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[PAGE 45](#): Motion to direct the staff to beginning the development of a scoping paper for exploring options for improving data collection, including the establishment of a federal permit in the EEZ. [The motion carried on page 54.](#)

[PAGE 69](#): Motion to request staff to move forward with the preparation of an amendment to each of the island-based FMPs to develop [recreational bag limits, commercial trip limits, recreational and commercial size limits] for pelagic stocks as specified during the August 2022 meeting. [The motion carried on page 71.](#)

[PAGE 127](#): Motion to include the descending devices actions in the trawling and net gear amendment to the IBFMPs that is currently being developed. [The motion carried on page 129.](#)

**CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
179TH REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
Isla Verde, Puerto Rico**

AUGUST 11-12, 2022

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened on Thursday morning, August 11, 2022, and was called to order at 9:02 a.m. by Chairman Marcos Hanke.

ZOOM SERVICE: Recording in progress.

Call to Order and Roll Call

MARCOS HANKE: Good morning, everyone. We are going to start the meeting now. We are going to be recording this meeting. Today is August 11th, 2022. We are at the Marriot Courtyard in Isla Verde. The time is 9:02 AM. We have a very heavy agenda this morning and tomorrow. I really appreciate it if everybody sticks to the point. We need to be very productive in order to have a good conversation and something very productive coming out of this meeting. Like always, I appreciate your collaboration on this.

We want to start with a roll call. Before we start, I would like to remind you that before you speak you have to state your name.

My name is Marco Hanke. I'm the chairman of the Caribbean council. You don't need to say your full name. Once you say your full name at first participation, then say Carlos, Mario, Julian, or whatever, right, just to speed up the process. But we need to be able to identify on the transcript who is speaking.

I want to take this moment to request for the roll call going to start with Graciela.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Buenos días. Graciela García-Moliner, council staff.

JOHN WALTER: John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, deputy director for science and council services.

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Jocelyn D'Ambrosio, NOAA office of general counsel.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Andy Strelcheck. Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region.

DIANA T. MARTINO: Diana Martino, council staff.

MIGUEL ROLON: Miguel Rolon, council staff.

MARCOS HANKE: Marcos Hanke, chair.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Carl Farchette. Council member, Saint Croix district.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Nicole Angeli, Division of Fish and Wildlife in USVI.

JAMES R. KREGLO: James Kreglo. Council member, Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCIA: Liajay Rivera, council staff.

CRISTINA OLAN: Cristina Olan, council staff.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: María Lopez, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office.

ALBERTO FORT: Alberto Fort. IT, Council staff.

MIGUEL BORGES: Miguel Borges. NOAA office, law enforcement.

NELSON CRESPO: Nelson Crespo. DAP chair, Puerto Rico.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras. DAP chair, Saint Thomas, Saint John.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: JJ Cruz Motta, SSC member.

HOWARD FORBES: Howard Forbes, DPNR enforcement.

JOHN MCGOVERN: John McGovern, NOAA Fisheries.

MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY: María Irizarry, council staff.

LAURA CIMO: Laura Cimo NOAA Fisheries, office of international affairs trade and commerce.

HEATHER BLOUGH: Heather Blough. NOAA Fishery Service, Southeast region.

KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI: Kate Zamboni, NOAA general counsel in the Southeast section.

WILSON SANTIAGO: Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico Fisheries liaison.

JANNETTE RAMOS GARCIA: Jannette Ramos García, Puerto Rico Sea Grant Program.

JADRIEL: JJ.

SOLIMAR GARICA: Solimar Garica.

MARCOS HANKE: The virtual participants? Liajay.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCIA: Okay. Participants in zoom. We have Adam Bailey, Alida Ortiz Sotomayor, Damaris Delgado, Ed Glaser. Edward, please if you can provide your last name to have it for the record. Henry, as well, please provide your last name. Iris Oliveras, Loren Remsberg, Lieutenant Cameron Box, Matt Wailea, Nicole Greaux, Rachel Eckley, Ricardo Lopez, Sarah Stephenson, Stephanie Martinez River, Tania Capote, Vanessa Ramírez, Yamitza Rodriguez. We have a caller ending with 821, if you can identify yourself, please, for the record. That is all on the list. Mr. Chair.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. And you can, the person that was just requested their name, you can put it in the chat and staff will communicate it to us later.

Diana?

DIANA T. MARTINO: Yes. I just wanted to let everyone know that we are changing our signature list. The name list of the attendees. You just have to put your name, I mean, your signature beside your name. For the ones that the names are not on the paper, just put your name and your signature. That would be it, you don't have to fill out anything else.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay, thank you. If you have any questions Diana and the staff will be around to help you out. Something else that I would like to mention at this time, after the roll call. I want to dedicate a minute of silence in honor of a fellow fisherman that passed away in a tragic accident recently. His name is Carlos Rosario "Lico", and his brother is seriously injured "Pitufo." I'm sorry that I don't have his full name, but everybody knows him as Pitufo. The council and the fishing community really feels deeply about this. A minute of silence.

Thank you very much. All the strength for the family and the friends and everybody around his family. We really know and feel

this tragedy. Thank you very much for the minute of silence and for sharing this feeling.

Now we have the swearing-in of a new council member.

Swearing in New Council Member

MIGUEL ROLON: Mr. James Kreglo is a new council member. I asked you to say something about yourself, so people will get to know you before we do the swearing-in.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Good morning, everyone. I'll try to keep this brief. I know we're under a time constraint. My name's James Kreglo, most people know me in the islands as captain CC or CC, but call me James, whatever. My background, I studied wildlife ecology at the University of Florida. I worked for the Florida game and fish commission, U.S. fish and wildlife, primarily. Did a lot of crocodile studies, alligators, but also, fish farming, wildlife ranching, economic issues in that area and I moved to the Virgin Islands. In the Virgin Islands, I've been fishing as a commercial fisherman, charter fisherman since the early 1980s. I learned from some of the best local people.

Now, I am commercial fishing. I do a lot of diving, dive lobsters, spearfish, and line fish. I served on the FAC for the Virgin Islands in Saint Thomas, Saint John for eight years. Now, I've been honored to be able to be a member of the council. And I think that's enough for now.

Thank you very much.

UNKNOWN: James or CC. It's my pleasure to administer the oath to the fishery management council. I'll read the first couple of lines and then you can continue.

As trustees of the nation's fishery resources, all voting members must take an oath specified by the Secretary as follows:

JAMES R. KREGLO: I, James Kreglo, as a duly appointed member of a Regional Fishery Management Council established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, hereby promise to conserve and manage the living marine resources of the United States of America by carrying out the business of the Council for the greatest overall benefit of the Nation. I recognize my responsibility to serve as a knowledgeable and experienced trustee of the Nation's marine fisheries resources, being careful to balance competing private or regional interests, and always aware and protective of the

public interest in those resources. I commit myself to uphold the provisions, standards, and requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other applicable law, and shall conduct myself at all times according to the rules of conduct prescribed by the Secretary of Commerce. This oath is given freely and without mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

UNKNOWN: So, on behalf of no fisheries, I want to welcome you. I want to thank you for your willingness to serve on the council. We recognize this is a substantial commitment away from your family away from your business. And so, we appreciate your time and dedication to serving on the council and look forward to working with you.

JAMES R. KREGLO: All right. Thank you very much.

Election of Officials

MARCOS HANKE: Just as a follow-up on this welcome note. I already spoke to James, and you can count on every council member. Everybody here is on the same page. We are looking for the best ideas and management and good discussions to make the best process possible. Everyone here is willing to help you out. Your perspective is very complete, very diverse and for sure it will help us in the future. Welcome to this group. Thank you very much.

The next item on the agenda is the election of officials.

MIGUEL ROLON: We can ask John Walter to share the election officials. It is time that we submit candidates for voting. It was supposed to be another member of the coast guard but since you're here, can you do the honors and share this section?

JOHN WALTERS: Executive director, I will try to do my best. It's my first time doing that. I know elections have been contentious and if I'm becoming an election official it might put me in the crosshairs, but I am willing and able.

MIGUEL ROLON: Okay. so, you can open the floor now for-

JOHN WALTERS: Which election- this is for Chair, I think Chair. Chair of the council.

MIGUEL ROLON: The first one is for the Chair.

JOHN WALTERS: Okay. Let me get my tasking straight. Okay. So, I will open the floor- and you can please, Miguel, tell me if I'm doing this properly. I opened the floor for a nomination for Chair of the council.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yes.

UNKNOWN: I would like to nominate Marcos Hanke as Chair of the council.

JOHN WALTERS: Is there a second?

