15 Tom Frazer.....Florida
- 16 Bob Gill.....Florida
- 17 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- 18 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 19 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 20 C.J. Sweetman.....Florida
- 21 Ed Walker.....Florida

22  
23 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

- 24 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 25 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 26 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- 27 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 28 LTJG Jacob Shinnick.....USCG
- 29 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 30 Troy Williamson.....Texas

31  
32 **STAFF**

- 33 Max Birdsong.....Social Scientist
- 34 Assane Diagne.....Economist
- 35 Matt Freeman.....Economist
- 36 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 38 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 39 Jessica Matos.....Administrative & Accounting Technician
- 40 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 41 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- 42 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 43 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

44  
45 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

- 46 Martin Fisher.....FL
- 47 Frank Helies.....NMFS
- 48 Mike Larkin.....NMFS

1 Jessica McCawley.....FWC, FL  
2 John Walter.....SEFSC  
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TABLE OF MOTIONS

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1 The Mackerel Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened at The Lodge at Gulf State Park in  
3 Gulf Shores, Alabama on Wednesday morning, April 10, 2024, and was  
4 called to order by Chairman Dakus Geeslin.

5  
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
7 **APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 2023 MINUTES**  
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DAKUS GEESLIN:** I would like to call the Mackerel  
11 Committee to order. The members on that are myself, Captain  
12 Walker, Dr. Banks, Ms. Boggs, Mr. Broussard, Mr. Diaz, Dr. Frazer,  
13 Mr. Gill, Dr. Sweetman, Mr. McDermott, Mr. Schieble, and Mr.  
14 Strelcheck.

15  
16 The first item -- Well, I would like to acknowledge that Dr. Max  
17 Birdsong is helping us out. We were previously led, and assisted,  
18 by Natasha, and Natasha has since moved on, and so Max is helping  
19 us today, and so thank you, Dr. Birdsong. The first item for the  
20 committee is the Adoption of the Agenda. Do we have any changes  
21 to the agenda?

22  
23 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** I move to adopt the agenda.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Can I get a second? Second by Dr. Banks. Any  
26 opposition to that? The motion is approved. Next is the Approval  
27 of the October 2023 Minutes. Any changes to the minutes?

28  
29 **MS. BOGGS:** Motion to adopt the minutes as written.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We have a motion by Ms. Boggs and a second by  
32 Mr. Broussard. Any opposition to approval of the minutes? Seeing  
33 none, the minutes are approved. Our next item will be Dr. Birdsong  
34 walking us through the Action Guide and Next Steps, and that's in  
35 Tab C, Number 3. Dr. Birdsong.

36  
37 **COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGIC (CMP) LANDINGS**  
38

39 **DR. MAX BIRDSONG:** Okay. Looking at Agenda Item IV, Mr. Frank  
40 Helies will provide an update on the status of CMP landings  
41 relative to annual catch limits for the Gulf of Mexico. This is  
42 for information only, and no action is required by the committee.  
43 There is an additional presentation on recent king mackerel  
44 landings by commercial fishing zones, and, for the recreational  
45 sector, later on in the agenda, there is more detailed information.

46  
47  
48 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Good morning. We have CMP Landings. The same

1 caveats as before, and the data is preliminary from 2023 and 2024,  
2 and I want to point you guys to our website, again, for weekly  
3 updates on our landings data.

4  
5 Gulf cobia, Gulf Zone cobia, currently, there is 3,599 pounds  
6 landed. Recreational landings are well below the ACT, the stock  
7 ACT. Again, feel free to stop me if you have any questions. The  
8 Florida East Coast Zone, 3 percent of the ACL, and 2,424 pounds  
9 have been landed, as of Monday. The rec landings for last year  
10 were under.

11  
12 Spanish mackerel, the 2023-2024 fishing year, we have landed  
13 243,397 pounds. You don't see ACL on here, because it's 11,300,000  
14 pounds, and so it's way off the chart. Recreational landings are  
15 483,903 pounds. We only landed 6.4 percent of the stock ACL,  
16 727,300 total pounds.

17  
18 As Dr. Birdsong mentioned, Mike Larkin is going to give a  
19 presentation on king mackerel coming up here, and I do have some  
20 slides in here about it though. The total landings for king  
21 mackerel are 1,156,418 pounds, which is 47 percent of the ACL, and  
22 I want to make a correction to this slide. The total commercial  
23 ACL, for the 2023-2024 fishing year, is actually 3,196,800 pounds,  
24 and that's going to be until modified, and so that's going to be  
25 the current ACL. Any questions on that?

26  
27 We're under on all the zones. The Western Zone is 33 percent, the  
28 Northern Zone is 34 percent, the Southern Zone hook-and-line is 81  
29 percent, and the Southern Zone gillnet is 79 percent. We do  
30 generally close that early, but they're still under.

31  
32 The recreational is at about 23 percent of the ACL, 1,544,908  
33 pounds, and the ACL is incorrect on this slide as well, and so the  
34 2023-2024 ACL for the recreational sector is 6,793,200 pounds, and  
35 that's going to be on the books until modified. That should do  
36 it.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I have Ms. Boggs and then Captain Walker.

39  
40 **MS. BOGGS:** So I don't know if there is any way that we can see  
41 where the cobia landings are coming from, what part of -- You know,  
42 what area, region, of the Gulf. We've caught 65 percent, but the  
43 landings are still low, and I know, in our area, to-date, as far  
44 as I know, there's not been a cobia landed in Orange Beach,  
45 Alabama, and I'm just curious where these landings are coming from.

46  
47 **MR. HELIES:** I'm sorry, Susan, and I don't have that off the top  
48 of my head. I can reach out to my team though.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

3  
4 **MR. ED WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to clarify,  
5 and did you say all the zones on king mackerel failed to reach  
6 their quota last year?

7  
8 **MR. HELIES:** This was current landings, the 2023-2024 percentage,  
9 is what I said. I can go back and look on that, and that actually  
10 should be --

11  
12 **MR. WALKER:** No, and that's okay. That would make more sense.  
13 Okay.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I guess I have a question to that. Similarly,  
16 Mr. Helies, you also indicated that Spanish were at 6 percent  
17 currently? Okay. Thank you. Mr. Rindone.

18  
19 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the commercial zones,  
20 everybody was under, with the exception of the Southern Zone  
21 gillnet, which was at 97.1 percent of its quota, and so still  
22 under, but they try to get as close as they can. That's for  
23 kingfish for the 2022-2023 fishing season.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you. Dr. Simmons.

26  
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Later  
28 on the agenda, Dr. Larkin is going to go through that in more  
29 detail, and he's got some historical information for king mackerel  
30 specifically, by zone, and for the recreational sector.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Excellent point. Okay. Any other questions  
33 related to Mr. Helies' landing report? If not, we will move on,  
34 I believe, and, Emily, you've got a summary of the special  
35 engagement session?

36  
37 **CMP SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT SESSION SUMMARY**

38  
39 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** I sure do, and so if we can go ahead and  
40 bring that up. If you guys remember, and I have a presentation  
41 for you, but, if you remember, back in our January council meeting,  
42 you approved an outreach plan to engage our audiences with CMP  
43 issues, mostly looking at what's going on with Spanish and king  
44 mackerel, and then we added cobia into it. This effort was meant  
45 to be complementary to the South Atlantic's port meeting effort.

46  
47 As I just mentioned, this effort was meant to complement the South  
48 Atlantic Council port meeting effort, and it's to inform any of

1 our future Gulf Council management, and recognizing that there  
2 might be some sort of interesting and strange things going on in  
3 the CMP fisheries.

4  
5 Historically, we've had very low participation in our mackerel-  
6 based engagements, and so we discussed, at our January meeting,  
7 that, in lieu of the port meetings, we would gather information in  
8 four separate ways. The first would be to do some sort of online  
9 feedback tool, like our Fishermen Feedback tool, and the second  
10 was to host virtual feedback workshops, and the third was to engage  
11 in AP feedback sessions, and then the fourth was to get feedback  
12 during council meeting testimony.

13  
14 We have already accomplished Number 3, for our CMP AP, and then  
15 Number 4 -- What you will notice is that, in each official council  
16 agenda, and press release, we are now publishing, for the remainder  
17 of the year, that we are interested in comments that are related  
18 to the CMP fishery specifically.

19  
20 We did host this first session, and what I would like to do today  
21 is go ahead and give you a summary of the feedback we heard. We  
22 asked them a number of questions, that you can see on the board  
23 here, and I know that's kind of a lot, but I guess I assume that  
24 that would be there for your homework, so you could read that, and  
25 then I've summarized the feedback that we've gotten, and that is  
26 in your briefing materials.

27  
28 Now, I'm going to quickly go through the information that we got  
29 from our AP, and then, at the end of that, what I would like to  
30 ask is whether or not this is the type of information that you  
31 would like, because I'm hoping you will help me sort of maybe think  
32 about whether our engagement plan, for the remainder of the year,  
33 is going to be appropriate or if there's anything that we can do  
34 to make it more rational.

35  
36 I broke this up into themes, and what we found was, even though we  
37 asked these sort of linear questions, and I think this isn't that  
38 strange, but the first question we asked, which was have there  
39 been any substantial changes in the fishery in the recent years,  
40 and it ended up being the question that had the most feedback, but  
41 the feedback that we were given in that first question sort of fit  
42 under all of the other answers, right, and so, in the summary,  
43 I've tried to break it up so that we could pull up some themes,  
44 and some of the things, we heard.

45  
46 From that CMP AP, we heard that all three species are experiencing  
47 some decline in abundance. They discussed that maybe changes in  
48 salinity, and water temperature, degradation of habitat, harmful

1 algal blooms, and low dissolved oxygen are driving that population  
2 decline, and it could be just impacting migratory behaviors, right,  
3 and so we didn't really understand whether the species were in  
4 decline or if they just had changed their habits with the way they  
5 moved, and I don't think there was a major consensus around that.

6  
7 The next theme was location, and so we heard that migratory  
8 patterns are changing, that the fish are moving with different  
9 timing than they have historically, that the areas that they  
10 occupy, where they sort of hang out, are changing, and that the  
11 size of the schools seem to be much smaller than they have been  
12 historically.

13  
14 We heard that king mackerel and cobia seem to be further offshore.  
15 Now, whether that's a factor of colder, deeper water or the removal  
16 of like rigs that they might have frequented for forage fish, or  
17 even the availability of forage fish was also sort of a  
18 conversation that we had, but we didn't have answers to.

19  
20 We did hear that that removal of rig structure disrupted movement  
21 and that bait used to attract fish disappeared in inshore  
22 environments, and they're changing the location and availability  
23 of the CMP species that rely on them.

24  
25 We also heard a theme that fishing behavior was changing, and so  
26 we heard that, recreationally, none of the three species are  
27 primary targets, because they're not as readily available, and  
28 that this is a departure from historical behavior. The folks on  
29 the AP, who engage in the recreational CMP fisheries, they all  
30 said that, you know, in past years, they would go out on a king  
31 mackerel trip, or they would go out on a cobia trip, specifically  
32 to target those fish, and that that was no longer sort of a primary  
33 target species, and instead they would be fishing for something  
34 different, and then maybe stop on the way back in, to, you know,  
35 ride the beach line, and see if they could see a cobia, or something  
36 like that, and so that, really, they were not engaging in those  
37 target trips as frequently as they used to.

38  
39 We heard, commercially, that there's been a major increase in  
40 competition for king mackerel, especially in the Southern Zone,  
41 and that there's a huge decline in pressure in the Western Zone,  
42 which may have just been reflected by what you saw in the ACL  
43 report, and so the commercial fishery did mention that they  
44 remained economically viable, despite the increased challenge of  
45 targeting fish, because price has increased as the supply has  
46 decreased.

47  
48 All right, and so there were some ecological themes that also

1 emerged. We heard that shark depredation is driving increased  
2 mortality, and I don't think that this is a surprise to anybody  
3 around the table. We also heard that fishing regulations are not  
4 the thing that is limiting harvest, and so, in other words -- You  
5 know, for Spanish mackerel, I think there's a fifteen-fish bag  
6 limit. For king mackerel, it's a three, and so it's not that  
7 people aren't catching those bag limits because -- That's not what  
8 is limiting them from not bringing home a cooler or fish, and like  
9 they're just not available, and so people aren't able to even  
10 harvest their bag limits, is kind of the point that was being made  
11 there.

12  
13 They said that, instead, it's the ecological challenges and  
14 decreased availability of the fish that is preventing anybody from  
15 being able to get their bag limits of fish. I think I will pause  
16 there, and I'm sort of looking for two types of feedback. First,  
17 if you have any questions that that session that we hosted, and  
18 about the feedback that we got, and then, second, I'm sort of  
19 looking for a little bit of feedback on what's next.

20  
21 You know, should we take this to other APs? Should we be doing  
22 this to more than just the CMP AP? Do you think the Reef Fish  
23 guys might want to give us some wisdom on CMP? Do you think the  
24 Data Collection guys want to do that? Is there another AP-type  
25 forum that this might be an appropriate exercise for? I would  
26 also like to hear, you know, if there's any preferences on how we  
27 change our questions, or the types of information that we gather,  
28 so that this effort, through the remainder of the year, is useful  
29 to you and providing you useful information, and, with that, I  
30 think I will give you some space.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Emily. Thoughts or feedback or  
33 questions? Captain Walker.

34  
35 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Emily, and, per your request, I say yes.  
36 I figure, if you have any AP that is likely a group that may king  
37 mackerel fish, you may as well ask them as well, you know, what  
38 they're seeing about kingfish, and I ask pretty much everybody  
39 what they're seeing about kingfish, given the chance, and so I  
40 would say yes. You know, the Reef AP, the charter APs, and, you  
41 know, give them a half-a-dozen questions, and why not? They're  
42 already organized.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Diaz.

45  
46 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** I agree with Captain Walker. I think that you  
47 should poll those APs, also.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Andy.

