

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

MACKEREL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Lodge at Gulf State Park

Gulf Shores, Alabama

April 10, 2024

VOTING MEMBERS

Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
Kesley Banks.....Texas
Susan Boggs.....Alabama
Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
Tom Frazer.....Florida
Bob Gill.....Florida
Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
C.J. Sweetman.....Florida
Ed Walker.....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
Anthony Overton.....Alabama
LTJG Jacob Shinnick.....USCG
Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
Troy Williamson.....Texas

STAFF

Max Birdsong.....Social Scientist
Assane Diagne.....Economist
Matt Freeman.....Economist
John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
Jessica Matos.....Administrative & Accounting Technician
Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Martin Fisher.....FL
Frank Helies.....NMFS
Mike Larkin.....NMFS

1 Jessica McCawley.....FWC, FL
2 John Walter.....SEFSC
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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.

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.

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.

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.

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