MIGUEL ROLON: You don't need a second just to see if there is another candidate for Chair.

JOHN WALTERS: Is there another candidate?

MIGUEL ROLON: Then, all in favor, say aye.

JOHN WALTERS: All in favor, say aye.

UNKNOWN: Aye.

MIGUEL ROLON: Don't be timid, say aye. [laughter] You don't like the guy? Okay. Now we open for Vice Chair.

JOHN WALTERS: Okay. And I think, should I announce that it has been decided. Then, Marcos, congratulations or condolences? [laughter] You have been dually elected as Chair.

And now we'll open Vice Chair. Do we have a nominee for Vice Chair?

UNKNOWN: I would like to nominate Carlos Farchette as Vice Chair.

JOHN WALTERS: Are there any other nominees? All in favor, say aye.

GROUP: Aye.

JOHN WALTERS: I think the ayes have it. Carlos, congratulations. You're Vice Chair.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you, John. We are going to recruit you for November 24. [laughter]

Mr. Chairman, congratulations. And the floor is yours.

Adoption of Agenda

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, again, for this opportunity. I heard, over this period, a lot of respect and encouraging words from the industry and the participants. All- I'm sure Carlos and me. All we are looking for is respectfulness and productive conversations at the council.

Thank you very much again. Carlos?

The next part of the agenda is the adoption of the agenda.

MIGUEL ROLON: Mr. Chairman, for the adoption of the agenda, we have three items that we would like to include. And I guess you have them in your notes. Also, we wanted to switch presentations. Can you just state it for the record, please?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. The changes that we are putting forth for your evaluation are that Kevin McCarthy, at 1:00 PM on the first day, will be the first one to present. We're going to pass the presentation of Cruz Motta after Kevin McCarthy, on that order. The other change on the agenda is on the second day. We have already explored the time that will be consumed by the presenters, and we understand that there is time for Nicolas Gomez to present a very short presentation about collaborative work among fishers in a crisis situation. The lunch break changed from 12:00 PM to 1:15 PM. We added, after lunch, a short presentation from Jose Rivera, about aquaculture. Then, we follow the agenda as it was stated before.

Any motion to adopt the agenda, to support us, to keep moving?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah, Carl Farchette. I move to accept the agenda as amended.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Second.

MARCOS HANKE: All in favor, hear no objection- all in favor, say aye.

GROUP: Aye.

Meeting Verbatim Transcriptions -Executive Director's Report

MARCOS HANKE: The agenda is adopted. Thank you very much.

The next item on the agenda is the meetings verbatim transcription. You go.

MIGUEL ROLON: Unfortunately, the provider of the services for transcription quit. We are going to recruit- we are in the process of recruiting another company. We will submit the transcription at the next meeting of the council. There were no major issues that are not being followed on the agenda for this meeting. You need to trust us that the meeting of April will be transcribed and presented to you at the next meeting.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. I'm aware of all the efforts that the staff has been doing to work with the transcript and create the best system possible available to us.

And the next item, on the agenda, will be the first presentation actually. Yes, I'm sorry. The executive directive reports. Go ahead.

MIGUEL ROLON: I spent two months preparing for this and you almost skipped me. As you know for the last two years due to COVID we have been working from home, teleworking. Across the nation, private industries and government agencies also have been teleworking. An interesting thing that has come up is that 70% of the people around the world, 66 to 70% prefer to stay at home. Managers, owners of companies, and agencies believe that as long as their work is done, nothing is missed, this can continue. The executive directors met some time ago and- actually, we were going to meet again. With the exchange of ideas and best practices, we found that there's a need for teleworking schedule for each one of the councils. In our case, we need to keep the door open of the council five days a week. From now on, the staff is required to work at the office at least once a week. That doesn't mean that you cannot go more than that, we have one staff member that goes three, four times a week. The second director is supposed to be on call at any time during the week. And then the rest of the time, the staff will be teleworking.

We believe that the system can continue. It's something that we found is very effective. There's a lot of money that is saved by the staff, you don't have to commute every day, etcetera. So, the system works. All the work that we are supposed to produce is being produced and the ladies at the office are doing more than they're supposed to. Sometimes they're working at night taking calls and everything. So, Mr. Chair we are going to continue that, doing the telework.

In the case of the system that we have, we have a new system, anybody who calls the office the call will be transferred to cellphones that we have. So, we won't miss attending the public the way it's supposed to be.

Meetings. All meetings of the council, advisory bodies, etcetera, will be hybrid. We have not decided yet on public hearings and workshops and scoping meetings because of the logistics, but at least for the council members to know, all our meetings from now on will continue to be hybrid. In this meeting, for example, we have two council members who are going to be participating via zoom. Vanessa Ramírez has a case of a family- her grandchild is in the hospital. So, she'll be with us via zoom. And also, Damaris Delgado she's participating via zoom.

All this has proven to be positive. We had a learning curve, in the beginning, it was a nightmare, especially for the technicians to get the audio the right way and everything. And if you look at the tables, we have two hours looking at you. They scare the people in the beginning because they follow you. You move, they follow you, and then it's recorded the way that they're supposed to be. So, rest assured that the teleworking conditions that we have, and the hybrid meetings are the right way to go at this time.

Mr. Chairman the other issue is that, not an issue, but I was going to encourage everybody to submit their documents on time for the briefing books. I know that everybody's busy, but it's very difficult to have a briefing book that is empty with only the Federal Registry notice in it. Some people go to the webpage and like to see the documents that we are going to discuss at the meeting.

Then at this time, I would like to take this opportunity- like for instance, we have done that twice, meetings. Promise you it won't be for every meeting, but anyway.

Hey, Damaris, you're here in person and you say your name for the record.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Morning, Damaris Delgado. Puerto Rico DNER.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you. So, at this time we would like to call. Jocelyn D'Ambrosio to the front.

This is something that we were going to do the last time, but I learned a long time ago that you never surprised lawyers, even

if they are on your side. [laughter] So, I had to ask her whether this was something that we could do or not. And she says yes. So, Jocelyn had proven to be one of the best lawyers we ever had in the council. I can say that because I've been around for more than thirty-five years, and I have met all of them. Jocelyn is always ready to answer questions. When she doesn't know exactly the legal answer, she knows how to get the answer for us from others in the department of commerce and NOAA. She's always quiet, but it's like high blood pressure. You don't know it's there, but it's there. And we really appreciate everything that you have been doing for this council. She was one of the first ones who decided to go to the SSC meetings because the SSC also needs the advice of NOAA's legal counsel for the activities and the events that they do every year. The meetings that they have every year.

So, Jocelyn, can you stand here so we can see under the light?

Guys, all of you are familiar with our reef in a bottle. We copy this from Superman's magazines, comic books. They have a whole city in a bottle. This is done by a biologist that happened to be an artisan from Puerto Rico. We are very proud to have him working for us on every occasion that we have.

So, Jocelyn. Thank you very much for all your efforts with the council. This is a way to say thank you from our council.

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Thank you very much.

MIGUEL ROLON: Now you have to say something.

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Thank you. I wanted to thank everyone here and thank you, Miguel. Thank the council for allowing me at the meetings. It's really been an honor to advise the council and all that they do and support your good work, and I've appreciated the hospitality here, and I've also appreciated getting to work on fisheries issues. I didn't have a lot of experience with fisheries when I started. So, I've been, it's been wonderful to learn and to work with everyone and to see all of the great work. I'm very excited about the progress we made on the island-based FMP and hope to continue working with everyone.

So, thank you.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you very much. Okay. And now I'm very proud to present to you a person that I met through Cristina Olan. He is a Fisher from Saint Croix. He has been fishing for many

years, although he's only 10 years old, he started fishing when he was five. He's very respected in the community of fishers. He's treated as one of them. And he hates to be called a little kid. He is our fisher from Saint Croix that we want to honor. Remember that the council has been trying to lure in new fishers, into the U.S. Caribbean Fishery. I wanted- Cristina, can you come over here?

JJ, you can move over here.

CRISTINA OLAN: Thank you, Miguel. Good morning to everyone. I feel very proud to present you to JJ, to Jadriel, to introduce you. We met JJ through his mom, Sol, she wrote to us asking for publications and information about fishing for her son. And then we were looking through his social media and we, I especially, became very impressed with all the things that he was doing and learning and how he, and also his family and his mom are involved in fishing, especially in the VIs.

I am very happy, it's the first time for me that I'm sitting here, here in person.

Y pues, quiero cambiar un momento a español por que los sentimientos son en español y estoy super, super contenta. A sido una experiencia maravillosa poder conocerlo.