2  
3 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** So, first, thank you, Emily. This is great  
4 information, and it's really helpful. I like the idea as well of,  
5 obviously, expanding this out to other groups, and, to me, I think  
6 where we could head with this is drilling into a little bit more  
7 specificity, right, and so there's themes emerging. You know, the  
8 inshore and offshore, and where is that line being drawn for a lot  
9 of people, in terms of changes in, you know, where they're seeing  
10 mackerel geographically, and is that consistent around the Gulf,  
11 and where, you know, are people seeing changes specific to certain  
12 geography, relative to others, and are those similar themes, or  
13 are they seeing -- Do they believe that the differences are caused  
14 by some other factors?

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point?

17  
18 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Just to quickly respond to Andy, I think one of  
19 the things that we may be able to do is, through our online feedback  
20 tool, that's going to look a lot like our Fishermen Feedback, since  
21 we've got that PRA limitation there, but I think that online  
22 feedback tool is going to be gathering that location-based  
23 information, and so that might be an appropriate way for us to be  
24 able to sort of georeference the types of things that we're  
25 hearing.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Frazer.

28  
29 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** I have, Emily, a specific question on the emerging  
30 themes, and so I'm just trying to -- If you were in the  
31 conversation, one of them is that shark depredation is driving  
32 increased mortality, and I'm just trying to wrap my head around  
33 what observations, or information, that the committee talked  
34 about, right, that would lead to that.

35  
36 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I think this is something that we've been hearing  
37 around the council table a lot, right, and we hear it in the  
38 Fishermen Feedback tool, and it's something that we hear, and so  
39 that conversation that we had at the AP was very reminiscent of  
40 the conversations that we've had here, and that is like, you know,  
41 we bring up half-fish all of the time, and so the thought that  
42 maybe a normal fishery would be catching these fish, and keeping  
43 them, and putting them in a box, but, under the pressure of the  
44 sharks, the amount of dead fish that are associated with a trip,  
45 because of the sharks, is maybe greater than it would have been  
46 had there not be the sharks present to kill those fish, if that  
47 makes sense.

1 **DR. FRAZER:** It does make sense, and so I was trying to separate  
2 out, you know, what's happening in the absence of fishing, right,  
3 and so this is a fishing effect, right?

4  
5 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes.

6  
7 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Anson.

10  
11 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on your committee,  
12 and, Emily, you may be collecting this information, but, I mean,  
13 are you getting any temporal information from each of the  
14 participants, to kind of showcase, or highlight, the length of  
15 time they've been fishing, whether or not their avidity rates have  
16 changed over time, if they started out young, fishing a lot, and  
17 now not as much, that type of thing?

18  
19 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So that's a great question, and that's captured  
20 a little bit in the full summary, if you take a look at that, but  
21 that was not a piece of information that we intentionally  
22 collected. However, when folks were sort of talking about their  
23 experience in the fishery, it was very typical for them, at that  
24 point, to say, you know, I've been in this fishery for forty years,  
25 and so they would sort of couch it in their experience, and I will  
26 say that, during that conversation, they did actually talk about  
27 the fact that, you know, a lot of the commercial guys said that  
28 we've been around for a lifetime, versus some of you who have only  
29 been seeing it recently, and they did specifically call out the  
30 idea that maybe people who haven't been in the fishery for a long  
31 period of time would have a completely different perspective than  
32 those that have been around for a long time, and so that  
33 conversation was had, but we did not specifically ask how long  
34 have you been fishing.

35  
36 That's something that we can consider, when we're doing the online  
37 engagement, or when we do future versions of this, for the other  
38 APs, and we might even be able to do it through our Fishermen  
39 Feedback tool, but I'll have to figure out how to make that work.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

42  
43 **MR. WALKER:** I think, to Mr. Anson's question, there is a bit of  
44 a debate on whether, particularly in the western Gulf -- I've heard  
45 some of the guys say that they're not catching the fish because we  
46 don't have any fishermen anymore, and they don't come here anymore,  
47 or vice versa, but, to me, the fishermen don't come because there  
48 is no fish. That's where it started. The kingfish prices have

1 reached as high as six-dollars this year, and, if there were fish,  
2 the fishermen would come.

3  
4 I know some of the east coast guys that used to travel, and they've  
5 all told me that we don't go because there are not many fish left,  
6 and so it's not worth our time, and so I think I would like to at  
7 least give my thoughts on that, because I heard it go back and  
8 forth, but I can assure you that, with that price on their head,  
9 the fishermen would come if the fish were there.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Captain Walker. To that point,  
12 Emily, I think that's the type of information you would be looking  
13 for, in approaching the different APs, and I fully support, going  
14 back to what Captain Walker mentioned, approaching different APs,  
15 the feedback tool, virtual workshops, but what exactly would that  
16 kind of look like? Would we start with one in-person to the APs,  
17 and then lay out the other tools that you have available? I'm  
18 just wondering what that would -- In your vision, what that would  
19 look like.

20  
21 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** That's a great question, and so we did this with  
22 the CMP AP, knowing that they were going to be the most intimately  
23 involved in the fishery, and sort of hoping to look at whether the  
24 information that we got out of the group was what you all were  
25 looking for. Based on that, I was hoping for your feedback today,  
26 and then I was going to put out that online tool and host two or  
27 three online feedback meetings that look a lot like those workshops  
28 that we just did with the CMP AP.

29  
30 In other words, I don't see them as being a public hearing, with  
31 like it's time to testify, and I want it to be I'm going to ask  
32 you a question, and we're really just workshoping this, and so it  
33 wasn't meant to feel formal, and it's very much more of an open-  
34 ended conversation, and then that's why, when I did the summary,  
35 I tried to pull out emerging themes, right, because the information  
36 that we did get, because it was more open-ended, was kind of all  
37 over the place, which, when people talk about what's important to  
38 them, I think that's when you get the information that is  
39 important, right, and so I was trying not to be super structured,  
40 but I can certainly throw in some things about experience and  
41 tighten that up a little bit.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you for that, Emily, and, if I didn't  
44 support it enough before, I support it even more now, with kind of  
45 an idea of how you're planning to approach that. Are there others?  
46 Dr. Walter.

47  
48 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Thank you, Chair. Emily, thank you for this

1 great presentation, and for all this outreach. Two things that  
2 would be useful, I think, when you're talking to people, and you're  
3 asking for what additional things would be useful, are how does  
4 the council use this information and what do people see as actions  
5 that either the scientific community could take or actions the  
6 council could take, because I think we're hearing things that are  
7 certainly concerning, and we've heard this repeatedly, but how we  
8 address it, I think, is sort of that big unknown.

9  
10 I think that's what we're engaging with the community on, is what  
11 could be done, whether there is scientific things that we need to  
12 explore, or whether there is certain management actions that could  
13 be taken, that I think are going to be really key to not letting  
14 this kind of stop at thanks for the information, but people want  
15 to see action. Thanks.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Emily.

18  
19 **MR. MUEHLSTEIN:** To reply to that, I think that's a really great  
20 idea, and the plan that we had was to take everybody who has  
21 contributed through this throughout the year and put them on their  
22 own sort of listserv, and so, as the council sort of starts to  
23 discuss what's happening, as we generate a final report, and give  
24 that to you, and as the council sort of decides what they want to  
25 do with the body of information that we've gathered, we will be  
26 able to then double-back to those people who contributed and say  
27 here's where we're at, and here's where we go next, and so, if we  
28 decide to start a management action, based on the information that  
29 we get throughout this year, then we will be able to engage those  
30 people directly and say, hey, we heard from you, here's what we're  
31 thinking, and then get the feedback through our normal public  
32 process, but be able to like sort of touch those people very  
33 intimately here, you know, like get them very intimately involved  
34 as we develop those management actions.

35  
36 Your comment does bring up a question, and, you know, at this  
37 point, my plan was to develop a summary from each meeting, and  
38 then probably my end product, that I was envisioning, was going to  
39 be sort of an emerging theme type of document that takes all of  
40 the summaries that we heard from every one of our different efforts  
41 and puts it all together, and is that what's going to be a useful  
42 product to you, or do you see there being something more useful  
43 that we can provide out of this effort, because I want to make  
44 sure that the comments that we get through this are going to be  
45 useful for management and science.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker, and then I have a comment.

48

1 **MR. WALKER:** I'm not really positive this is the right place to  
2 throw that in, but Dr. Walter kind of touched on it, and does the  
3 council -- Could the council request a kingfish study be done, or  
4 is there one going on right now? I mean, this is all anecdotal  
5 evidence, and this guy said that, and this guy said that, but it's  
6 -- I don't know what it is going on, but, if not, I think it's  
7 high time that we try to get some real science behind this, instead  
8 of asking the fishermen. Maybe there is, and I'm not aware of it,  
9 and I'm not sure that the council actually would go to somebody  
10 and say can we get a kingfish study going, but, if not, I think  
11 it's high time that we get one going, if there isn't one already.  
12

13 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Banks.  
14

15 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** So what exactly are you looking for in a study,  
16 and maybe I can point to who might be doing it at the moment.  
17

18 **MR. WALKER:** I don't know who it would be, but, you know, the  
19 status of the population out there, really, and is there really a  
20 decline? Did they swim out to deeper water? Year classes that  
21 are missing, or are coming up, that, you know, general overview of  
22 the status of the stock, and we're trying to identify it based on  
23 nonscientific methods thus far, at least so far today.  
24

25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Banks and then Ms. Boggs.  
26

27 **DR. BANKS:** There is, and John probably -- Andy can also talk to  
28 this, but there is ongoing recruitment studies, through SEAMAP and  
29 stuff like that, that are looking at how boom or bust the  
30 recruitment class is, and we just did an age-and-growth, looking  
31 at age classes in the western Gulf, and Will Patterson does age  
32 and growth, and looking at year classes in the eastern, and so  
33 there are studies ongoing. I don't know of any that are currently  
34 looking at movement, and so looking at are they going to deeper  
35 water or coming back, and I'm not aware of anybody currently  
36 tagging that way.  
37

38 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs, and then I have a thought.  
39

40 **MS. BOGGS:** Well, and I was just going to add, and Ryan can correct  
41 me if I'm wrong, but we've got a king mackerel operational  
42 assessment in 2025, and cobia is 2026, and so, I mean, that's the  
43 SEDAR schedule, and I know that -- But Dr. Banks just said there's  
44 ongoing studies about different things, but I -- At this council,  
45 and I can't remember, three, four, five years ago, and I had the  
46 fishermen begging to close cobia, but the council had no appetite  
47 for it, and I don't like closing seasons, because we all know what  
48 happens when you close something. You very rarely get it back,

1 but the king mackerel, the cobia, and our charter office sits right  
2 in front of the fish cleaning station, and not one of those species  
3 came to our dock last year.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** So, to Dr. Walter's point, I think that's where  
6 the value in some of this public engagement really comes from, is  
7 identifying, you know, the thoughts, and the sentiments, from the  
8 folks that are on the water, to Captain Walker's point, and, you  
9 know, some of that can help identify those research needs, if there  
10 are truly, you know, other factors leading to the trends that we're  
11 seeing, both in our catch rates and the anglers are seeing on the  
12 water, and help identify those research needs, prioritize those  
13 needs, and exhaust some of our resources here, with our academic  
14 community, to not only punt to the agency to conduct that research,  
15 but our academics and universities, and so I think that there's a  
16 lot of value there.

17  
18 I get a little sensitive when -- You know, when your only tool is  
19 a hammer, everything looks like a nail, and we want to regulate,  
20 and regulate, and take management action on simply everything that  
21 comes across our table, and I think this is a great opportunity to  
22 look outside of that narrow lane of regulatory action. Andy.

23  
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, a couple of thoughts, and so I, obviously,  
25 like the idea of exploring research opportunities. I think the  
26 concern I have is the scope and scale, given what we're seeing in  
27 terms of changes throughout the entire Gulf and South Atlantic for  
28 these species, and so any research study would have to be really  
29 well thought out, and I think targeted at specific issues.

30  
31 I think of someone like Mandy Karnauskas at the Science Center,  
32 that looks into kind of ecosystem-level, you know, changes, and  
33 how that might be affecting fisheries, and we've looked at shifts  
34 in dolphin abundance, for example, in the South Atlantic, that are  
35 related to changes in temperature in the straits off of Florida,  
36 and so lots of things that I think could be explored, but it's  
37 just a matter of the scope, and the scale, and where that funding  
38 comes from.

39  
40 In terms of, you know, the comment earlier, I really appreciated  
41 John mentioning to Emily about, you know, asking about kind of the  
42 management and science response. You know, I think that's why I  
43 brought this motion up at the last couple of meetings, was I don't  
44 think we are in a situation where we should be waiting for the  
45 next assessment. We don't know, right, how influential any  
46 management action might be, given there's other causal factors,  
47 but we at least need to give it a chance to take a look at what we  
48 could do to help these stocks in the meantime, as we try to

1 understand and get better information about what's going on.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Diaz.

4

5 **MR. DIAZ:** This question might be for either Mr. Strelcheck or Dr.  
6 Banks, and so they mentioned bait, and we don't talk about bait  
7 that much here, but do we have some ongoing studies that could  
8 give us some information about the availability of bait in some of  
9 these areas? I doubt that we do, but I'm just curious, because I  
10 know I've talked to Captain Zales, and he's in the audience right  
11 now, and he's told me, when the fish were not off of Panama City,  
12 the bait wasn't there either, and so, anyway, is there anything to  
13 that?

14

15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Andy.

16

17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I will look to C.J., or Jessica, and I guess she's  
18 not here, but, you know, my familiarity with Florida is, you know,  
19 there was, or is, or at least was, a baitfish fishery in state  
20 waters, for some time, and I don't know if there's any trends, or  
21 information, that could be gleaned from that, in terms of how that  
22 would have changed over time. We, obviously, have the menhaden  
23 fishery, that is closely monitored in Mississippi and Louisiana,  
24 but I don't know what other fisheries might exist for bait  
25 elsewhere.

26

27 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman and then Ms. Boggs.