Also, when we interviewed you, it was a great experience to have that conversation. You are so mature for your age and all the things that you do, and how you drive the boat, your interests, and also how you practice every day and practice makes perfection. So, I don't know what to say, what more do I have to say? We are proud and happy to have you. Feel free to join the meeting and feel welcome to this family of the CFMC.

MIGUEL ROLON: We probably looking at- 10 years from now you'll be looking at the chairman of the council. You never know.

JJ, he's the chairman of the council for the time being, but I know that in 10 years, 15 years, I would like to see you here. I won't be around, I will probably be somewhere else, either down there, very warm, or up there in a cloud, but I won't be around.

I'm very proud to meet you through Cristina. And I want Marcos as chair of the council to provide you with the recognition.

MARCOS HANKE: JJ, I want to say this with the deepest sentiments of my heart. The reason all those people are sitting here is because of you, because of the future of fishing. You

are the representation of the fishing community in the future. Please keep going on. We all respect you, and we all need you to keep engaged and to keep stepping up. You are the man.

Want to say something? Just thank you.

[applause]

JADRIEL: Yes. Thank you.

CRISTINA OLAN: Sol, do you want to say anything?

SOLIMAR GARICA: I'm very proud of my son. Like they said, he's 10 years old. He has a passion. He actually leaves school, and he wants to go to the lagoon. So, you'll see some videos with him in his uniform, you know, catching fish. He'll borrow the nets from the guys. He's one of them, he'll catch a bait, he'll carry it to them. He'll jump in a car and be like, see you next time. He's very- I mean the governor of the Virgin Islands is actually following him. He has a lot of supporters; he's doing really good on TikTok. Like I tell him, the sky is his stepping ground. He can do whatever he wants to do as long as he stays in school. And he does what he needs to do. But the fact that, you know, he catches his fish, he cleans his fish, he cooks his fish. What more, what more can you ask for? So, thank you guys for honoring him. He was happy. He's excited, you know, for being Fisher of the month for June. Thank you, guys.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you to mom too. A round of applause for mom for supporting him. Thank you very much.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The last part is that we, the council participates in the WECAFC of Pesca and CRFM. These are three organizations that work for the Caribbean in fishery management. Tomorrow we will have a presentation by Laura Cimo on the latest developments of the WECAFC the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission.

Just to let you know, the council will continue working on these endeavors. Since 1976-77, we started working with international institutions in promoting plan Caribbean fishery management because we share a lot of the species, especially the Coastal Pelagic and other pelagics, as well as reef fish that are spawning upstream in other countries. We then get the result of that spawning and then the offspring populates our reef around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Island. So, it's important that

the council keep working in the international arena. Tomorrow we'll hear more about it. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman.

**Puerto Rico Spiny Lobster Accountability Measure (AM)
Application Discussion—NOAA Fisheries**

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. The next item on the agenda is the Puerto Rico Spinal Lobster Accountability Measure (AM) presented by NOAA Fisheries, María.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Good morning, everybody. This is María Lopez with NOAA Fisheries. It's not that presentation as the-okay, thank you. While I wait for that, I want to say that I actually met JJ in the elevator yesterday and he was so excited. He had just arrived at the hotel and I said, "hi, how are you?" Because he was super, super excited. He's like, "oh, we're here for a fisherman meeting." I was like, oh, interesting. So, I'm really happy to have met him. He looks like a very happy kid. Thank you so much for being here. I hope you get some time to enjoy the pool. And thank you to Sol, my sister's name is Sol as well. So, thank you so much for bringing him here and for all the efforts that you do to raise such a great son.

Okay. So, let's get to business. These are just a couple of slides that are going to be presenting a little bit about the Spiny Lobster closure that was just recently implemented in Puerto Rico, federal waters, which is the EEZ which goes from nine nautical miles to 200 nautical miles. The reason that we are presenting this is that the council is interested in having a little bit more discussion about this closure and the reasons why these closures took place. And, to open the forum for council members to discuss and if they have some questions.

So, can you go to the next slide, please? Thank you.

Okay. So right now, we are still operating under the old, call it the older, species-based FMPs, which are the Spiny Lobster FMP, the Reef Fish FMP, the Corals FMP the Queen Conch FMP. Why? Because the island-based FMPs that you approved, and it was approved by the secretary of commerce, the final rule is still in the works. It's almost done, but it's still not implemented. So, in the meantime, we're still operating under the old FMPs.

Now under the old FMPs, there are regulations for ACL monitoring and implementation of accountability measures. So, based on those regulations, the trigger for the Spiny Lobster (AM) compares the most recent three-year average landings to the animal catch limit.

Okay. This is something, this is specifically for the Spiny Lobster because this is the topic that we're talking about here. So, and just to remind you, the accountability measures apply only in federal waters. Now, the ACLs are based on data, landings data, that is from state and federal waters. The monitoring is done as well with those landings from state and federal waters. Now, based on the available landings that we have at this time when NOAA Fisheries determined if the ACL has been exceeded and if there is a reason for triggering an AM and implementing an AM the- just to mention too, that in the regulations, it says that the AM is not applied if the Southeast Fishery Science Center determines that data collection or monitoring efforts are improved.

So, after all that determination is made if NMFS sees that the ACL average resulted from increased catch rather than from improved data collection or monitoring, the AM will be applied. So that means that the length of the fishing season will be reduced by the amount necessary to prevent landings from exceeding the ACL. The required fishing season reduction will be applied starting September 30th and moving earlier toward the beginning of the fishing year. That means that it goes from September 30th, back all the way to January 1st if it's needed, but hopefully that's not the case.

So, in this case, the available landings data that we have for Puerto Rico were from 2017 through 2019. Um, 2020 landings were not available, were partially only available, so NOAA Fisheries was not able to use those landings to make this determination. For the U.S. Virgin Island, for all other species too, 2018 to 2020 were the available landings.

Can you go to the next slide?

Okay. So based on 2018 to 2020 landings for the U.S. Virgin Islands, no stocks went over their ACL. There was no need to apply accountability measures. Now, for Puerto Rico based on 2017 through 2019 landings, the spiny lobster stock exceeded the ACL by 103,086 pounds. The ACL is 327,920 and the average landings were 431, this is just for your reference, and the fishing season in federal waters, therefore, was closed from July 12th to September 30th, 2022.

Okay. Can you go to the next step?

Okay. So next steps we have, as you all know, we have a proposed rule for- there's going to be an amendment for the Spiny

Lobster, as you all know, that will update the reference points for Spiny Lobster that has been already approved by the council and for submission to the secretary of commerce. We're currently working on the proposed rule for that. There will be a public comment period for that, and we will announce that when it's ready.

The other thing that is happening is that the Science Center Caribbean branch is developing updated OFL and ABC projections based on SEDAR 57 assessment model, which is what prompted that amendment to the Spiny Lobster. We can talk a little bit about all that later. The Science Center is also working with the Puerto Rico DNER to get commercial landings from 2020 and later.

Okay. So again, this is just to give you an update on, or information about, why the closure occurs. So now. If there are any questions or if anyone else would like to add more information about what things are being done to improve monitoring and data collection for the Spiny lobster and other species, etcetera the forum is open for that. Thank you.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Thank you, María. We wanted to give an overview of the regulatory requirements. I know there's frustration around having closure in Puerto Rico and the accountability measure being triggered. I think María's done a good job of explaining some of the reasons why we don't have the flexibility under federal law just to take into consideration other information that hasn't been vetted through the scientific process and ultimately recommended by this fishery management council.

So, you know, we have a number of challenges. One is data that's lagging in terms of time. We're using old data to make determinations about accountability measures. Improvements are happening on that front. We look forward, obviously working with Puerto Rico on getting more timely commercial landings.

Um, the other challenge is that most Spiny Lobsters are caught in territorial waters. And so, when we impose an accountability measure, we have limited authority to close only the EEZ, right? And so, if there are not compatible territorial regulations, that means the federal closure is going to be longer because we're compensating for the smaller amount of harvest that's then occurring out of federal waters.

There are a couple of things that María noted. One is that science is going to be evolving and changing based on new information, and scientific advice. I don't know what that means

in terms of, you know, changes to the catch limit. But one of the recommendations I would make is that we look at exploring more effective accountability measures for Spiny Lobster as well, given the limited ability, obviously, to affect harvest based on the lack of, you know, landings coming from the EEZ. So, if there are any questions about the regulations, please let us know.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for the comments and Andy. Nelson?