28

29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I appreciate the question. We certainly do collect  
30 information on baitfish fisheries, and we can pull trends over  
31 time, to see what's going on there. I mean, I guess I would ask  
32 what species are we talking about here that we would like to  
33 actually investigate to look into king mackerel, and so I guess  
34 any king mackerel experts, that know the diet of king mackerel,  
35 and maybe we can pull some of that information.

36

37 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.

38

39 **MS. BOGGS:** Well, to Mr. Diaz's question, when we were in Panama  
40 City Beach, I was talking to Eugene Raffield, with Raffield  
41 Fisheries, and we buy bait from them, and we haven't been able to  
42 for several years, because they didn't have any bait, but he said  
43 the bait is back, and he said you can call me any time, and I've  
44 got what you need, and so that's from him.

45

46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Before we go on, Dr. Simmons is kind of reining  
47 me in, which I appreciate, and so we're getting a little off-  
48 topic, from particular to Emily's subject and the Fishermen

1 Feedback tool, and I think some of this is going to be addressed,  
2 and discussed, later on, and specific to the king mackerel item,  
3 and so, with that said, if anyone has any other particular  
4 questions, or feedback, specific to Emily's effort, let's kind of  
5 narrow that in. Kevin.

6  
7 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you again, and so, Emily, I appreciate you  
8 putting this slide in here to get us to think about it, but I'm  
9 hesitant of putting more work on staff, but, since you asked, you  
10 know, we talked a little bit yesterday, in Reef Fish, with gag,  
11 about, you know, a little bit more intensive efforts amongst, you  
12 know, folks that are looking at the data, to, you know, look at  
13 catch rates and those types of things, and so I'm wondering -- To  
14 get that information, or that review, of the data that's reviewed,  
15 back into the loop, so to speak, for those that have previously  
16 registered for a specific species.

17  
18 You know, we're looking at, or requested, priority species, of  
19 which there's about eight, to go through the SEDAR process, and so  
20 maybe we're just looking at eight species that we really want to  
21 keep our finger on, and so, you know, providing those anglers that  
22 have expressed interest, but signing up in the feedback tool, that  
23 they can be the -- Kind of the check system, if you will, and so  
24 to feed them back that information of, hey, this is what the latest  
25 information is showing, and what do you all think, and is this  
26 syncing up with what you're seeing on the water type of thing.

27  
28 Then the only other comment would be, you know, to make it easy,  
29 and I realize these are not randomly-selected individuals, and so  
30 I say that before I'm going to say the following, and that is, on  
31 the Fishermen Feedback tool, you've got listed there all the  
32 species that you've conducted the special surveys and such with,  
33 but, you know, maybe to put to the right of each of those species  
34 kind of the overall belief of what the condition of the stock is,  
35 and so I realize that's Gulf-wide, and so you've got the east/west  
36 thing, but maybe, you know, you have a little pie chart, and it's  
37 mostly in the red, or mostly in the green or whatever, and so, if  
38 it's not too much work, just think about that. Thank you.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Walter.

41  
42 **DR. WALTER:** Just briefly putting a little bit of a wrapper on  
43 some of the science points, and, after the October council meeting,  
44 I had actually asked our staff, in our oceanic and coastal pelagics  
45 branch, to start putting together kind of a plan for what surveys  
46 we might be able to do for these coastal pelagics, which is really  
47 challenging, because we don't have a great survey for them, and  
48 then what science questions we might be able to address, noting

1 forage and using our surveys to evaluate changes in forage  
2 dynamics.

3  
4 They have put together a number of materials here, and I think  
5 perhaps there's -- Also, there's this ongoing large marine  
6 ecosystem project to do an assessment, a Gulf-wide assessment, of  
7 king mackerel, and that's had fits and starts over the years, and  
8 that would be in coordination with Mexico, and it stops and starts,  
9 but I think, because of a lot of the issues facing these species,  
10 and they're going to be Gulf-wide, because the migratory stock  
11 moves into Mexico, that that is one venue to potentially explore  
12 them.

13  
14 I think maybe the most productive venue for scientific inquiry  
15 might be some of the climate, ecosystem, and fisheries initiatives,  
16 and I believe that the council actually requested funds for that,  
17 of which king mackerel might be one of the projects, which, when  
18 we are adding staff, should king mackerel and east coastal pelagics  
19 be priorities, and I think they will emerge as something to look  
20 into.

21  
22 Perhaps the way to keep the endeavors we're working on current  
23 might be to have our branch chief engage with the AP, and maybe to  
24 bring some of the science that we've got to the AP, to get some  
25 feedback, and maybe that might be something we can work on  
26 coordinating. Thank you.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Okay. Not seeing any  
29 other hands, we're going to go ahead and move on to Draft Framework  
30 Amendment 14: Modifications to the Gulf Migratory Group Spanish  
31 Mackerel Catch Limits and Accountability Measures. For this one,  
32 in talking with Dr. Birdsong and Dr. Simmons, I think it made sense  
33 that we would bump up Item C, the AP recommendations, and hear a  
34 summary from Mr. Martin Fisher.

35  
36 Just a quick note, and I had the opportunity to attend the CMP AP,  
37 back in February, and I found it incredibly valuable, and  
38 insightful, and I got to meet some of the AP members, and so that's  
39 kind of a call to action for any of our council, fellow council  
40 members, and, if you have the opportunity attend, and I know that  
41 Captain Walker also attended that AP, but, if you have that  
42 opportunity, take it. It's a great experience, and I found it  
43 incredibly beneficial to me, as a council member, and so, with  
44 that said, and that was kind of a delay, to give Martin some time  
45 to prepare, if he is online. Mr. Fisher, are you with us out  
46 there?

47  
48 **MR. MARTIN FISHER:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Can you hear me?

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We sure can. Take it away, sir. It's good to  
3 hear from you.  
4

5 **DRAFT FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT 14: MODIFICATIONS TO GULF MIGRATORY**  
6 **GROUP SPANISH MACKEREL CATCH LIMITS AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES**  
7 **CMP FEBRUARY 2024 ADVISORY PANEL (AP) RECOMMENDATIONS**  
8

9 **MR. FISHER:** Thank you very much for the introduction and for the  
10 opportunity to represent the CMP AP. Dr. Simmons asked me to  
11 summarize the summary, and I did the best I could, and so it's not  
12 going to read word-for-word what you see on the screen, but it  
13 will be close.  
14

15 The meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's  
16 Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panel was convened on February  
17 13, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Martin Fisher and Mr. Tom Marvel were  
18 elected as chair and vice chair, respectively. The agenda and  
19 summary report from the December 1 meeting were approved as  
20 written.  
21

22 The CMP AP was presented with several presentations, and the AP  
23 responded with several concerns and motions. Ms. Jennifer Lee,  
24 from the Southeast Regional Office, presented landings to-date  
25 related to the respective ACLs, and Dr. Mike Larkin presented an  
26 analysis on historical Gulf migratory group king mackerel  
27 landings, a comparison by sector, commercial zone, year, and state,  
28 federal versus state waters, and monitoring units.  
29

30 The AP was concerned about the decline in Gulf king mackerel  
31 landings and perceived stock condition. In addition, the AP noted  
32 that landing estimates in the Marine Recreational Information  
33 Program's Fishing Effort Survey, MRIP-FES, were almost 40 percent  
34 higher than the estimates from the current Coastal Household  
35 Telephone Survey.  
36

37 Mr. John Foster, from the NOAA Office of Science and Technology,  
38 offered a presentation reviewing ongoing pilot study work of the  
39 FES portion of MRIP. The AP was concerned that the mailing list  
40 for the FES survey was not specific to actual anglers, and Mr.  
41 Foster responded that they use both an address list from the U.S.  
42 Postal Service and state fishing licensing programs.  
43

44 Mr. Foster described response rates related to the quantity of  
45 returns. The AP surmised that some incentive mechanism could be  
46 employed to increase the response rate. Mr. Foster explained that  
47 OST doesn't have the regulatory authority to conjoin MRIP  
48 participation with license renewal.

1  
2 The AP was quite interested in improving private recreational data  
3 in the Gulf. Council staff reported that the Gulf States Marine  
4 Fisheries Commission has presented to the council some initial  
5 ideas for creating a federal offshore permit and that exploring  
6 novel approaches to managing private recreational sector is  
7 ongoing.

8  
9 The AP made its first motion of the meeting by recommending to the  
10 Gulf Council that future FES studies include a separate sampling  
11 of saltwater license holders, to be gathered monthly, with the  
12 identify within the sampling whether pelagic fishing or reef fish  
13 fishing has occurred, and that motion carried nine to three.

14  
15 The AP followed up with a motion reflecting -- Supporting a motion  
16 made by the Reef Fish AP, in its previous meeting, that the council  
17 encourage the Gulf states begin development of a uniform  
18 standardized mandatory reporting requirement for Gulf recreational  
19 anglers. That motion carried unanimously.

20  
21 The CMP AP further requested, by motion, that the Gulf Council  
22 delay any changes in allocation between the commercial and  
23 recreational sectors of any Gulf fishery resources that are subject  
24 to MRIP-FES until such time as the pilot study has been completed  
25 and deemed consistent with BSIA by the Gulf SSC, and the council  
26 has empirical support for the actual level of recreational fishing  
27 effort in the Gulf. This motion also carried unanimously.

28  
29 I might add that, later in the meeting, Mr. Dakus shared with the  
30 AP that the council had adopted a similar action that they would  
31 not pursue any sector allocations until the MRIP-FES pilot study  
32 was finalized, and so, carrying on here, council staff then  
33 presented the findings of the SEDAR 81 operational assessment of  
34 Gulf of Mexico migratory group Spanish mackerel.

35  
36 SEDAR 81 resolved several concerns from the previous model, from  
37 the SEDAR 28 of 2014, and it incorporated updated recreational  
38 landings data calibrated to MRIP-FES data units. The council's  
39 SSC ultimately accepted SEDAR 81 as the best scientific information  
40 available, BSIA, and recommended the council adjust catch limits  
41 for Gulf Spanish mackerel. The SSC recommended an overfishing  
42 limit using a constant catch of 12.074 million pounds whole weight  
43 for 2025 through 2027 and an acceptable biological catch (ABC),  
44 using constant catch of 9.630 million pounds whole weight for 2025  
45 through 2027.

46  
47 The AP brought up water quality issues, i.e., the northern Gulf  
48 dead zone and eastern Gulf red tides. There was also discussion

1 about the source of the landings used in the SEDAR. Council staff  
2 replied that the MRIP-FES data, in combination with the LA Creel  
3 and the Texas recreational survey data, were the only data  
4 available for Gulf Spanish mackerel for this purpose.

5  
6 Council staff then presented a summary of the council's Fishermen  
7 Feedback tool for Spanish mackerel, what we just heard from Emily.  
8 117 responses were received, mostly from private recreational  
9 anglers, and mostly from the eastern Gulf. Overall, anglers tended  
10 to have a negative to neutral view of the Gulf Spanish stock, and  
11 staff reported that, generally, Gulf-wide, the health of the  
12 Spanish mackerel stock was viewed negatively, and that shark  
13 depredation was commented on more frequently than any other  
14 negative sentiment about the Spanish mackerel stock.

15  
16 The AP moved ahead with a presentation on Draft Framework Amendment  
17 14: Modifications to Gulf Spanish Mackerel Catch Limits, and  
18 council staff presented a document that considers modifying the  
19 overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, and the stock ACL  
20 for Spanish mackerel, Gulf Spanish mackerel.

21  
22 This action includes three alternatives. Alternative 1 is no  
23 action, and Alternative 2 incorporates the SSC's recommendations  
24 for OFL and ABC, and it retains the definition of the ACL being  
25 equal to ABC, and Alternative 3 incorporates the SSC's  
26 recommendations for the OFL and ABC and uses the council's ACL/ACT  
27 Control Rule to determine the stock ACL. Alternatives 2 and 3  
28 represent at least a 35 percent reduction from the current ACL.

29  
30 Staff also mentioned that an action to modify accountability  
31 measures is also being explored. Gulf Spanish mackerel has an in-  
32 season AM, in which the stock ACL is reached, or projected to be  
33 reached, within a fishing year. The Assistant Administrator for  
34 Fisheries will file a notification with the Office of the Federal  
35 Register to close that fishery for the remainder of the fishing  
36 year if those accountability measures are reached.

37  
38 The AP noted that, similar to Gulf king mackerel, overall landings  
39 for Gulf Spanish mackerel have remained below the ACL and seem to  
40 be declining. Thus, some AP members had concerns about the health  
41 of the stock and debated whether an ACL of 9.36 million pounds  
42 whole weight would be a responsible measure. The AP was unified  
43 in requesting that the council should explore options to prevent  
44 closures to the fishery to prevent economic impacts. The AP also  
45 reflected, again, that shark depredation was a glaring issue. The  
46 AP also noted that recreational landings in MRIP-FES also seemed  
47 high, given their experience in the fishery, and that not many  
48 anglers seek to retain the fifteen-fish-per-person bag limit.

1  
2 The AP made a motion recommending that, in Action 1, to make  
3 Alternative 2 the preferred. Alternative 2 is modify the OFL,  
4 ABC, and stock ACL as recommended by the council's SSC, for the  
5 fishing years 2025 through 2026 and 2027 through 2028 and  
6 subsequent fishing years and to retain the stock ACL being set  
7 equal to the ABC. The fishing year, OFL, ABC, ACL for 2025 through  
8 2026 and 2027 and 2028, and roughly twelve million pounds, 9.6,  
9 9.6 million, catch limit values on the OFL and ABC, as recommended  
10 by the Gulf Council's SSC, in pounds whole weight. The  
11 recreational portion of the OFL, ABC, and ACL are based on MRIP-  
12 FES data. The motion carried unanimously.

13  
14 The next motion, the CMP AP recommended that the council explore  
15 options to reduce harvest in the Spanish mackerel fishery to  
16 prevent a fishery closure, and that motion carried ten to three.

17  
18 Reiterating the concern for a potential closure of the fishery,  
19 the AP also discussed the option of exploring sector allocations.  
20 Mr. Dakus Geeslin, council liaison, pointed out that the council  
21 would consider this recommendation, but would not assure any action  
22 at this time. Council staff reminded the AP that, at the October  
23 2023 meeting, the council passed a motion stating that they would  
24 not pursue any sector allocations until the MRIP-FES study, pilot  
25 study, was finalized.

26  
27 Although recognizing the uncertainties associated with MRIP-FES  
28 data, the AP still recommended initiating work on sector  
29 allocation, and so we made a motion to request council start work  
30 on a document that explores what sector allocations would look  
31 like for the Spanish mackerel fishery, and that motion carried  
32 twelve to one. A common theme of --

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Fisher, can I stop you just for a second?

35  
36 **MR. FISHER:** Sure.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We have some questions, or some comments, here.

39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, I didn't know if the  
41 committee had any questions for Mr. Fisher regarding the  
42 recommendations for the framework, and we were going to go back in  
43 and discuss the framework before we get to the rest of the AP  
44 motions, if that's okay.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Good move there. Okay, and so we have a  
47 recommendation coming out of the AP, and we have a document. There  
48 we go. Thank you. In the draft framework amendment, we have the

1 recommendation coming out of the AP, and they recommended the  
2 alternative for Action 2, or the Action 1, Alternative 2, as the  
3 preferred. Is there discussion surrounding that action?

4  
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, I think staff is prepared  
6 to go through the document, and I was just wondering if the  
7 committee had any questions to Mr. Fisher regarding the AP's  
8 recommendations on the Spanish mackerel.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you. Sorry for the clunkiness. Any  
11 questions to Mr. Fisher surrounding the AP's discussion and their  
12 arrival at this preferred alternative? With that, if I'm hearing  
13 correctly, we will go to Dr. Birdsong to walk through the document  
14 and a presentation related to this framework action.

#### 15 16 **PRESENTATION**

17  
18 **DR. BIRDSONG:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is Agenda Item VI.  
19 Council staff, myself, will review the document that considers  
20 modifying the catch limits and accountability measures for the  
21 Gulf migratory group Spanish mackerel, based on the recent SEDAR  
22 81 stock assessment and the council's Scientific and Statistical  
23 Committee's recommendations.

24  
25 SEDAR 81 transitioned the recreational catch and effort data to  
26 the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort  
27 Survey, MRIP-FES, and determined the stock was not overfished or  
28 undergoing overfishing, as of 2021. This version of the document  
29 includes an additional action to modify the in-season  
30 accountability measure for Gulf Spanish mackerel. The committee  
31 should consider the actions and select preferred alternatives, as  
32 appropriate.

33  
34 We have prepared a short presentation to go through the document.  
35 Gulf Spanish mackerel, the fishing year is from April 1 to March  
36 31. There is no sector allocation. The minimum size limit is  
37 twelve inches fork length. The recreational bag limit is fifteen  
38 per person, and there is currently an in-season accountability  
39 measure, where there is a closure if the stock ACL is reached or  
40 projected to be reached.

41  
42 The purpose is to modify Gulf Spanish mackerel catch limits based  
43 on the results of the SEDAR 81 stock assessment, and the need is  
44 to use the best scientific information available for managing Gulf  
45 Spanish mackerel, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery  
46 Conservation and Management Act.

47  
48 Action 1, here's the table of the alternatives, and the first row

1 is Alternative 1, no action, and it's presented in the CHTS units,  
2 and then the second row is the FES equivalent for Alternative 1,  
3 and so, for Alternative 1, in FES units, the OFL is 15.2, the ABC  
4 is 14.9, and the stock ACL is 14.9 million pounds whole weight.

5  
6 Alternative 2 would be a reduction from this, down to 12.074  
7 million pound whole weight for the OFL, 9.63 for the ABC, and then  
8 the stock ACL would be equal to the ABC, and we did a closure  
9 projection, and it was projected that there would be no, or  
10 minimal, closures under this alternative, and then Alternative 3  
11 is similar, but it involves the ACT/ACL Control Rule, where there's  
12 a 10 percent buffer, and so the stock ACL would be 8.667, instead  
13 of 9.63, million pounds whole weight.

14  
15 Then this table here just presents the landings going back to 2000,  
16 from the recreational and the commercial, for both MRFSS units,  
17 CHTS units, and then the FES equivalent, in this fourth table from  
18 the right, and you can see the total landings in FES, and we have  
19 highlighted 2019-2020 there as the one year, looking back, where  
20 there was not -- Where the ACL was not exceeded, and it was under  
21 the ACL, under the old ACL, but it would be exceeded under  
22 Alternatives 2 and 3, if that makes sense.

23  
24 As you just heard from Mr. Fisher, just a brief summary of the CMP  
25 AP feedback, and recreational landings seem high, and not many  
26 anglers seek to retain the fifteen-fish-per-person bag limit. The  
27 overall landings seem to be declining, and there are concerns about  
28 the condition of the stock. Increased shark depredation on Spanish  
29 mackerel was a concern for the CMP AP, and they believe that the  
30 council should explore options to prevent a closure.

31  
32 Here are those motions, and they motioned -- Motion 1 was the CMP  
33 AP recommends that, in Action 1, to make Alternative 2 the  
34 preferred, and this was carried unanimously, and then the CMP AP  
35 recommends that the council explore options to reduce harvest in  
36 the Spanish mackerel fishery, to prevent a fishery closure.

37  
38 Now Action 2 looks at modifying the Gulf Spanish mackerel  
39 accountability measure. Alternative 1 is no action, retain the  
40 current accountability measure, whereby the Regional Administrator  
41 will close the fishing season for Gulf Spanish mackerel, for the  
42 commercial and recreational fishing sectors, when the stock annual  
43 catch limit is reached, or projected to be reached, and then  
44 Alternative 2 would modify the accountability measure, such that,  
45 if the stock ACL is exceeded in a fishing year, then, in the  
46 following fishing year, the Regional Administrator will close the  
47 fishing season for Gulf Spanish mackerel, for the commercial and  
48 recreational fishing sectors, if the stock ACL is projected to be

1 reached.

2  
3 Historically, Spanish mackerel closures are rare. Based on current  
4 harvest projections, and the catch limits under consideration in  
5 Action 1, this change would likely have minimal impact, and so a  
6 question for the council is should Action 2 be kept, if it does  
7 not add substantive value, and then a follow-up question is are  
8 there other accountability measure options with clear benefits?  
9 Let me pause there.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Birdsong. Ms. Boggs.

12  
13 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Birdsong, you've asked a  
14 question here, and I was just rereading all of this, and I don't  
15 really see what Action 2, and I'm sure we can talk it too when we  
16 get to the document, but my initial feedback is that you're right,  
17 that it doesn't really add much, and I don't see why we need it,  
18 but I'll wait until we get to the document to do anything with it.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs.

21  
22 **MS. BOGGS:** If you want recommendations now, then, okay, and let's  
23 just jump into this. I would like to ask the agency, very quickly  
24 though, with that Action 2, and Alternative 2, and, I mean, it  
25 really doesn't do anything, does it, Andy?

26  
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm not seeing really much of a distinction, in  
28 terms of what it provides, and so I think we would be fine with  
29 just eliminating Action 2.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker, or to that point, Ms. Boggs?

32  
33 **MS. BOGGS:** Well, I was going to make a couple of motions, but go  
34 ahead.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Let's go with Captain Walker.

37  
38 **MR. WALKER:** I agree with Ms. Boggs and Andy. It's not going to  
39 make a dent in it, and, if it did -- If it did end up risking a  
40 closure, which seems highly unlikely, it would be based on FES  
41 estimates, which I'm skeptical of here as well, and so I see very  
42 little gain here for anybody, really, including the mackerel.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Most importantly. Dr. Frazer.

45  
46 **DR. FRAZER:** I think we had a number of discussions about this  
47 document, obviously, in the past, and, because it's a jointly kind  
48 of managed fishery, I was just curious, since we have our South

1 Atlantic liaison, if we might get a little input from the South  
2 Atlantic on this.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** That's a good point. Ms. McCawley.

5

6 **MS. JESSICA MCCAWLEY:** Thank you, and so we were also working on  
7 a Spanish mackerel amendment as well, but we put a hold on that  
8 until we can complete those port meetings, and so the port meetings  
9 -- There is different weeks for different states, and I believe  
10 the ones in Florida are in the month of October, late October,  
11 but, since the port meetings are going to look at kind of what's  
12 happening with king and Spanish mackerel, and they're going to  
13 look at the objectives of that FMP, and they're going to really  
14 kind of look at everything, and we felt like it was premature to  
15 keep working on the Spanish mackerel amendment, that we had  
16 underway, until the port meetings are completed.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you for that insight. Any other  
19 discussion surrounding Action 2 and the couple of alternatives and  
20 the accountability measures? Ms. Boggs.

21

22 **MS. BOGGS:** Well, I guess, based on what Ms. McCawley just said,  
23 and the fact that we just said that we want to take this out to  
24 all of our APs, and get their feedback, do we want to just kind of  
25 put this on hold, until all of that is complete? I don't know  
26 that anything is going to change. I mean, I will be happy to make  
27 a motion to remove Action 2 from Alternative 2, just to kind of  
28 get something done, but are we premature in -- Based on what Ms.  
29 McCawley said, because we do have issues with Spanish mackerel,  
30 king mackerel, and cobia, and I just don't know. I don't want to  
31 jump ahead, if this council wants to just kind of say, hey, let's  
32 hang on a minute.

33

34 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

35

36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm kind of in agreement with Ms. Boggs there. In  
37 addition to getting more information from our stakeholders along  
38 those lines, I think it was back in October that we received a  
39 presentation from the SSC about Spanish, in particular, and the  
40 sensitivity runs, relative to the exposure level to FES, and this,  
41 obviously, is a highly-recreational fishery there, maybe upwards  
42 of 90 percent, or something along those lines, and so I don't know.

43

44 I think the SSC recommendations there were to kind of urge caution  
45 for stocks that have high levels of recreational landings, and  
46 this would certainly fall into the category, and so, in addition  
47 to what Susan was talking about relative to the port meetings, I  
48 think adding a little more time into this could maybe give us some

1 more insight relative to that the follow-up FES study is doing.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I'm going to go to Ms. Levy and then Dr.  
4 Froeschke.

5  
6 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Well, just a couple of comments. I mean, so, if  
7 you have another stock where you have a recommendation for catch  
8 levels that are below current catch levels, and so there's an  
9 obligation, right, to not have those catch levels higher than the  
10 SSC recommendations, and slowing down action on that prolongs that  
11 situation, and, I mean, I'll just point out that the Gulf stock,  
12 right, is a little bit different than the South Atlantic side.

13  
14 They manage all the way up the east coast, right, and there's been  
15 changes, in terms of distribution of the stock and all of that,  
16 and so I can kind of see the idea of port meetings, and looking  
17 more broadly at that range, and, I mean, here, we're dealing with  
18 a Gulf stock, and it's the Gulf of Mexico, and, while there may be  
19 some issues with the stock moving, it's still -- It's a Gulf of  
20 Mexico stock, and you have catch limits for that stock from the  
21 SSC, right, and -- No, we don't have catch limits from this stock  
22 from the SSC?

23  
24 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I was kind of disagreeing with your distributional  
25 shift there in the Gulf.

26  
27 **MS. LEVY:** I'm not making a comment about whether there has been  
28 a distributional -- All I'm saying is that there is a Gulf stock,  
29 and we have recommendations for that Gulf stock, and it's Gulf-  
30 wide, right, and so, you know -- And it's less than what we have  
31 on the books now.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Froeschke and then Ms. McCawley and Ms.  
34 Boggs.

35  
36 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** I just wanted to give you a little bit of  
37 insight into the IPT discussions about this action and the initial  
38 reason why we came up with it. The concern, as you see here, with  
39 the change to FES, and the reduction in the stock ACL, there was  
40 concern, now, that we might either fully use the stock, or we might  
41 run out of fish before the year end, and the feedback that we heard  
42 is that, you know, we don't want to have a seasonal closure for  
43 this, if at all possible, and so one thing we considered was this  
44 action, and we looked to try to provide a little bit more  
45 flexibility in how the accountability measures were used, such  
46 that you wouldn't be triggering these end-of-the-year kind of  
47 things, or causing unnecessary disruption to the fishery.

48

1 When we put together the alternatives, we discussed them, and we  
2 kind of looked through how this would perform historically, and we  
3 saw that it really didn't do something, do what we had hoped, and,  
4 based on our discussions, it seemed like there was fairly limited  
5 flexibility in how we could do that through the AM side of it,  
6 and, in talking with some of the others and things, perhaps it  
7 would be something like a reduction in the bag limit, if that was  
8 a real concern of the committee, and it wasn't necessarily, but it  
9 doesn't seem like this was a fruitful path, and we might need  
10 something else, if the concern is for a closure.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. McCawley.

13  
14 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** I was going to say we had the same issue, and that  
15 we had some recommendations from our SSC, and we still decided to  
16 wait, and I would say that what we're intending to get from those  
17 port meetings isn't just because of the distribution of Spanish  
18 mackerel, and king mackerel, and how they might be changing along  
19 the Atlantic coast of the U.S., and I would say that there's a lot  
20 of other factors involved.

21  
22 We too, because the numbers are smaller, once converted to FES,  
23 would need to take additional management measures, and so, if  
24 you're going to take additional management measures, why get out  
25 in front of all these stakeholder meetings, and why put the Spanish  
26 mackerel amendment out in front of all of that?

27  
28 Some of the goals and objectives of that plan are so old, and, I  
29 mean, we're talking from the 1970s and 1980s, and we have a lot of  
30 questions about are people still targeting the same way, and  
31 they're probably not using the same gear, and they might be  
32 shifting how they fish for this stock, how they think about it,  
33 how they fish for it relative to other species, and so we really  
34 just felt like we couldn't make a very informed decision, and so  
35 we had a similar situation, and we still decided to stop work on  
36 that amendment, and I just wanted to add that.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thanks for that South Atlantic insight. We've  
39 got Andy and then Ms. Boggs.