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo for the record. I think we have a problem here. First, during the past years, we are more or less the same fishermen that are fishing for lobsters, nothing changed, you know. There were no big changes in this fishery. In the last SSC meeting, we were talking with Reni Garcia, for example. He told me about an example, Stacey William was cultivating sea orchids and she had a problem with lobster larvae that are eating the orchids and she could not, you know, go through with that project.

That made me think that this fishery is more healthy than we think. If we don't have bigger changes in the fishery and we start increasing our catches, that means that there's a lot of lobster in the water.

Second, I request the local government to attend to the issue of the trauma nets. This is a big problem. I keep saying this almost in every meeting. And I think it's time to step up to the plate and try to do something with this dangerous year. I'm a fisherman and I want to make money. I want to cash fish. I want to cash the lobster and make a lot of money, but I have common sense and I want to protect where I make my living.

We don't have a lot of money. Our bank is the water. It's the sea. If we don't protect it, nobody is going to do it. Doesn't matter how many regulations you put in, or how many accountability measures you make. If the fishermen don't protect our resources, nothing is going to work. And I think it's very important to attend to the issue of the trammel netters once and for all because I know it's going to be really helpful to protect, to keep protecting this fishery. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Nelson, especially because your passion and participation, and guidance in this discussion. Julian?

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras, for the record. This lobster issue is becoming a serious problem. And, you know, I spoke a

little bit at the SSC meeting, but the more and more I think about the issue that Puerto Rico here is facing with the overrun of the lobster ACL five out of six years. This is the second time that they have gone through accountability measures. We sat through the process with the SSC. Went through the tear process and looked at all the year landings for the lobsters. This process took more than two years, correct me if I'm wrong. When the decisions were being made and what the annual catch limit should be, this was before the SEDAR assessment process. In that meeting, there were heavy discussions that the numbers were being set too low. The actual numbers for the lobsters harvested- if you guys go back and look at the numbers harvested over a 20-year period were way higher than the annual catch limit that was given to the fishers using the year sequencing that was chosen. The final decisions were made, and it was put on the record that we are going to drive these fishermen to overrun the annual catch limit that was set.

So, it was set. And so said, so done. They have overrun the ACL five times out of six years. This is a problem. I feel, as a fisherman I look out for my counterparts in Saint Croix and Puerto Rico, that this process needs to be revisited. That whole process needs to be revisited. And, you know, if it was, if it didn't have large numbers back then showing that you had a fishery that could sustain those numbers, then it was a problem. But you have those numbers there. And what happened was we took the word uncertainty, and we set catch limits for these fishers off of uncertainty. And, you know, I'm asking that the council requests for the officials of Puerto Rico, especially that we revisit the process that was used back then in setting annual catch limits for Puerto Rico Fisher. We are creating a hardship for them.

Now I'm hearing that we want to use compatible regulations. That would be devastating to the fishers, especially under national standards too. You know, taking into consideration the socioeconomic impact that this would put on the fishery of Puerto Rico and the people of Puerto Rico. Once again, we need to slow down this process and we need to take into account what happened. We need to revisit. And I think this is a great opportunity that we revisit this situation.

And one last comment, you know, I've been listening to Nelson and other fishers talk about these trammel nets forever. And I'm asking the Puerto Rico government to support your fishers in their requests to get rid of these nets. We have gotten rid of them everywhere else. Your bycatch should be the driver behind

banning these nets in territorial waters. I think you would see a great increase in your stocks in a lot of different areas.

So, these are my comments in support of my Puerto Rico counterparts. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Julian. This support and this kind of conversation are very important for this council.

Anybody else? We have some- one second Damaris. We are going to go with Damaris in a bit. We have a chat comment.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCIA: Vanessa Ramírez, says, comment. From the commercial sector, lobster data has been already a natural disaster compromised for the years 2017, 2019. Need to move urgently and check 2020, 2022 data to really make an evaluation cost. Fishermen don't understand that once they give better data, they continue getting longer closures and also ask for data in fish markets that are the ones that pay directly and have a more realistic pound number. For example, two of the fish markets of Cabo Rojo make that quota yearly and no one is checking the reality of the landings in fish markets. They are not regulated and don't give reports.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Vanessa. Damaris. Just a quick comment. Miguel was contacted by Daniel Matos saying that he wants to say something on record. Go ahead, Damaris.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes. Regarding, Nelson and Julian's comments recommendation about working with this problem with the trammel nets. You have all my support with this.

Can you hear me now? sorry. So, I support your recommendations. I have always done. I agree with your ideas and recommendations. In the DNER we have to go through different processes, including the approval of our office of legal affairs. And also, we have to count on recommendations and feedback from the Junta Acesora de Pesca the Fishing Advisory Board. So, let's keep talking about this, maybe during the breaks of the meeting, we can have a conversation and organize our plan of action so we can move this forward. So that's my recommendation right now.

Thank you, Damaris. We have a short presentation from Daniel Matos on this matter.

MIGUEL ROLON: Daniel is on the- I just exchanged emails with him, and he has a five-minute presentation just to tell us what's going on with the data collection regarding this topic.

We want to hear from him, what is the status of the shellcatch information. How can that be sent to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center so they can use it for the assessment of the stocks and the Spiny Lobster?

Daniel, ¿estas listo?

DANIEL MATOS: Hi, I'm here. I'm here, but I don't listen very well. The sound is not very good today, so, okay. I know you are talking about- Do you listen to me?

MIGUEL ROLON: Daniel Yeah. Yeah. We listen to you. Actually, you don't need to listen to us that much. We want to hear from you about the five-minute presentation that we discussed through email. What is the status of the information that you collect via shellcatch, for the Spiny Lobster? And when is this information going to be available for the Southeast Fishery Science Center? Thank you, Daniel.

DANIEL MATOS: I'm sorry. I don't listen very well. I have a presentation for shellcatch for this afternoon, or you prefer to have it right now?

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, right now, please

DANIEL MATOS: Right now. Okay. Oh my God. Okay. One second, one second.

Okay guys we started the project on the electronic trip ticket last April 2020. So, this year we receive 5,032 electronic trip tickets that reported 264,000 pounds and 361 commercial fishers participated in the year 2020. For the next year, 2021, we had the participation of 429 commercial fishers. They reported 9,000 trip tickets and they reported 516,000 pounds.

For the year 2022, from January 1st to July 31, we had 430 commercial fishers participating in the eReporting project. They reported 7,875 trips and 447,000 pounds. So that means we are able to catch 33% of commercial landings through the eReporting and seems like we will increase to 35 or 40 during the year 2022. So, the project is working okay. Commercial fishers are participating in the project, and we continue to roll in that project.

Any question?

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Mr. Chair, if I may. Daniel, Graciela here. We were not able to see your presentation. Can you please

provide us an email with the numbers that you just quoted during your presentation?

DANIEL MATOS: Sure. I will send you everything. Yeah.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Thank you.

DANIEL MATOS: You're welcome

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Graciela here. Daniel, these are numbers reported landings, right? There is no correction factor in the data that you just quoted. Correct?

I think you're muted.

MIGUEL ROLON: Maybe he left.

DANIEL MATOS: Yes, this is the wrong data. This does not include the correction factor.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Do you have a specific correction factor for Spiny Lobster in Puerto Rico?

DANIEL MATOS: Not for the specific species. No, we have the correction factor for the whole landings. However, we have data, we can work with that. Maybe later we can do that. All the data has been shared with the Southeast Fishery Science Center. So, Kevin has it and Kevin is working to develop a very good program to work with. So, I think in a few weeks we can do that.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So, Daniel one more question. At the same time that you are collecting this self-reporting shellcatch data. Do you have any of the biological sampling conducted for the same people that are reporting to you via eReporting?

DANIEL MATOS: Well, probably. Probably, yes because the statistical sample came from the commercial fisheries. So probably we are able to have some information like that. Yeah. But takes time to do that.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Are you sure that there is no double counting of the data from the eReporting to the paper forms that fishers fill out? Are you sure that there is no duplication of that data? That it is being collected through the eReporting at the same time that it's being collected through the paper forms? Thank you.

DANIEL MATOS: Okay. Well, I am. I don't think we have duplications. Maybe at the beginning of the project, but you know, they don't want to have to do things twice. Very difficult. So, it's not probable we have this problem. However, I have no way to be a hundred percent sure, but it's a very, very low probability that it happens.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Hopefully, this will be the last one. So this is an issue that we really need to sit down and look through all these data, because if it's a duplication of data, then those numbers that we're using for accounting, for the triggering of the ACLs are way higher than they should be. So, definitely, this is an issue that we need to all come together and deal with. Thank you, Daniel.

MARCOS HANKE: Kevin.