40  
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Lots of thoughts here, and so I'm kind rethinking  
42 my comment about Action 2, and so the distinction, obviously, is  
43 kind of an in-season versus post-season AM, and so, you know, we  
44 would look at landings after the fact, and then make a decision  
45 about whether to close the fishery, and so I think we should keep  
46 this in. I think one of the frustrations that a lot of anglers  
47 have is the predictability of seasons, and so having a post-season  
48 accountability measure may make more sense here, as well as the

1 combined nature of the fisheries.

2  
3 The other, I guess, thoughts that I have -- One, in terms of  
4 delaying action, and so I heard MRIP-FES kind of thrown out as a  
5 concern, and, yes, you know, that is an issue, and we're going to  
6 have a pilot, but we're going to still be monitoring in MRIP going  
7 forward with this, and we don't have a commensurate state survey  
8 to evaluate Spanish mackerel, and so the only issue really becomes  
9 timing, in terms of what does that pilot tell us, and how does  
10 that then adjust the catch levels down or up, going forward.

11  
12 Then, you know, there was mention of looking at the bag limit.  
13 Given the declines, the fact that a lot of people aren't catching  
14 the bag limit, I think that would be prudent, to go ahead and add  
15 an action, and then I guess my last comment is I am certainly not  
16 a fan of closures as well, right, but I don't think that should be  
17 our sole reason here, or purpose, is to avoid closures, especially  
18 if a stock is in decline, right, and so we want to make sure, if  
19 the stock starts to recover, that we can put some fish in the bank  
20 again and manage those fish to a healthy population level.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.

23  
24 **MS. BOGGS:** All right. I've got a lot to do here. Okay. With  
25 Action 1, I think we wait and hear public comments, and see where  
26 that goes, and maybe do something with it during Full Council.  
27 Action 2, Andy, if we leave Alternative 2 in there, and it says,  
28 if we exceed it in the fishing year, then it will close the  
29 following year, and so it will be closed the entire year, or  
30 season? It's kind of unclear, but it would be -- It's kind of  
31 like we've got a payback, is essentially what we're doing here,  
32 and is that correct?

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point, Mr. Strelcheck?

35  
36 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, I mean, I think we maybe need some  
37 wordsmithing here, and so it's the "if", right, and so, if the  
38 stock ACL is exceeded, then, in the following year, the fishing  
39 season would close, if the stock ACL is projected to be reached,  
40 right, and so it's that second "if", right, the if the stock ACL  
41 is projected to be reached, and so you have to have an overage the  
42 prior year, and then we would monitor and essentially determine  
43 when to close in the following year.

44  
45 **MS. BOGGS:** I'm kind of torn, because when you -- No one likes in-  
46 season closures, and I get that, but at least you know where you're  
47 going to start. If you use Alternative 2, then it's kind of like  
48 amberjack, and, I mean, we don't know if amberjack is going to --

1 Well, I know, Mara, and it's a bad example, but it's the only one  
2 that I can come up with, but you don't know. You know it's going  
3 to open currently now in August, but you don't know if it's going  
4 to open in May, and so you don't know how to plan.

5  
6 To me, if you have an in-season closure, yes, you may mess up your  
7 plans a little bit, but you know that, next year, on April 1,  
8 you're going to open and so that's --

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point, Ms. Levy?

11  
12 **MS. LEVY:** So all this is doing is sort of delaying the in-season  
13 monitoring and closure for a year, and so, instead of looking at  
14 it every year, and seeing if you need to close, you only look at  
15 in the year following an overage of the ACL. That's all this is  
16 doing, is it's pushing back that monitoring and in-season closing.  
17 I mean, we do in-season closures via projections all the time,  
18 right, and so that's all it's saying, right? It's saying you have  
19 to go over in year-one, and then, next year, you monitor and close,  
20 if you project that your ACL is projected to be -- If you project  
21 that the catch limit is met. We have those for other stocks.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Diaz.

24  
25 **MR. DIAZ:** I just want to get on the record and say I'm okay with  
26 leaving Action 2 in there. I think it's the right thing to do,  
27 but, to be clear, for Alternative 2, it would just be -- There is  
28 no payback, and it would just be, next year, if it's projected to  
29 be met -- It would be closed when it's projected to be met. Thank  
30 you.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Frazer.

33  
34 **DR. FRAZER:** To Dale's, I guess, comments, or points, I don't mind  
35 the way that Action 2 rolls out either, and my bigger question is  
36 that FES was never intended -- Or MRIP was never intended for using  
37 in-season monitoring, and we don't have a good track record of  
38 projecting when we might exceed the ACL, and so, you know, Andy,  
39 I'm putting you in a really tough spot here, right, and so do we  
40 have some confidence that we've looked at the historical data and  
41 run any models that say, hey, if we ran this model, we would hit  
42 that with high confidence, because we haven't been doing really  
43 well at that, with like red grouper, for example, or gag, and so  
44 that's my question. Do we have the tool, right, to actually do  
45 the in-season monitoring, moving forward?

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

1 **MR. WALKER:** So there's some -- Sorry.  
2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Let's go to Andy, to that point.  
4  
5 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, you make a valid point, Tom, right, and  
6 that's been one of our challenges, is how do we project these  
7 seasons, and there's variability in the data, and sometimes we hit  
8 the mark, like for-hire red snapper, and sometimes we don't, like  
9 red grouper, right, and so we do look at different approaches, and  
10 try to refine that, with mixed success.  
11  
12 The challenge though is that it doesn't alleviate us from a  
13 responsibility to set catch limits and have accountability  
14 measures, and the choice is then up to us, in terms of what those  
15 accountability measures look like.  
16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.  
18  
19 **MR. WALKER:** So accountability measures are going to be  
20 challenging, because, whenever you close it, it's going to vary  
21 across regions, and so you're going to have to pick -- Because of  
22 the migratory nature of the fish, if you close it in the  
23 summertime, you're going to take it away from the Panhandle guys.  
24 If you close it in the winter, it will affect, you know, Key West,  
25 or wherever, and so, as these fish move around the Gulf, and you  
26 pick a couple of months to close it, you're going to hit one town,  
27 when the other town got to fish, and so that's going to be  
28 challenging, in my opinion.  
29  
30 Also, I still don't like Action 1, because it has so much exposure  
31 to FES, and, looking at the landings numbers in FES, I think  
32 they're greatly overstated, personally, but I would like to point  
33 out that this -- Such a closure is going to close commercial as  
34 well, and it will be -- They're going to close commercial, if this  
35 happens, based on FES estimates.  
36  
37 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.  
38  
39 **MS. BOGGS:** So I've got my head wrapped around this now, and I  
40 think there's a lot of conversation at this table, and so I'm not  
41 ready to make a motion, like I thought I was, but I do agree with  
42 a lot of Captain Walker's points, because, as I was looking in  
43 Appendix C about projected closures, if you did certain things,  
44 and you're looking at November and December closure, and I know  
45 that affects our fleet in the spring, and so just I'm going to  
46 pause.  
47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

1  
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I want to go back to Captain Walker's  
3 comment about closing commercial. If we want to allocate between  
4 the commercial and recreational sectors, this is the time to do  
5 it. We wouldn't be able to do it in a framework action though,  
6 right, and so we would have to change this to another amendment,  
7 and so I recognize that's a concern, but managing the stock ACL,  
8 versus commercial and recreational ACLs, has, obviously,  
9 differential impacts.  
10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.  
12  
13 **MS. BOGGS:** Mr. Strelcheck, I mean, I would not recommend that we  
14 do something now, just because of the motion that this council  
15 passed, as well as the AP recommendation that we don't look at any  
16 allocations while we're doing this FES pilot, and so that's not  
17 something I would recommend. Now, if it's the pleasure of this  
18 council, maybe something we could do in this document, as suggested  
19 by Mr. Strelcheck, is maybe look at the bag limits, and that may  
20 be an option to help reduce.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. To that point, and I think Dr. Froeschke  
23 appropriately brought it up, the AP did recommend to take -- They  
24 recommended that the council take measures to prevent a closure.  
25 Andy.  
26  
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Dr. Birdsong, can you remind us of the timing of  
28 this framework action, when we expect to take final action?  
29  
30 **DR. BIRDSONG:** I think it's expected to go final in June.  
31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
33  
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Dakus, I would like to make a couple of motions  
35 then. **Just to spur conversation, and to get public testimony, I**  
36 **make a motion to select Alternative 3 in Action 1 as the preferred.**  
37 If I have a second, I will explain my rationale.  
38  
39 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Second.  
40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Second by Mr. Broussard. Andy.  
42  
43 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So my rationale is this would be a 10 percent  
44 reduction relative to the catch limit and ABC advice, but we are  
45 seeing, obviously, declines in landings that have been occurring  
46 in recent years, and landings levels are below that catch limit  
47 currently, and this is just to be on the conservative side, until  
48 we can understand what may be going on in the environment, and so,

1 right now, it's not projected to close the fishery, and it would  
2 provide some additional conservation benefits.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.

5  
6 **MS. BOGGS:** I understand, Andy, what you're trying to do here, and  
7 I'm not sure -- I do know that one of the issues off of Alabama,  
8 and I'm not trying to step on Alabama's toes, but we have some net  
9 fishermen out there, and, when the net fishermen come through,  
10 that's when we see a big decline in our catch. It's been pretty  
11 good so far this year, and I understand the conservation end, and  
12 I don't know if I will support the motion or not. Thank you.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Other discussion surrounding Mr. Strelcheck's  
15 motion? Captain Walker.

16  
17 **MR. WALKER:** I disagree as well. I prefer Alternative 1. I mean,  
18 there's kind of a contradiction in the AP, if you ask me. It says  
19 take measures to prevent a closure, and it kind of sounds like  
20 they're asking to lower the ACL, which only puts them closer to a  
21 closure, right, or a potential closure, but, just because of my  
22 concerns with FES overstating the landings, I have concerns about  
23 taking the ACL down so low.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Diaz.

26  
27 **MR. DIAZ:** Before Andy made his motion, I was kind of leaning  
28 towards Alternative 2, because the AP recommended it, but I do  
29 want to note that, and correct me if I'm wrong, but Alternative 2  
30 is a 5.5-million-pound reduction over Alternative 1, and so it's  
31 still conservative in nature, and so it's not like it's not a  
32 conservative measure.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. Any other discussion surrounding that  
35 motion? Otherwise, we're going to vote it up or down. Okay. With  
36 that, those -- We're going to get -- **Those in favor of the motion,**  
37 **signify by raising your hand, two; those in opposition, raise your**  
38 **hand. The motion fails.** Mr. Diaz.

39  
40 **MR. DIAZ:** In the interest of -- I would like for us to have some  
41 kind of direction before public testimony, and so I'm going to  
42 make a motion that we make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We've got a second by Dr. Banks. Mr. Diaz.

45  
46 **MR. DIAZ:** So my rationale is kind of what I said before. It is  
47 somewhat conservative, and I said 5.5, and I think it's more like  
48 about a 5.3-million-pound reduction over Alternative 1, and it is

1 -- It was kicked around, and it was the AP's recommendation for a  
2 preferred, and that's a big part of my rationale, and so thank  
3 you.  
4

5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Gill.  
6

7 **MR. GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am going to support the  
8 motion, but I would note that Alternative 1 is in CHTS units, and  
9 Alternative 2 is in FES, I believe.  
10

11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I believe, in a table in the document, we also  
12 had a conversion there for Alternative 1, if I'm not mistaken.  
13 Mr. Diaz. Then Tom.  
14

15 **MR. DIAZ:** I was just going to say the same thing. In the  
16 presentation we had from the staff today, right below the top  
17 column, the column below that is an FES comparison.  
18

19 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Tom and then John.  
20

21 **DR. FRAZER:** I mean, the FES comparisons are in the table, but I  
22 think the SSC set the OFL at twelve million pounds, right, in FES,  
23 and so I don't think Alternative 1 is a viable option, right?  
24

25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Froeschke.  
26

27 **DR. FROESCHKE:** That's all I was going to say.  
28

29 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you for that, Dr. Frazer. Ms. Boggs.  
30

31 **MS. BOGGS:** So I would like to make a motion that -- I don't know  
32 how to word it, but about adding an alternative to --  
33

34 **MR. GILL:** A point of order, Mr. Chairman. There's a motion on  
35 the board.  
36

37 **MS. BOGGS:** I'm sorry. We haven't voted on this one yet. I  
38 apologize.  
39

40 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We do still have this motion open. Captain  
41 Walker.  
42

43 **MR. WALKER:** I will speak in favor of the motion, as a compromise,  
44 I think.  
45

46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Any other discussion on this motion made by Mr.  
47 Diaz? Okay. We're going to vote this thing. **Those in favor,**  
48 **signify by raising your hand, twelve; those in opposition, same**

1 **sign.** Okay. **The motion carries.** Ms. Boggs, we'll go to you now.  
2  
3 **MS. BOGGS:** Okay. I think I'm back with the program now. Sorry  
4 about that. **I would like to make a motion to add an action item**  
5 **to look at bag limits, maybe reducing it to ten, and I don't think**  
6 **we need to go anything less than, but fifteen, twelve, and ten,**  
7 **and I don't know, but I think a reduction to ten would be most**  
8 **appropriate.**  
9  
10 **MR. GILL:** Seconded.  
11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Second by Mr. Gill. Discussion? Dr. Froeschke.  
13  
14 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I did reach out to SERO staff about the potential  
15 for bag limits, and it seems like it's something that could be  
16 done, based on the data, but I don't know, but, historically, in  
17 my experience here at the council, when you guys do bag limits, in  
18 order to make a meaningful cut, you've got to take a big swing,  
19 like probably five, is my just -- Like to five, because, when you  
20 generally look at the distribution of the catches, there is, you  
21 know, sort of a modal kind of a thing, and then a long tail, but  
22 most people don't catch near the end of the bag limit, but that's  
23 just my intuition right now.  
24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point, that's where, again, I think  
26 some of this public engagement, and hearing from anglers, can  
27 inform some of that, to see how many folks are actually catching  
28 out on the water. Mr. Gill and then back to Ms. Boggs.  
29  
30 **MR. GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, but that's exactly what this  
31 action will do. It will inform as to what has an impact and what  
32 does not, and I'm assuming that, as part of that action, there  
33 will be varying bag limits suggested, and the analysis will then  
34 identify whether it will have an impact or not. Thank you.  
35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.  
37  
38 **MS. BOGGS:** Mr. Gill pretty well made my points, because, I mean,  
39 normally, we see a chart that shows the regions, who is catching  
40 them, and who is not, but, as Emily stated, most people are not  
41 currently catching the bag limit anyway, and, you know, reducing  
42 it to five might not be palatable, but it may be something that we  
43 do have to look at, and so I would appreciate the exploration.  
44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Further discussion on the motion? Mr. Diaz.  
46  
47 **MR. DIAZ:** This might have been said, but so this document -- We've  
48 got it teed-up to go final in June, and is this something that

1 would impact the timeline?  
2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I am looking at council staff.  
4  
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it  
6 could impact the timing of it, but we could do our best to try to  
7 keep it on track, but it may be a heavy lift.  
8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Captain Walker.  
10  
11 **MR. WALKER:** So I don't disagree. Fifteen just seems like a lot,  
12 but I don't know that there's any scientific backing here that's  
13 going to make a difference at all, but we should definitely examine  
14 that. I mean, I support the idea. I do not support the idea of  
15 five, and I think that would have unintended negative effects on  
16 fishermen, but, fifteen to ten, I could probably live with, but I  
17 don't know that we're supposed to just throw our personal  
18 preferences out there, and we've got to have some validation on  
19 trying to accomplish what we're trying to do here, and so I would  
20 like to look at the data, if we don't have it already.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
23  
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I would just recommend not constraining  
25 ourselves right now, and I feel like we're talking about getting  
26 into a preferred without even seeing the data, and so have staff  
27 come back with at least a range, and we can always select ten, or  
28 whatever the amount is, even if it may not result in as much of a  
29 reduction as some of the other options.  
30  
31 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Further discussion? Okay. We've got a motion.  
32 **Those in favor, signify by raising your hand; those in opposition,**  
33 **same sign, raising your hand. Okay. The motion passes. Ms.**  
34 **Boggs.**  
35  
36 **MS. BOGGS:** So I just want to make a comment, and it really wasn't  
37 to the motion, but it was to what Captain Walker was saying, and  
38 I've said it before, but, if you're not catching the fish, what  
39 does this really do to help the fishery, but, if it's something  
40 that you can do to maybe constrain it, if the fishing comes back,  
41 and it gives us time to adjust, but, again, the ACLs, the ABCs,  
42 all those things -- If the fish aren't there, the fish aren't  
43 there, but we have to do our best to try to manage it, so that,  
44 when it does come back, we have a healthy fishery.  
45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs, and so we've worked our  
47 way through Action 1, and we have an additional motion to look at  
48 bag limits. Andy.

1  
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I would like to make a motion for Action 2, to  
3 select Alternative 2 in Action 2 as preferred.  
4  
5 **MR. DIAZ:** Second.  
6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** It's seconded by Mr. Diaz.  
8  
9 **MR. STRELCHECK:** We've already talked about this, but post-season  
10 accountability measure, to me, is easier than trying to do  
11 something in-season, and it gives kind of more time for planning  
12 purposes, and notice as well, and so I think that would be a  
13 benefit to the fishery.  
14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.  
16  
17 **MR. WALKER:** I agree with that, and it also gives the people like  
18 the charter guys a heads-up on -- You know, they don't get a  
19 surprise closure in the middle of their season, or something like  
20 that, and so I support the motion.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs.  
23  
24 **MS. BOGGS:** So, now that I understand how it will work, Andy, I  
25 will support the motion.  
26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Further discussion on the motion? **Not seeing**  
28 **any, those in support, signify by raising your hand; those in**  
29 **opposition, same sign.** Okay. **The motion carries.** All right. I  
30 think we have successfully worked through this one. It didn't  
31 come easy, but we got there. All right. We will move on. Do we  
32 want to finish up -- I am looking at Dr. Simmons, and Mr. Fisher  
33 -- Was he wrapped up? I know I let him go kind of past, but is  
34 there any additional -- Mr. Fisher.  
35  
36 **MR. FISHER:** I just have kind of a closing remark, and also one  
37 more motion.  
38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Please do, Mr. Fisher, and I appreciate your  
40 patience as we worked through that. Thank you.  
41  
42 **MR. FISHER:** Not a problem, and so a common theme of increased  
43 shark depredation was raised throughout the meeting, and I would  
44 like to personally, as a fisherman, recreationally and  
45 commercially, note that -- Well, I used to be a shark fisherman,  
46 back in the 1990s, and we definitely impacted the shark population,  
47 and, thus, the regulations that came forth out of that, in terms  
48 of trip limits and what have you, and the reduction in quota, but

1 what is happening now is that the sharks don't have a predator,  
2 and they are overwhelming the inshore and offshore fisheries, in  
3 both the recreational and the commercial sectors, and so I kind of  
4 would like to coin a phrase, and it would be called shark bite  
5 mortality.

6  
7 We have a shark bite mortality that is truly almost immeasurable,  
8 and it's really impacting the health of the fishermen, in terms of  
9 what they can bring back to the dock, and the health of the fishery,  
10 and so hopefully NMFS is working on some kind of way to reopen  
11 shark fishing, so that we can responsibly manage commercial shark  
12 harvest, to sort of put a dent in what has become an overwhelming  
13 influence.

14  
15 Going back to what the AP said, you, Mr. Geeslin, also mentioned  
16 that the U.S. House of Representatives passed, on February 8, 2024,  
17 the Supporting the Health of Aquatic Systems through Research,  
18 Knowledge, and Enhanced Dialogue, code name SHARKED Act, HR4051.  
19 The SHARKED Act directs NOAA to create a taskforce to study shark  
20 depredation.

21  
22 The AP was encouraged by the Congress's effort and thought the  
23 council should engage in the conversation, and therefore made the  
24 following motion to strongly recommend that the Gulf Council write  
25 a letter compelling NMFS to conduct research regarding shark  
26 depredation in the harvest or regulatory discards of the Gulf reef  
27 fish and coastal migratory pelagic fisheries. The motion carried  
28 twelve to one.

29  
30 Then the meeting pretty much ended with Ms. Muehlstein's  
31 presentation, and I believe that -- We had no public comment, and  
32 that was the end of our meeting. Thank you very much for allowing  
33 me to participate virtually and report-out for Natasha. Thank  
34 you.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Fisher. We appreciate you  
37 bringing that up. I mentioned, and that had just passed, I guess,  
38 through congressional act, the SHARKED Act, and it may be  
39 premature, but, Andy, or John, any thoughts on formulating that  
40 workgroup in response to that congressional act?

41  
42 **DR. WALTER:** Mr. Chair, thanks. Right now, we don't have a formal  
43 response to that, and we'll have to probably give a formal response  
44 to it, for the Science Center exclusively to form that workgroup,  
45 or lead it, and I think -- I guess the language says for NMFS to  
46 do that, but I think that's probably something that would benefit  
47 from not just us being the sole ones involved in it, and so I guess  
48 we would welcome if the councils also wanted to partner with that,

1 and how that might occur.

2  
3 I will note that there was also a request to fund research there,  
4 and there are a number of requests for proposals out there that  
5 are exploring, or are ongoing right now, dealing with depredation,  
6 and there's one that is ongoing, that I think had one of its  
7 kickoff meetings at this same meeting one year ago, and so some of  
8 the results of that are coming out.

9  
10 There are a couple of other proposal opportunities that are open  
11 now, that have projects related to depredation, and so we're going  
12 to take those into our consideration of the prioritization of those  
13 projects, I think, here, and also it will probably likely be  
14 something that, when future opportunities, say cooperative  
15 research projects, come up, that that will be something that would  
16 be a focus of those funding opportunities. Thanks.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. That was more than I  
19 had expected, but I appreciate that. Mr. Gill.

20  
21 **MR. GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also point out, in  
22 concert with what Dr. Walter has mentioned, that the S-K and CRP  
23 grant programs commonly have depredation projects as part going  
24 in, and the last CRP, as it has been for the last several years,  
25 was mostly shark-related, and I don't know that the determination  
26 of who is going to be selected is done, but it is a very frequent  
27 topic, and proposal, in the grant competitions.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you for that, and now I will pivot to our  
30 very own council resident shark expert, Dr. Banks.

31  
32 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you. Sea Grants, state Sea Grants, are also  
33 putting depredation on the top, and we actually have a Texas Sea  
34 Grant that's looking at depredation in both the recreational and  
35 commercial fisheries, and it will kick-off this summer, and so  
36 hopefully we'll have some data for you quickly.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. We will now move over to the Gulf  
39 Migratory Group King Mackerel Discussion, and Captain Walker is  
40 going to briefly take the lead here, as we move into the historic  
41 landings from Dr. Larkin.

42  
43 **MR. WALKER:** All right. I believe I am just handing off to Dr.  
44 Larkin here for his presentation. Are you there, Dr. Larkin?

45  
46 **DR. MIKE LARKIN:** I'm here. Can you hear me?

47  
48 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, sir. We've got you loud and clear, and you have

1 the floor.

2  
3 **GULF MIGRATORY GROUP KING MACKEREL MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION**  
4 **HISTORICAL LANDINGS**  
5

6 **DR. LARKIN:** If someone could pull up my presentation, and then I  
7 will just say "next slide". Really quick, back to this morning,  
8 that question that Frank got about cobia, I looked at that real  
9 quick, and so the recreational landings for cobia, by state,  
10 roughly, and I just looked at the last four years, real quick,  
11 this morning, but about 70 percent come from the west coast of  
12 Florida, and then Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana are about 10  
13 percent of those cobia landings, and then Texas is about 1 to 2  
14 percent of those Gulf cobia recreational landings, just to answer  
15 that question that Frank got this morning.

16  
17 Now I will move on to the king mackerel, and so I guess I will go  
18 through the commercial and recreational landings. To show you,  
19 real quick, the map, and I'm going to focus on the Gulf group,  
20 which you can see is the Western Zone, Northern Zone, and Southern  
21 Zone, and then you can see the boundary there, right there between  
22 Miami-Dade and Monroe County, that Gulf/Atlantic group boundary,  
23 and so I'm just going to focus on the Gulf group landings, the  
24 historic landings, roughly about the last ten years, for this  
25 presentation.

26  
27 I looked at the historical landings compared to the current quota  
28 and ACL for each of the king mackerel zones, and so I just looked  
29 at what we have right now, and so it might be confusing, to some  
30 people, if we were looking at this five years ago, or six years  
31 ago, and they had different quotas, and so I just kind of didn't  
32 want to be too messy, and I just looked at the current quota, and  
33 ACL, and compared it to the historical landings.

34  
35 There was a lot of closure dates, and you will see, in the figures,  
36 that I added the closure dates on top, if there was one, and the  
37 2023 landings are still preliminary for both commercial and  
38 recreational.

39  
40 To start, here's the king mackerel Western Zone, and so this has  
41 a fishing year from July 1 to June 30, and you can see that quota  
42 there, that 1.27 million pounds, that red-dashed line, the current  
43 quota, and you can see it has been in decline in recent years,  
44 with the most fishing years of 2021, 2022, and then 2022-2023, but  
45 you can see the other years in the past, and you can see the  
46 closure dates on top of them, and so that's the Western Zone  
47 commercial landings.

1 Then here's the Northern Zone, which has a fishing year of October  
2 1 to September 30, and you can see only two of those years had  
3 closures, but there's the other landings, relative to the current  
4 quota of 575,000 right there, and so that's the Northern Zone, and  
5 I'll give you guys a second to look at it.

6  
7 Now the Southern Zone, which is split up between gillnet and hook-  
8 and-line, and so this is the Southern Zone gillnet commercial  
9 landings. It has a fishing year from January 16 to June 30, and  
10 this is one of the ones that, in recent years, has had a closure,  
11 and you can see, you know, March 22, 2022, we had a closure there,  
12 for that 2022-2023 fishing year. That's the gillnet, Southern  
13 Zone gillnet, commercial landings.

14  
15 **MR. WALKER:** Mike, can I ask you a question on that one?

16  
17 **DR. LARKIN:** Sure.

18  
19 **MR. WALKER:** On the gillnet?

20  
21 **DR. LARKIN:** Sure.

22  
23 **MR. WALKER:** Did they catch their limit this year or not? I've  
24 heard two different things. I know their season is essentially  
25 over, because the fish left, but I wasn't sure if they caught their  
26 quota or not with the gillnets this year.

27  
28 **DR. LARKIN:** For the 2023-2024? I can look that up, but is there  
29 someone else that's more up-to-speed on that in the audience?

30  
31 **MR. WALKER:** That's all right. It's not a big deal. I can find  
32 out. Frank is here, and Frank may know the answer to this, and  
33 he's working his way up to the microphone. I know that things  
34 were a little slower down there this year, and I know the hook-  
35 and-line guys -- I believe the hook-and-line guys did not catch  
36 their quota in the Southern Zone this year, but I've heard  
37 conflicting reports on the gillnet fishery.

38  
39 **MR. HELIES:** Thanks. As of March 12, the Southern Zone gillnet is  
40 531,015 pounds, which is 79 percent, and the hook-and-line is a  
41 little more than, 546,380, which is 81 percent.

42  
43 **DR. LARKIN:** Thank you, Frank. If there's no more questions, I'll  
44 go to the next slide. Now the king mackerel Southern Zone hook-  
45 and-line commercial landings, and that has a fishing year of July  
46 1 to June 30, and you see closures in past years, but, as far as  
47 I can tell, no closures in the current, more recent years, with  
48 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, and these are, again, compared to the

1 current quota that we have right now.

2  
3 Now I'm switching gears, and I'm going over to the recreational,  
4 and it looks like I forgot to put the fishing year, and this one  
5 has a fishing year of July 1 to the end of June, and you can see  
6 -- This is, again, this is king mackerel MRIP-FES recreational  
7 landings, and so keep that in mind.