DANIEL MATOS: You're welcome.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Thanks, Marcos. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fishery Science Center. So, to be clear, any double counting or the possibility of double counting has not been a factor so far because we haven't used 2020 or 2021 data, and those were the years where eReporting was an issue, right? Up to 2019, everything was in paper form so there was no double counting. What we can do at the Science Center is look for those duplicates, right? We have, we have the dates, we have the fisher ID numbers, we have the pounds, we have the species. So, we can look in those records from the eLog and from the CCL paper forms and make sure we don't have duplicates or apparent duplicates.

So, we're going to do that. And that's sort of standard practice anyway. Not just in the Caribbean, it's standard practice for everything because you're concerned about double counting into Gulf, everywhere, so that's not an issue.

I just want to thank Daniel. He's been very responsive in the last couple of days at getting the raw shellcatch data to the science center. We have the 2021 data, it's great. He is working on getting us the 2020 data. As I understand it, we do have correction factors for 2020, and as Daniel mentioned, 2021, some of the application developers at the Science Center have built a data entry system specific for getting information that will build the correction factors. That application has been built so it saves DNER staff a heck of a lot of time and trouble, from the old method to this new methodology that's a little more automated. There was a lot of hand calculation that just took a

lot of time and a lot of staff hours and effort. I think we're getting away from that. It's just a matter of how quickly the data can be entered for calculating the correction factor for 2021, but we've already got 2020.

At least we've got 2017, 18, 19, and 24 more years of data from the last stock assessment, which had a terminal year of 2016. And ideally, we'll get 2021 and we'll be up to date. That's where we stand on the data supply side of the house. And again, I want to thank Daniel for so quickly getting those data to us. I really appreciate it.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. We have Nelson then Julian.

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo for the record. Giving a follow-up regarding the trammel netters. Damaris, the Junta de Pesca already said, that they are interested in evaluating the issue of the trammel netters. I want to make a question, maybe to you or Daniel. How can you make a fair correction factor if right now the DNER lab only has two port samplers for the three islands of Puerto Rico and I know they have to report about the catches and validate the catches of the fishermen around the island to do the appropriate correction factor.

MARCOS HANKE: Want to respond, Damaris?

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes, I was allowing Daniel to speak. I can speak after Daniel. Danielle, are you going to explain or make a comment?

DANIEL MATOS: Yeah, I'm here, but I don't listen very well. What was the question by Nelson?

MARCOS HANKE: He was asking about the port sampler. The question was: can you with just two-part samplers, how confident do you feel about having an accurate correction factor?

DANIEL MATOS: The correction factor? The correction factor is the data collected by the port sampler at the site. Was that the question?

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Nelson is saying that we only have two port samplers. And that, how come, if we only have two port samplers, we have a certain correction factor process?

DANIEL MATOS: Oh, okay, no. Well, we have two full times Puerto Rico DNER personnel port samplers. Luis Anibal Rivera and Jesus

Leon. They have worked for us for more than 30 years, but also, we have Wilson Santiago, who is a contractor. We have María Angeline Leon, who is also a contractor. I also collect correction factor data, and we also have Juan Lugo and Marta Ricauchen who help us part-time. So we have four full times around the island and two or three part-time around the island.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, Miguel Rolon for the record. I guess the best thing to do is to allow Graciela and Southeast Fisheries Science Center to have a meeting with Daniel to coordinate all these efforts. And probably, at the next council meeting in December, we'll have a report as to the status of the information that we are collecting and the best available information that the Science Center is supposed to provide to us.

MARCOS HANKE: Andy then Julian.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah. So, I just wanted to, I guess, make a recommendation, but before that. We're talking about improvements in data collection and as María noted earlier, the accountability measures do talk about if NMFS determines an ACL was exceeded because of enhanced data collection we wouldn't necessarily have to reduce the season. Right? So, we've done that before with other species. Certainly, the science has to catch up with the data collection and we don't want to trigger accountability measures simply because we've shifted how we're collecting the data. So that'll be something we're going to have to consider going forward.

That doesn't address the problem today, which is the data hasn't changed at this point to determine the accountability measure. And it's very clear with our Magnuson Act National Standards, that if ACLs AMs are triggered more than once every four years, there should be a reevaluation of that ACL AM system. We're kind of in flux because we're shifting to island-based FMPs. We also have some new science.

My recommendation would be to have the Science Center working with this council and the SSC at least discuss the system of ACLs and accountability measures and possibly make recommendations on how those could be changed specifically for the Spiny Lobster.

MARCOS HANKE: That's very helpful and gives a path to the future. Go ahead, Julian.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras for the record. Very good, Andy, I like that statement. And just to touch a little bit. We had a lot of heavy discussions, last week at the SSC, about expansion factors. And they need to be revisiting on how they're used because we've been requesting from the fishers, both in the U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico, for better reporting.

There are companies out there that are collecting data and you're going to see improvements in that data. And when you add an expansion factor to better data, it can drive those numbers in the wrong direction also. So I wanted to get that out there on the table because that's very, very important.

You have asked the fishers to help improve the process and they're trying desperately to do that. And you have a lot of different fishing organizations, fishing communities, here in Puerto Rico, with individual leaders in those areas that are collecting and working with their fishers to get better reporting.

And we need to take all of that into consideration when we are doing management because this is what was requested and we're trying to get them on board, and we need to continue looking at that process. So I wanted to get that out there.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Miguel. And to wrap it up and go for the next item.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yes, we have other stuff on the agenda. I believe that Graciela has all the elements of information here to coordinate the efforts with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and the SSC following on this suggestion at this time.

MARCOS HANKE: Kevin.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: So, I just want to add one last thing. So, let's not forget that we have an updated assessment of Spiny Lobster happening right now. That could change the whole picture. Right? And so the data inputs for that are not just landings, although the landings are important, we also have size composition. We have life history information and things like size composition can really drive the answer in many cases. It is, you know, it's early on in the process so it's very difficult to predict anything at this point. So, I won't do it, but you know, we could have a very different picture by November.

So that process is ongoing. That's why it's so important that Daniel got us the data from a shellcatch so that we have the total landings. We also have to make sure that all of the size composition, all of the tip data, the port sampling, where they measure the lobsters, we've got to make sure that we've got all of those data as well. Um, because that's very critical data inputs, but we're, you know, we've got this ongoing update assessment just starting now should be complete for SSC review in their November, December meeting, whenever that happens.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Damaris from Daniel's presentation. Do you think that information will be available in the next few weeks? The shellcatch.

Damaris Delgado: Yes. I wanted to ask the council that whenever you have questions, technical questions, for the fisheries research lab, I would like to get the questions beforehand with some anticipation to the meeting so we can all provide the best information, a more complete information. We would like to have those questions before our meetings. I would like to have a request for more information in writing through email, so we are certain about the questions that you have regarding our data and our procedures. So that's my response to that.

Island-based Fishery Management Plans ([IBFMPs]/Regulations and Amendments Update—María Lopez- Mercer and Sarah Stephenson, NOAA Fisheries

MARCOS HANKE: That's fair and for sure we can. That's easily addressed. Thank you, Damaris.

I want to say something to wrap it up. In the comments that Kevin did, I want to highlight there is participation of local scientists. There is participation of fishermen in the efforts to collect better data. And I want to recognize that. Thank you. That's the right path to do things in a better way.

The next item on the agenda is Island-based fishing management plans. It will be presented by Sarah or María.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Oh, what's going on? The presentation is the one that says island- status of island-based FMPs. Yeah. Thank you.

Okay. So, this is María Lopez with NOAA Fisheries. This is a very brief update of not only where we are with the island base FMPs, but also some of the actions that are being developed currently. We wanted, at every council meeting, we want to give you an update of everything that's going on so we can all keep track of the actions that are currently going on so we know for the future, what can be done, what is been done right now and all the statuses. You can expect from staff an update on all of the actions at every council meeting. Sarah and I are going to do this together. It should be fairly quick.

Okay. Please go to the next slide, Cristina. Thank you.

Okay. So, the island-based FMPs as you know were approved by the secretary of commerce. The proposed rule was published on May 19 of this year, and there was a comment period that ended on June 21. We only received two comments on that proposed rule and those comments are addressed in the final rule.

The final rule, which is the last step it's currently under an NMFS review. We are very, very close to sending this to headquarters for final approval and publication of the rule. So, we're expecting that the publication date would be late in the summer or early fall.