8  
9 This is, you know -- Through calibration factors, we go back in  
10 time and have the FES landings, but, in reality, you know, we  
11 didn't have FES before 2018, and so just keep that in mind, but,  
12 anyway, if we did, this is what it was projected to be, back in  
13 those early years, but you see, in the more current years, you  
14 know, the landings are well below the MRIP-FES. The landings are  
15 well below that quota of 6.79 million pounds.

16  
17 I have a couple more, and this are -- When I gave a presentation  
18 to the AP, they asked for some additional figures, and so I figured  
19 that I would also include them here as well. Again, with this  
20 one, I just did it much simpler, and I just did it by calendar  
21 year. This is the Gulf of Mexico king mackerel recreational  
22 landings by state, and so, again, MRIP-FES landings, and you can  
23 see the clear blue of Florida, and so west Florida and Alabama are  
24 dominating the landings there, and you can see the other states  
25 having smaller, you know, bars there in the graph, but you can see  
26 it's dominated by Florida and Alabama. They're the two primary  
27 ones where the recreational landings come in by state for king  
28 mackerel.

29  
30 Then, also, I got a question from the AP to break it up by  
31 jurisdiction, and so, again, the MRIP-FES recreational landings,  
32 and I tried to keep it simple, and I just did it by calendar year,  
33 but you can see, in most years, the state landings for king  
34 mackerel are dominating, but there was, you know -- In 2021, the  
35 majority of those landings came from federal waters, and just  
36 providing the state and federal landings for the king mackerel  
37 recreational landings for the Gulf, and that's it.

38  
39 **MR. WALKER:** All right. Any questions for Dr. Larkin? Okay.  
40 Seeing none, I appreciate you, Mike. I think it's pretty obvious  
41 to see the decline, no matter which chart you look at there, and  
42 something seems to have changed about three years ago, and a rapid  
43 decline has taken place, and, to me, it backs up what we've been  
44 hearing, and what I've personally seen, and so thank you, Mike.

45  
46 **DR. LARKIN:** Sure.

47  
48 **MR. WALKER:** Next up, we have the Current Management Status and

1 Next Steps.

2

3

### CURRENT MANAGEMENT STATUS AND NEXT STEPS

4

5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** That's me. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I  
6 have a short presentation, and it's Tab B, Number 7(b). What I've  
7 tried to do here is, after you received the historical, recent  
8 historical, information on king mackerel is just kind of give the  
9 council a picture of recent actions, recent requests to the center,  
10 some ongoing activities, which you've heard an in-depth report  
11 from Emily, and then a request with the climate resilience funding,  
12 and then the motion that was passed, and so where we've been, what  
13 we're doing, and then I'll ask you guys where you want to go, at  
14 the end.

15

16 Just to remind everybody, the stock status from the most recent  
17 assessment for Gulf king mackerel, it was not overfished or  
18 undergoing overfishing, and then the next assessment, which I think  
19 has already been brought up, is currently slated to start in mid-  
20 2025. There was some discussion already about the efforts with  
21 the Gulf large marine ecosystem group and the Science Center, in  
22 trying to get better support to incorporate the Mexican landings  
23 in that process, to get a better Gulf-wide assessment, and that's  
24 just a reminder of where we are currently with some of our other  
25 management measures for king mackerel, regarding the minimum size  
26 limit and bag limit.

27

28 The council, you will remember, you implemented that most recent  
29 stock assessment in Framework 11, and that transitioned the  
30 currency to MRIP-FES. That was a reduction in the total ACL, by  
31 about 13 percent, and that became effective in just January of  
32 last year, January of 2023, and so you're fishing on that total  
33 ACL of the 9.99 million pounds right now.

34

35 We also worked on Framework Amendment 12 action, and that was for  
36 the gillnet fishery, and it was primarily administrative, and that  
37 removed the weekend and holiday closures for that particular  
38 component of the fishery, and that was effective in October of  
39 2023, and so you considered Amendment 33, which looked at modifying  
40 sector allocations, and you ultimately decided to table that, based  
41 on stakeholder concerns about the stock and the ongoing efforts we  
42 have with engagement and communications that we're working on on  
43 the Gulf side with stakeholders.

44

45 We've heard a lot of public testimony that the council is not doing  
46 anything for king mackerel, and so I wanted to just kind of give  
47 an overview here of what we have tried to do within our knobs and  
48 levers and things that the council does available to them for this

1 stock, and so we did request that the Science Center consider an  
2 interim analysis, and that was right after the stock assessment.  
3 That was reviewed in July, and, ultimately, the SSC, and the  
4 center, concluded that the data from the fishery-independent  
5 indices were not robust enough to consider any modifications to  
6 catch advice, and so I think there were two independent indices  
7 that were reviewed, and I think it was the larval survey and --  
8 Was it SEAMAP, and I can't remember what the other one was, and  
9 there were two of them.

10  
11 Okay, and so you've heard from the Mackerel AP, and you've heard  
12 from public comment, that the number of traveling fishermen  
13 following the fish is declining, and so I said what kind of  
14 information do we have on that that's already been pulled, and  
15 this is a little bit old, but I took this out of our generic  
16 commercial reporting amendment, and it does show -- It's not most  
17 recent, and it ends in 2021, but it does show a decline in the  
18 CMP-permitted vessels that have Gulf king mackerel landings, and  
19 that shows from 2017 to 2021, and then it also has the number of  
20 trips, and so we could consider asking for an update on that, but  
21 that is some verification that there has been a decline in that,  
22 as the AP is suggesting, even though that's a little bit older  
23 information.

24  
25 In October of 2023, you guys directed us to begin an amendment, to  
26 develop an action, to review and modify Gulf king mackerel  
27 recreational and commercial annual catch limits and consider  
28 management measures.

29  
30 We've talked a lot about the stakeholder engagement process with  
31 Ms. Muehlstein, and you got a pretty in-depth overview of what our  
32 plan was, and we've kind of operationalized that for this first  
33 go-round with the CMP AP, and you also directed us to include king  
34 mackerel, cobia, and Spanish mackerel in that effort, and so I've  
35 kind of skipped down to the bottom bullet there.

36  
37 Then, circling back, we have those ongoing activities, and we also  
38 requested, through the climate resilience funding in the Inflation  
39 Reduction Act, to examine environmental factors that could be  
40 contributing to the king mackerel decline, and we haven't -- We  
41 have a staff member that's going to be onboarded on May 6, and we  
42 have not received funding yet for that effort, and we have to work  
43 through that, and get back to the council on that, but that is one  
44 of our main goals that we did put in that proposal, and we really  
45 want to look into this, with the Science Center and other  
46 appropriate technical staff.

47  
48 If you look a little bit at the literature, there is evidence of

1 increasing water temperatures altering the distributions of fish  
2 populations in the Gulf of Mexico and the North Atlantic, and there  
3 are some citations.

4  
5 We have a resident expert here on the council that just published  
6 a recent study that I want to highlight a little bit about, just  
7 reminding everybody what we know, high-level, about the migration  
8 patterns of king mackerel, and, obviously, where we have some data  
9 gaps, and so king mackerel are generally found off the west coast  
10 of Florida from April to May, and sometimes they show up as early  
11 as March, and in the fall from October to November. While king  
12 mackerel that winter in southeast in Florida are migrating into  
13 the northern Gulf of Mexico, there is a simultaneous migration  
14 from the Yucatan area, from those wintering grounds, that occurs  
15 along the west coast of the Gulf of Mexico into the northern Gulf.

16  
17 Then there was a recent publication, with Dr. Banks et al., just  
18 hot off the presses this year, for fish that was tagged off of  
19 Veracruz, Mexico, and they were reported to be recaptured off of  
20 Texas, indicating that the winter mixing may also be occurring  
21 between fish in the western Gulf and fish in the Mexican waters,  
22 and this pattern was supported by the landings, which showed a  
23 seasonal component in the Mexican fishery.

24  
25 I will also note, just high-level from the literature, there seems  
26 to be a narrow range that's been reported for king mackerel,  
27 regarding temperature and salinity, and so that is also something  
28 we would, obviously, be looking into as we move forward with our  
29 ecosystem efforts, working on our ecosystem fishery management  
30 plan, potentially addressing this as an FEI.

31  
32 What kind of reduction in catch limits would you want to consider?  
33 We just did, you know, a back-of-the-envelope calculation, and, if  
34 you were to do something similar to what was done with red grouper  
35 some years ago, which was to base it on landings, because clearly  
36 we don't have any real new science right now to determine the  
37 direction we should go, if we are going to take action right now,  
38 and that would be looking at like a 56 percent reduction,  
39 potentially, if you use the three-year landings history.

40  
41 If you use the five-year recent landings history, you've got a 44  
42 percent reduction from the current ACL, and so those are quite  
43 large reductions, based on the landings history that you just  
44 received from Dr. Larkin.

45  
46 Do you want to consider other management measures, a reduction in  
47 the recreational bag limit, which I think was increased to three  
48 fish not all that long ago, and we would have to look up on when

1 that was changed, and Ryan has got his hand up, or a closed season,  
2 commercial season closures by zone or gear, and I just an overall  
3 question of is the timing right to consider management changes  
4 when other factors, such as environmental factors, may be the  
5 primary drivers of this decline? That concludes my report.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. If we can keep this  
8 slide up, I think this is kind of paramount to our discussion, and  
9 you did a great job laying out the options. I mean, I see kind of  
10 the central tenets of fisheries management. You've got the catch  
11 limits, and you've got bag and size, and you've got season  
12 closures, and the only thing missing was maybe a gear restriction,  
13 and I don't know, but, with that, it's a complex issue, a lot going  
14 on, and we have heard, you know, ad nauseum, from our anglers,  
15 from our own scientists, that catch rates are going down, and,  
16 with that, I will kind of open this up for discussion. Captain  
17 Walker.

18  
19 **MR. WALKER:** I was on the CMP AP when the bag limit was changed  
20 from two to three, and, you know, the stock assessment had just  
21 come out, and it said you could raise it to four, you know, easily,  
22 without overfishing, and, you know, it's a bunch of charter guys,  
23 and recreational guys, and everybody kind of -- They gave us  
24 options for four, three, or leave it at two, and pretty much -- I  
25 might have said this before, but pretty much everybody in the room  
26 looked at each other, even the charter guys, and said none of us  
27 really need more than two kingfish.

28  
29 There was one guy who, after us all of kind of looking at each  
30 other and putting our hands up, and one guy said, you know, my  
31 charter boat might do better if I could keep three kingfish, and  
32 so we just all just kind of said, fine, and so maybe keep that in  
33 mind.

34  
35 I know I just spoke against picking random numbers with no science,  
36 but you're not going to really bother anybody lowering it, and I  
37 don't know if you have much of an impact either, but I don't expect  
38 to get a bunch of resistance from the fishing community by lowering  
39 it from three to two.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs and then Mr. Diaz.

42  
43 **MS. BOGGS:** I tend to agree with what Captain Walker said, and I'm  
44 going to make this comment, and I hope you all understand where  
45 I'm going with this, but you're right, and we've heard a lot of  
46 comments about this, and I just made the comment about Spanish,  
47 and, if you're not catching the fish, you're not catching the fish,  
48 but, if we don't take some type of action, then your fishermen

1 don't feel like we're doing anything.  
2  
3 I don't want to do anything that's going to be detrimental to the  
4 fishery, but I think, if you do try to constrain -- Again, like  
5 Spanish mackerel, if the fishery starts coming back, you're not  
6 just, all of a sudden, well, they're here, and we're catching them  
7 all, and we've constrained them, to hopefully rebuild that stock,  
8 and so one suggestion, and I get conflicting answers when I say  
9 this, but we've done it for other species, and do you close it  
10 during the spawn? That may be an alternative to look at.  
11

12 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point, Ryan?  
13

14 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can speak to that point,  
15 but, first, I would speak to the bag limit, and so, when we changed  
16 the bag limit, that was in Amendment 26 to the CMP FMP, and the  
17 data that were used in that bag limit analysis include 2011 through  
18 2013, and, just eyeballing this, over 85 percent of people catch  
19 one kingfish or fewer per trip, and so the frank way of describing  
20 that is you could lower it to one per person, and you still wouldn't  
21 have much of an effect on fishing mortality, and so it may be that  
22 you guys should consider some things beyond just the bag limit.  
23

24 With regard to the spawning season, kingfish spawning does peak in  
25 the summertime. I will pull up the SHELF egg project from the  
26 University of South Florida, and I will try and get that slide  
27 sent out to you guys, so you can see when kingfish spawning tends  
28 to occur, and I will do that right now,  
29

30 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone, and, just to point and  
31 kind of orient us in time, I think that -- I was looking through  
32 my files, and, in Texas, I ran that through our commission, and I  
33 think we bumped that bag limit up in 2018, and that was spawned in  
34 federal action, and so that may have been as long ago as 2017 that  
35 we made that change here at the council. Mr. Diaz and then Dr.  
36 Sweetman.  
37

38 **MR. DIAZ:** That's the point that I was going to make, is that bag  
39 limit was raised quite some time ago, and that was really before  
40 we started hearing from fishermen that king mackerel were starting  
41 to decline, and so, when the council did that, we were -- At that  
42 time, as a matter of a fact, I was the main one trying to push it,  
43 but we were kind of looking at maybe doing some type of  
44 reallocation, because the recreational was never catching their  
45 ACL, and the commercial was generally catching all of theirs, but  
46 once the discussion -- Once we started hearing, from the public  
47 and other people, that mackerel was in decline, we haven't talked  
48 about reallocation, in a number of years, because it's obvious

1 that something is going on, but that bag limit increase basically  
2 came from those discussions, when we were kicking around  
3 potentially looking at a reallocation.

4  
5 There were a few people that said, well, maybe we ought to give  
6 the recs a chance to catch more, and we raised the bag limit up,  
7 and the catch limit for recreational has not changed very much  
8 since we've done that, and so that's kind of a history lesson on  
9 it, and I just wanted to say that for the public that's listening,  
10 and the council has not discussed any type of reallocation in a  
11 number of years, and primarily because the signal has shown that  
12 the fishery seems to be in decline now, and so we're dealing with  
13 a whole different set of issues than we were back in 2016 and 2017.  
14 Thank you, sir.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dale. Dr. Sweetman.

17  
18 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and so I am struggling with this  
19 one, simply from the perspective of there is -- You know, the last  
20 assessment that we got was not overfished and not undergoing  
21 overfishing. We heard all the concerns from the public, and we're  
22 seeing that in the subsequent data that we've looked at here, and  
23 so I'm not -- Clearly something should be done here, but, in terms  
24 of what will actually be impactful, from a conservation  
25 perspective, I'm a little bit struggling there, because that last  
26 question is just kind of hanging out there right now.

27  
28 If it's environmental factors that are the primary drivers of the  
29 decline, what is even reducing the ACL, along those lines, or some  
30 of these other proposed measures that we're looking at -- What  
31 actual impact is that going to have, and so I'm just -- I'm in  
32 agreement, and I certainly want the public to know that this is  
33 one of the most important issues that we need to be working on  
34 right now, but we just have this absence of data or something  
35 that's driving these changes right now, and so, from my personal  
36 perspective, I'm just struggling to figure out what is the  
37 appropriate thing to do here.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I appreciate that, Dr. Sweetman. I also  
40 struggle with this one. I'm going to go Dr. Banks and then Ms.  
41 Boggs.

42  
43 **DR. BANKS:** I will echo the struggle, and I appreciate the  
44 shoutout, Carrie, for our new manuscript that just came out. I  
45 don't really know what we can do, management-wise, here. I  
46 struggle with bag limits and season closures, just because my feel,  
47 and experience, is it's something environmental.

1 I do know that king mackerel have more of a cyclic recruitment,  
2 and I will put in a request, over here to Dr. Walter, on the NOAA  
3 Stock SMART website, the data only goes through 2017, and is there  
4 a way that we can recruitment numbers from 2017 to newer? We might  
5 just be in a downturn, in which case that's not something this  
6 council would be able to manage.

7  
8 I will throw it out there, and I will preface that this is not an  
9 attack on any fishery at all, but, when we did our age-and-growth  
10 paper, to get small kingfish, we pulled them from shrimp cull, and  
11 there is a fair amount of small kingfish in shrimp cull, and so  
12 that might also be a point of mortality that we need to look at.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Ms. Boggs. Then I will go to Andy.

15  
16 **MS. BOGGS:** So, Dr. Sweetman, I agree, and it's like you want to  
17 do something just to feel good, but you want to do something that's  
18 going to do something, but, talking about environmental and  
19 migratory change, and there may be, but, when I was looking at  
20 Slide 10 that Dr. Larkin produced, at least in 2022-2023, and  
21 actually most years, there's a lot of landings in state waters,  
22 which indicates they should be nearshore, but your federal landings  
23 haven't gone up, and does that make sense? If you were catching  
24 them inshore, you would think they would move offshore, but maybe  
25 they're moving further offshore than what our fishermen are  
26 fishing, and it just -- I thought I had --

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Andy, then Dr. Frazer, and then Captain Walker.

29  
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I agree with a lot of the comments, and, you know,  
31 the challenge here is, you know, what's in our control, versus  
32 what's outside our control, and, you know, to me, we could spend  
33 a lot of time, you know, putting in a lot of management measures  
34 that aren't effective, and the concern I have is, obviously, the  
35 decline in landings, and then, ultimately, you know, are we at  
36 least controlling fishing mortality, where we can, right, and  
37 setting catch levels that are more commensurate with what the  
38 fishery is actually seeing.

39  
40 One of the thoughts I've had, right, is along the lines of what  
41 Carrie was suggesting, some sort of reduction in the catch limits,  
42 but almost like a tiered system that once -- If we start seeing  
43 the stock respond, and coming back, right, and that's usually our  
44 challenge, is that we're not nimble enough in reacting that we can  
45 start somehow ratcheting those catch limits back up, because the  
46 stock is getting healthier and more abundant, right, and so I think  
47 about like the tiered trip limit system that we use in a lot of  
48 places, where you hit a certain target, and you reduce the trip

1 limit.

2  
3 In this case, you know, if you hit a certain amount of landings  
4 by, you know, X date, that could trigger us increasing the catch  
5 limit in-season, or the following year, and so I just wanted to  
6 throw that out as kind of an idea, but I do feel like the biggest  
7 control we have is just pulling down the catch limits, for the  
8 time being, and some of these other controls probably will have  
9 limited success.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thanks, Andy. Dr. Frazer.

12  
13 **DR. FRAZER:** I have enjoyed this discussion, and it's stimulating  
14 a lot of thoughts on my part, you know, but, you know, with regard  
15 to kind of the environmental factors, and, you know, what is within  
16 our control and what's not, I had just a couple of questions.

17  
18 You know, it would be helpful, obviously, and I liked what Dr.  
19 Banks said about getting the updated Stock SMART data, and I would  
20 really like to see that, and I was intrigued also with this idea  
21 that, you know, there's a number of mackerel that are part of the  
22 shrimp bycatch, but, interestingly, we had some presentations,  
23 that we saw in the Shrimp Committee, that effort is going down,  
24 and so I'm trying to reconcile those two things, and maybe you can  
25 talk to that, but then I have another question.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Banks.

28  
29 **DR. BANKS:** To that point, with this cyclic recruitment, we would  
30 be seeing the down -- The adults declining right now, and they  
31 were back in previous shrimp bycatch, if that makes sense, and  
32 we're in that pattern. There's a lag from we see lower effort in  
33 shrimp, versus growing, and most of the king mackerel in the  
34 western Gulf too are entering the fishery around age-five.

35  
36 **DR. FRAZER:** That's super helpful. Can I ask one more to that  
37 point, maybe? Then my other question is, and Dale pointed it out  
38 too, is, you know, we have a lot of historical questions, on this  
39 committee, about, you know, why we would retain like the  
40 allocations between the commercial and the recreational, and part  
41 of it was there was a strong argument, by the recreational sector,  
42 that it's more than just how many fish you harvest, right, and it  
43 has to do with the opportunity to actually catch a fish, right, or  
44 encounter a fish, and having more fish in the water increases that  
45 recreational experience.

46  
47 I've thought a lot about that too, but that made me think about,  
48 well, maybe people are only keeping one or two fish, and most of

1 the time it's just one, and nobody wants fifteen king mackerels,  
2 you know, or not very many people, but so then I go, okay, well,  
3 if there's a high encounter rate, what we don't capture is what  
4 the discard mortality might look like, right, and I think the  
5 discard mortality is probably -- The values that are used for that  
6 in the stock assessments are really low, relative to what they  
7 probably really are in life.

8  
9 When you catch a mackerel, you pretty much shred that mackerel,  
10 right, and so, when I talk to commercial fishermen, or recreational  
11 fishermen, or charter-for-hire guys on this, you know, they suspect  
12 that that mortality is 50 percent or more, right, and so I would  
13 like to look at that a little bit more, but maybe John can talk to  
14 that point a little bit.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Walter, and then we'll circle back through.

17  
18 **DR. WALTER:** Okay, and I've got a couple of things. I don't know,  
19 off the top of my head, what the discard mortality rate is, but  
20 it's probably not the smoking gun, necessarily, in the decline.  
21 Something that -- Well, Stock SMART is pulling that from the stock  
22 assessment, and so it gets updated when there's a new stock  
23 assessment, and that recruitment is what is estimated in the  
24 assessment.

25  
26 I think what we really want is to get our indices updated, and  
27 publicly available, more frequently, which we actually have a  
28 project, that should go live in the next couple of days, I think,  
29 that's going to have all of our survey-based indices be readily  
30 accessible, and easily obtainable, and I think that would be a  
31 real nice tool for people to see what the surveys are saying.

32  
33 On this last part, in terms of environment versus management,  
34 unfortunately, if the environment is not giving us fish, there is  
35 not really much we can do, other than throttle back management,  
36 and I think that's kind of one of the things that a lot of the  
37 literature says, that, when the environment is causing challenges  
38 for the fish, what you want to do is be precautionary, to allow  
39 the innate reproductive capacity to survive through that.

40  
41 There is one particular situation that has concerns, in that the  
42 fishery that's concentrated in the winter, in the gillnet fishery,  
43 where the fish are highly concentrated, has the hallmarks of a  
44 hyperstability situation, where you could have the other fisheries  
45 on the migratory components not catching their limits, and,  
46 meanwhile, the one that's concentrated catching those limits,  
47 which it is indeed doing.

48

1 That could be problematic, in that case, and so, if there was an  
2 area where we think everything is good, but actually have a  
3 declining stock, and be doing more fishing mortality than we would  
4 want to, that might be an area that could be looked into. Thanks.  
5

6 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. I'm going to go with  
7 Captain Walker, and then I'm going to attempt to kind of parachute  
8 us back down.  
9

10 **MR. WALKER:** As often seems to be the case, I agree with Dr.  
11 Walter. I agree with both Tom and John that the discard mortality  
12 rate on king mackerel is definitely higher than what is listed,  
13 and it's easily over 50 percent, but, like Dr. Walter said, I don't  
14 think that's the smoking gun, and it's always been the same discard  
15 mortality for kingfish. It's an issue, and it's understated, and  
16 it maybe needs to be looked at again, but something dramatically  
17 changed in the fishery about three years ago, and it wasn't the  
18 mortality rate or anything like that, and so --  
19

20 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. Thank you, Captain Walker. So clearly  
21 there is no clear line here. I'm not hearing, or seeing, any  
22 strong recommendations for management action, drafting any kind of  
23 framework action or suggesting a white paper, and I keep going  
24 back to Dr. Sweetman's comment that, yes, this is front and center,  
25 and we know it's a priority, and we recognize declining trends,  
26 but we don't have that silver bullet to point to, at least within  
27 our control from the council right now.  
28

29 Carrie's last bullet here of is the timing right to consider  
30 management changes, and what other factors may be primary drivers  
31 of decline, and I would suggest the answer to that bullet is no,  
32 and I'm just looking for kind of a pulse, or a feel, of the council  
33 at this moment. Mr. Strelcheck.  
34

35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I have a difference of opinion, and I  
36 recognize that we can't control the environmental factors, but I  
37 feel like we're just sticking our heads in the sand if we don't do  
38 something, and we've had plenty of public testimony, before this  
39 council, asking us to do something, given what people are seeing,  
40 and so I think, once again, I go back to what's in our control,  
41 and setting catch limits, in the short-term, that are more  
42 commensurate with what we're seeing in terms of fishery conditions,  
43 would be an appropriate management action.  
44

45 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman and then Mr. Diaz.  
46

47 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks. As I mentioned, I struggle with this, but  
48 part of me wants to -- We've got these specific questions on the

1 board here, and I would like to hear from the public, and this is  
2 a little bit more insight towards the management actions that we  
3 would actually potentially be considering here, and so I would  
4 like to hear, during public comment today, from people that are  
5 involved in that fishery, and I also would like to hear relative  
6 to what the virtual workshops are going to be along these lines,  
7 to get more insight along that, but I hear you loud and clear,  
8 Andy. I'm kind of in agreement that something should be done, but  
9 I think I need a little more feedback from the public, in terms of  
10 what that specific action could be.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Diaz.

13  
14 **MR. DIAZ:** This is a question, and you kind of went over the levers  
15 that we could pull a minute ago, but Susan did mention a spawning  
16 closure, and I was going to -- I'm going to put Mr. Strelcheck, I  
17 guess, on the spot, and what would a spawning closure look like,  
18 Andy?

19  
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, it depends on how long you want the spawning  
21 closure, but they spawn during the summer months, right, and so  
22 it's going to have differential effects based on where the mackerel  
23 are at during the summer.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Simmons.

26  
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just was  
28 going to put out there that you had already directed us to start  
29 work on this, and we were just trying to come up with a frame, if  
30 you want us to keep moving forward with it, and so we can always  
31 circle back at Full Council, and it seems like there is going to  
32 need to be some more discussion, I think, and so, if we're running  
33 out of time, maybe we could do that.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I think that is sage advice. Yes, thank you.  
36 One more, and we've got Captain Walker and then Mr. Rindone.

37  
38 **MR. WALKER:** Similar to the Spanish mackerel, Andy is exactly  
39 right. If you're going to close in the spawning season, you're  
40 going to close Texas, and you're not going to close Florida, and  
41 that's just something to think about. They spawn up there in the  
42 summertime, and we don't have them then. You're going to close  
43 one state, and then my season is going to be open for the whole  
44 migration, both ways.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Fair point. Mr. Rindone.

47  
48 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I sent the SHELF egg project

1 table, which shows the spawning activity for a number of pelagics  
2 and reef fish on -- It's based off of data from the West Florida  
3 Shelf, and it shows that spawning for kingfish, on the West Florida  
4 Shelf anyway, begins in May, and it peaks from June through  
5 September, and then it tapers off in October, and so what we  
6 typically see, from migratory patterns of kingfish though, is that  
7 they're mostly in the western Gulf in May, June, and July, and  
8 they start to come up through the northern Gulf in July, August,  
9 September, October, and they start coming down the West Florida  
10 Shelf in September, October, November, and then they overwinter  
11 north of the Keys. Like Captain Walker was saying, a spawning  
12 closure may disproportionately affect certain regions more than  
13 others.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Good point, Mr. Rindone, which certainly begs  
16 that we consider different geographic spawning closures at  
17 different times, which could be awfully complex. With that, I  
18 will suggest we keep moving, and maybe revisit this, as Carrie  
19 suggested, in Full Council.

20  
21 We did have the coverage from Mr. Fisher, and Dr. Birdsong, of the  
22 remaining items that got away from us there in the CMP AP, and I  
23 don't believe there's other business, and so I will pass that back  
24 to Mr. Chair.

25  
26 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 10, 2024.)

27  
28 - - -  
29