After that is published NOAA Fisheries usually add a 30-day cooling period. After that, the plans will be implemented and the other plans are not going to be in place anymore. These are going to be, and management is going to be, under the island-based FMPs. If you would like to review the actions that are in those plans the information is available on the council website. The council website is also available in Spanish. Chapter five of the island-based FMP has been translated into Spanish and it's available on the council website. Chapter five is basically a summary of all the actions that are being implemented in this new FMP.

Okay. So that's the update for the island-based FMPs. Can you go to the next slide, if possible? They're not seeing the slides. Okay. Give us a moment, please. Can you see now the slides? Yep. Okay. Thank you. Okay, so next slide.

This is going to be Sarah.

SARAH STEPHENSON: Good morning. This is Sarah Stephenson. Can you hear me?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Yes, we can.

SARAH STEPHENSON: Okay. yes, I'm going to give a quick update on the amendment to the island-based FMPs that the council accepted last August, at the August 2021 council meeting, that was updating management reference points for Spiny Lobster based on the SEDAR 57 stock assessment results, and the acceptable biological catch control rule that was included in those FMPs.

So, the issues that were addressed in the amendment were to update the management reference points, including the ACL. And then revise the accountability measure trigger for the Spiny Lobster stocks. So, it would use a different trigger than what was specified in the FMPs. The council took action, final action, in August of 2021 and we are working on preparing the proposed rule and the associated documents for that.

Next slide, please.

So just to kind of do a high-level recap of the two actions that were in the amendment. Action one, modified the overfishing limits, the acceptable biological catch, and the annual catch limits for Spiny Lobster in each island FMP. The preferred alternatives selected a constant catch approach for specifying those values and used that constant catch ABC to derive the ACL. The preferred sub alternative to set the ACL used just a 5% reduction buffer. So, it set the ACL at 95% of the ABC. These values, in this table, are the ACLs that would be in place for next year, starting in 2023, for Puerto Rico. You can see it will be 369,313 and so on across the row. And then the SSC recommended that the ABCs and OFLs, for 2024 and later, be set at a slightly more conservative value just to reflect the data that was used.

That's why the science center is working on that updated assessment, which will project new OFLs and ABCs that the SSC will revisit and hopefully accept and send to the council. So that would require a second amendment for Spiny Lobster. As soon as we get that information, we'll start working on it.

Um, next slide, please.

The second action included in the amendment was to modify the accountability measure trigger. So, María showed the slide earlier for the accountability measure that's included in the Spiny Lobster FMP that uses the average of the most recent three years.

The new fishery management plans are actually using a spin-up process, which starts with a single year of landings compared to the ACL and eventually moves up to a three-year average of landings compared to the ACL. During the discussion for this action, the council wanted to just straight use a three-year average. So, the preferred alternative for this one is using the average of the most recent three years of landings to evaluate whether an AM is triggered. And so, since ACLs could potentially be different during those three years using, the AM is triggered if the average landings exceeded the average ACLs that were in place during those years.

Um, and of course, the years of landings used to trigger the AM can be adjusted to account for the best scientific information available. For instance, if a new assessment comes out and new ACLs and ABCs are produced.

Next slide, please. Oh, and María back to you.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Okay. I'll take you back. Thank you, Sarah.

Okay. So, this is María with NOAA Fisheries. So, the other amendment that we have is an amendment to all of the FMPs. It is the modification of the buoy gear definition and use. This amendment, as you all recall, modifies the definition of buoy gear and federal regulations to allow for the use of up to 25 hooks to fish commercially, and also limits the use of buoy gear to those fishing commercially.

The council took final action in December 2021 and NMFS is also going to be preparing the proposed rule and associated documents for this action. There's nothing else for the council to do on this one either, at this time, because you already took final action in December 2021. Once NMFS prepares the proposed rule, we will publish that and open it for comments, etcetera. We will let you know. We usually do a fishery bulletin announcing this as well.

Okay. Next slide.

Okay, just to remember these were the alternatives that were included, and this was the preferred alternative, prohibit the use of those fishing recreational in federal waters. This was the one that the council preferred.

Next slide, please.

Action two was just modified so the fishers that were fishing with buoy gear in federal waters could use up to 25 hooks.

Okay. So next slide, please.

Lastly, the other amendment that was in the works is also for the three islands. This is for the trawling gear and other net gear in federal waters. The issues that will be addressed in this amendment are a prohibition on the use of trawling gear from within the marine protected areas or council-managed areas of the U.S. Caribbean EEZ or in the waters of the EEZ. Those are the options that are going to be evaluated.

There are going to be options also to prohibit or regulate the use of gillnets, trammel nets, drift nets, and purse seines for harvesting fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ. This is for those species that are mostly new to management. For example, pelagics for which some of these net prohibitions do not apply because those species were not included in the management plans before.

So, what is the status? The interdisciplinary plan team was constituted. They had their first meeting. However, there is a need to further develop a purpose and need and refine actions and alternatives based on the council guidance that was provided during the April meeting. The IPT is going to be developing the amendment for the council to discuss or choose preferred alternatives for either the December 22 meeting or the spring 2023 meeting, depending on workload.

Okay. So, we have guidance from the council on this one, however, we're still in the very early process. We're anticipating that the IPT is going to be meeting again soon to continue further discussing this. Hopefully, we can bring an update to the council for the next meeting. Okay.

So, this is all we have in terms of the actions that are a little more advanced that were tasked by the council to staff to work with.

In our next presentation, we're going to be talking about potential actions. If you have any questions regarding these specific actions, please let us know. Thanks.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for the presentation. It is good to know that everything is running, right? That we are in a good position here. Any quick question, before we have a very short break? I was requested for a short break of five minutes. Any questions, anybody on virtual participants? Hearing none, let's

take a five-minute break and come back for the next presentation that María will provide to us. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

MARCOS HANKE: We are about to restart the meeting. Please take your seats again. María Del Mar. The next presentation. Yeah, everybody's in the room. They are paying attention from the back of the room, a few of them, but everybody is here. Please proceed.

Potential Actions for IBFMPs Amendments

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Okay. Thank you. This is María Lopez with NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office. This is going to be a presentation, two presentations, one by me and one by Sarah Stephenson. These are two potential actions for island-based Fisher Management Plans amendments.

The first of these presentations is the development of a federal permit program in the U.S. Caribbean.

You can go to the next slide, please.

The objective of this presentation is to reopen the federal permit program discussion that was held some years ago by the council and that was put on hold for a future discussion. The federal permit action is something that many of you have requested to be reintroduced to the council for more discussion. There has been expressed interest from different groups as to whether a federal permit program will be something that would be beneficial to implement in federal waters. So the objective of this presentation is to do a background and an update on what happened before when this was presented to the council. Also to talk about the benefits of a federal permit program and to talk about where would the council like to go, if anywhere, with this.

As you know, the absence of a federal permit system or a mandatory federal reporting requirement has been identified as a major contributor to the lack of fishing effort information in the Caribbean Exclusive Economic Zone. Having a permit system would allow better estimates for measuring fishing efforts for council-managed fisheries while shedding light on the effectiveness of regulations implemented to manage that effort. We understand exactly what that population of active fishers looks like. And we are able to know who they are and what's

their distribution. It would have a lot of value from a scientific standpoint.

So, part of this conversation that we have had in the past because obviously many of you are new to this, we have discussed that having a federal commercial permit, of course, depending on how it is implemented would enhance, could enhance, the ability that we have to monitor landings data, which is something that we need in the Caribbean. The permit may be a general requirement or also may be a specific to a particular fishery sector. For example, such as the Spiny Lobster or the Spiny Lobster trap sector or the deep-water snapper, etcetera. So, different options could be put in place as to what a permit could look like.

Next slide. Cristina, do you think you can remove the label on the bottom? Thank you very much.

The primary goal of establishing federal permits or a federal permit system is to gain a better understanding of the population of fishers and their harvest patterns in the EEZ. These are some of the benefits and some of the needs and issues that it could address. It could increase knowledge of the fishing effort. It could better identify spatial patterns of capture and harvest. It could reduce, help reduce, scientific and management uncertainty because permits would allow fisher management to gather more accurate data and that would be expected somehow to decrease the scientific and management uncertainty because we will have a little bit more knowledge of the fishery and the health of the fish populations that support that fishery. It could enhance the ability to obtain landings data from fishermen. Like I said, providing accurate and timely data on landings, would be something that would enable the application involving season accountability measures. As you all know, the accountability measures that we currently implement are not in season, which means that they're not implemented with data that is current from the same year. We're using information from the previous year. So ideally, if we had a system that would allow us to get more timely data that would enable us to have a better understanding of what is the actual status of the stocks.

So, it could also help manage competing interests. This is one of the objectives that were mentioned in the past when this federal permit program system was first discussed. It was a competing interest for example, between different sectors, the commercial and the recreational fishers. However, efforts in the past, and I will talk about that a little bit later, had been

mostly focused on commercial fishing. It would help identify trends in the health of targeted fish stocks. Also, from the socioeconomic perspective, quantify the importance, and the socioeconomic importance of the permitted fishing sectors and mitigate the negative impacts of management on fishing communities.

Um, it will provide permitted fishers with a better understanding of their fishery and the opportunities and implication of management to that fishery. And lastly, it could also target active fishermen for educational and or research activity, because it would allow for direct communication with fishing entities, enabling focused outreach and educational opportunities.

Next slide, please.

In this slide, I'm going to talk about what happened before when it was discussed. So, the council started discussing federal permits back in June 2013, that's a long time ago, at the 146th council meeting. And this conversation started because this is the same year where the Puerto Rico DNER implemented their deep-water limited access snapper permit, the deep-water snapper permit.

So, the permit was discussed from 2013, through 2016 at different council meetings. But then the action was tabled in 2016. Some of the past council actions that are worth mentioning with respect to this, although it has been discussed in several meetings, certain actions were taken at that time.

In 2014, there was a white paper that discussed various aspects of the fishing permits as they might apply in the Caribbean EEZ. That was at the 2014 August council meeting. That paper summarized all the general considerations regarding the establishment of fishing permits in the EEZ. Following a broad overview of the permits under potential applicability in the Caribbean EEZ, the paper discussed two specific permit opportunities that included the commercial trap fishery of Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the commercial Snapper Unit 2 or Cardinal and Queen snapper fishery of Puerto Rico. And again, this is EEZ.

Okay. So based on the information that was contained in that white paper, the council then directed staff to develop a scoping document to evaluate those general concepts regarding the harvest permits in the EEZ, and then do scoping hearings. There was that scoping document in 2015 that should be included

in the briefing book that you have access to through the council website. And there were also scoping hearings held at various locations in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Saint Thomas and Saint Croix, and in Puerto Rico in March 2015. The public comments that were obtained during those scoping hearings were presented to the council at their April 2015 meeting. Regarding the development of a permit program for Puerto Rico's commercial Snapper Unit 2, the comments were generally positive.

There were suggestions made, for example, to make the federal permit completely independent of the present state permit, and to include a provision to allow federally permitted fishers, to transit state waters with their catch. So, those were some of the things that were discussed during the scoping meetings that the participants desire to see if this were ever to happen. Right?

So, there was a consensus to move forward with the development of a permit program for this fishing sector. Remember, this was back in 2015. Now, there was another scoping paper that was presented in August 2016 and that document used the outcomes from that scoping hearing in March 2015 to develop a permit program for that Snapper Unit 2. That, in combination with all of the other requirements that were common to all of the NOAA Fisheries permit programs, was used to create alternatives or options for designing the permit. The scoping document included possible options distributed among various organizing actions, and they were meant to be used as a starting point for public discussions regarding the design and implementation of a permit like this.

There was an IPT created for the action. In some of the feedback that was contained from the U.S. Virgin Islands, although there was interest in doing a Spiny Lobster permit for Saint Thomas, they didn't want to pursue it at that time. Okay. So that was a discussion at some of these council meetings. There was an IPT created for both of the actions. However, the action was put on hold by the council in December 2016, by motion until the information needed for the permit was obtained. Okay. So, this was mostly for Puerto Rico because Saint Thomas's representation at the meeting at that time wanted to wait a little bit to decide if they wanted to move forward with this.

This was mostly envisioned more as a pilot program at that time, to see how starting small was something that could be set up on a larger scale. As I mentioned, in 2016 this was tabled until more information was obtained. Right? Mostly this is regarding deep-water snapper because there were still a lot of questions

about the permit in Puerto Rico that needed to be answered before we could work on something at the federal level. But at that time, the council's ambition was to become the first amendment to the island base FMPs. And remember, back then we were expecting that the island-based FMPs would be in place much earlier than they happened.

Okay. Next slide.

Okay. So, this is what's going on currently in the Caribbean. Obviously, you know, there are jurisdiction permits like Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. If there are other permits or something that I'm missing or something that has changed in the U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico, in territorial waters, please let me know. So, in federal waters, as you all know, there are no federal permits to fish, sell or purchase council-managed species in the EEZ. There are HMS permits, which the council does not manage, these are managed by NOAA Fisheries, but they're required to fish in the EEZ.

In Puerto Rico, there's a commercial fishing license required. There are additional species-specific permits for incidental catch and other species. There's the limited access, deep water snapper permit. And there are other permits for individual species that commercial fishers have to apply for.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, there's also a commercial license required. Most recently the moratorium that was on the fishing licenses was lifted. There's also a requirement for helper permits and there's also, my understanding is, that there are other additional permits for fishing in certain other areas. Right? Okay. So, I'm not getting into details of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, but if you have any questions, representatives are right here. There were also control dates that were set by the federal government per year request on the Spiny Lobster and reef fish fisheries.

Um, I also want to mention that in terms of recreational fisheries for federal waters, we don't have a permit. However, there's a requirement to sign up in the national registry for recreational fisheries from NOAA.

Okay. Next slide, please.

So these are the control dates for those of you that participated in the most recent district advisory panel meeting. This is the same slide that was presented by Jocelyn D'Ambrosio from NOAA GC when she was discussing the federal regulations for

trap fishing. The control day, basically, says that persons entering the fishery after the control day are not assured fisher access. They do not commit the counselor names to take any particular action to limit entry into particular fisheries. There was a February 11, 2011, control day that applied to the commercial traps sector of the reef Fisher in federal waters, in the U.S. Caribbean and that can be found in the regulations that 78 FR 2496. There is also one that applies to the commercial traps sector of the Spiny Lobster fishery in the federal waters of Puerto Rico. There's also a September 1st, 2017, control date that applies to the Spiny Lobster trap Fisher in federal water of Saint Thomas and Saint John. That supersedes the dates in the April 2013 notice.

Okay. Can we go to the next slide?

So very briefly. I want to remind everybody that the intention of this presentation is not to try to solve all the problems and try to figure out how this is going to go, but mostly to reintroduce the topic to the council so the council can decide if they want to move forward because establishing a federal permit is something that is a little complicated and it involves putting many pieces together. This is the basics of what needs to be done.

First of all, the council needs to decide if they're interested in developing and implementing a permit system, of course. Then the council needs to decide what objectives they want to accomplish with that permit. What is the problem that the council wants to address? For example, do you want to just collect basic data information, basic data collection on effort? or do you just want to collect information on participation and not collect information on effort? That will be an example. Do you want to collect spatial data and landings data? If you want to do that, then you have to set up the permit in a way that for example, they have logbook requirements so that you can collect data on the fishers' participation in federal water. Do you want to set up some controls for the fishery? Do you want to control effort? Do you want to control gear use? Do you want to reduce capacity in the fishery?

Those are all questions that do not necessarily have to be at the general level, but for example, you may need to control effort for a sector for a certain fishery. A way to do that is, for example, controlling- and when I say controlling, I mean managing. I shouldn't use the word control but manage the use of the gear, for example. Is there a need to reduce capacity in

the fishery? Is there a need to manage competing interests for the resource?

Once you figure this out, then you define the scope of the action. Do you want a general permit? Or do you want a species-specific permit? or a sector-specific permit? Would it apply to all the EEZ? or do you want it to apply to each one of the islands? See, remember that now that we have island-based fisheries management, we have that possibility that not necessarily something that would work for Puerto Rico will work for Saint Thomas or Saint Croix. Those can be decisions made at the island level in terms of what can be put in place for a federal permit. Do you want to do it for a particular species or a group of species? Etcetera. Do you want to do it for one sector, all of the sectors, etcetera?

Then you have to figure out other things in terms of what is it that you want to accomplish. Is there a need for this particular fishery to do this permit because you want to keep landings at, or under the ACL? Is there a need to add a logbook requirement because you want to be able to use this permit to monitor landings? Is the way that you implemented the permit, would it allow you to control effort if that's what you want? Like, if you have certain restrictions, such as gear restriction, and this is something that, for example, has been done in other areas, for example, in the U.S. Virgin Islands with the trap reduction probe, you're controlling effort to controlling the gear.

Is there a need to put a limit, cap the limit, on the number of participants? Or is it okay for this fishery to be open? Is there a need to set a limited access permit? Or keep it open? Set trip limits? For example, all of these things can be done through a permit system. Then obviously there has to be a way of measuring how we are going to accomplish this.

So this is a complicated process, but it can be done. It's something that it's currently in place, as you saw, in the HMS and also in other, for example, in the South Atlantic and the Gulf. There is a system already in place that we can take lessons and we can use to build something that is targeted to the specific needs of the Caribbean.

Okay, next slide, please.

This is just an example of the options that were presented to the council during those years. There was an option, and again, there can be other options and they can be modified because many

things have changed since then, right? Require commercial vessel operators to obtain a federal permit to fish in the EEZ. That could be an option. Or require the commercial vessel operators to obtain a fishing license from either Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands to fish in the U.S. EEZ. And with respect to this one, this was something that was identified as a potential problem in federal waters, because for you to be able to have a commercial license in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, there are residency requirements that are not something that is allowed in federal water. So there has to be a way of working with that to be able to do that.

Those are things that we can discuss later. There were other options, for example, to require, to obtain a federal permit if you wanted to fish in federal water or have a license for either Puerto or U.S. Virgin Island. There are different combinations that can be done. Requires species group or fishery specific permit, require a gear specific permit, require a dealer permit to purchase fish. Conduct a pilot study with some other fishers from some or all island groups to evaluate the practicability of permits in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ or other options that the council will want to entertain.

Now. Um, I want to make clear that back in 2014 and 2016, the interest was mostly in commercial, right? But that doesn't mean that a federal permit has to be developed just for commercial. It can be explored and evaluated for other sectors as well. And of course, there are data limitations that had to be taken in place if that is the desire of the council. It doesn't, by no means does it have to be the same thing that was done before.

Can we go to the next slide?

So, what has changed since then? At the federal level, we have the island-based FMPs which the implementations have been delayed for a little bit. As I mentioned earlier, we are expecting a day of implementation between summer, early fall of 2022 if everything goes as planned. There are bearing measures under each FMP, for example, different than what we had in 2016 or before we have updated ACLs. We have accountability measures and we talked about that earlier today.

Um, other than that, a federal permit program was also included as a measure under the standardized bycatch reporting program in the island-based FMPs. It means that the council has a requirement to obtain information on bycatch from the stocks. However, we don't have a setup program to collect that information. Right now, we rely on monitoring landings, on the

catch that is provided by each one of the states, right? In the Puerto Rico form, there's no bycatch, there's no collection of bycatch information. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, there is. In order for us to collect bycatch information, there has to be a method set in place. Right? The council, in the island-based FMP, said that if we do a federal permit program, that could be a way of collecting information on bycatch. That's something that the council will need to take into consideration. If there's no desire to do a federal permit program, then we will have to update that methodology that we said to see if we can collect that information some other.

There are also other changes as we discussed this morning that had been triggers of the AM and application of the AM on some fishers, for example, the Spiny Lobster. Now at the local level- and I'm just talking about this for reference or compatibility purposes because one of the objectives of a permit could also be to be compatible with the states, right? There's electronic reporting in Puerto Rico for the commercial sector that wasn't there before. It's also a development of that electronic reporting and other tools in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Right? We heard about that back in the DAP meeting. There may be potential changes to the Puerto Rico local deep-water snapper permit. Damaris, if you know a little bit more about that, you can provide information, but that's my understanding, our understanding, that there may be some changes or at least they have been discussed. There were changes to the commercial license moratorium in the U.S. Virgin Islands, that would allow additional entry into the commercial fishery. If the U.S. Virgin Islands want to update us on that as well, that would be good. There was also an implementation of the trap reduction program in the U.S. Virgin Islands back in 2017.

So those are all the changes that have happened since this action was discussed in the past. That means that they need to be taken into consideration if the council decides to move forward in creating a federal permit. And of course, because of these changes and also because of the current management system and licensing system, etcetera, in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, it's very important that this is a coordinated effort between state and federal managers so we can make the most of a federal permit system that will work for both federal waters and state waters.

The next steps, if you can go to the last slide.

The next step will be for the council to decide if moving forward with developing or evaluating the development of a

federal permit system in the EEZ. When we say EEZ here means the EEZ of each one of the islands or applicable to all because that's a decision that the council will have to make and provide guidance on what to explore. What would you like to see in a federal permit? For example, a general permit, or would like to explore implementing a limited access permit for a specific fishery or something else. Or is the interest of the council not moving forward with a federal permit per se, and just start a small, like for example, with a pilot study or pilot program? And if so, there will be a creation of an interdisciplinary plan team that will be working on this action. This planning team will have persons that have experience working with permits so that we can make the most of this action or the creation of other advisory groups if needed. Right? Because that would be something that will be beneficial also for this action.

Another thing is that we can discuss a preliminary timeline too. If you want to have a permit, when would you like to have the permits implemented? Like an idea. This also has to do with other actions that are being pursued. I mean, I think the council will benefit from having a discussion about what are the near-term and long-term actions that they would like to see. And if the council is not ready to make a decision at this time, you can also explore having additional scoping or discussion at future meetings.

Okay. That's all I have. Um, if there are any questions, Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Um, Miguel, for the record. Thank you very much María Del Mar. This is an excellent, excellent presentation. I believe that this is a roadmap for the council. What we are doing here is retaking the topic that you have seen that you worked on before 2016.

So the first question to the council is, do you want to pursue this or not? The first question would be to address that and how. This is a complex topic, and I don't think that you could do it in one council meeting or two. You need to have, by the way, the interdisciplinary plan team, similar to what you have for other actions that you instructed the start to follow, then the advisory groups needed- we were talking among ourselves and probably we need to have ad hoc committee of the council, just to look at everything that María Del Mar just presented to us and see the best avenue to undertake this. But the first

question is, and this is what we need to hear from you and staff people. Do you want to pursue this or not?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. I would like to hear from the council. Carlos. Before Carlos participates, María, I think it would be good for the discussion to have the slide up. I think it was number eight, where you had all the things that we have to consider and the possibilities.

MIGUEL ROLON: Pero Marcos... Wait. Wait. We can go back to that one where you have more specifications, but right now, what we need to know is in that slide. Do you want to move forward or not? And if you want to move forward, how? But the first thing would trigger that, and then we can go back because I agree with Marco. There are certain things that you need to go for specifics.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, I agree, Miguel. The only thing that I want to highlight to the group is that the slide gives a roadmap for us on how to attempt, in an organized way, what we really want in the future. Right? I want to highlight that. Carlos?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. I do agree that we need to move forward with this proposal. I, for one, have quite a bit of questions. I think an ad hoc committee would suit well for this because there are many things in here that we need to look at, particularly when it comes to federal permits versus commercial licenses. But just let me leave it right there for now because I agree that we need to take a better, a closer look at this. And I have other things to discuss, especially with this control date for lobster traps, because I don't even know what that is yet, but I'll leave that for the discussion.

MARCOS HANKE: Julian, Nelson then Graciela

JUALIAN MAGRAS: Julia Magras for the record. Excellent presentation, María. I am very pleased to see that we, you know, are moving in this way. I think it's a great idea to visit these licenses and permits. What I would recommend from the council is that we could have a joint DAP meeting where this same presentation is presented to the DAPs, because each one of them needs to have input. Not only the DAPs on the federal side, but any fishing organization, even the fishery advisory committees for Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix to have this presented to get everyone's input on how they feel. But I think this is a great way for moving forward in looking at our fisheries and collecting the data.

So I really think we could have a joint meeting this presentation be given and then maybe even have the DAP split up. We have done this before, getting their take on the presentation and the Chairs present back in a full committee, how they feel and how to move forward with the process. That's just my opinion.

MARCOS HANKE: Nelson.

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson for the record. I think I agree with Julian's words, and I totally agree with this presentation. Especially for the Snapper Unit 2, I think that, before granting permits for the local- and in the end, you know, you decide to develop a permit for federal waters. I think it's good to develop a stock assessment, especially for Snapper Unit 2 to evaluate how many permits this fishery can hold. We cannot start giving permits like crazy because we are going to find ourselves with a big problem when we start picking up the data.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. Thank you, Nelson. Graciela then Miguel.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: One of the main issues that you've been presented with is the actual fragmentation of the licensing and permitting systems within each of the areas of jurisdiction and with the EEZ. There is some information that the fishers provide regarding where they fish at, whether it's, you know, 10 miles of shore or in the EEC or whatever. So, there is a bit of information that can be explored in that sense. But I think that most of the issue will have to do with that fragmentation of permits. Having one for the EEZ, one for state waters, different regulations in place, and the council has been discussing the compatibility of regulations several times now. So, it's an issue that will result in a burden to the fishers because of needing to acquire additional permits, etcetera, versus having one all-encompassing permit.

The other thing would be that it would be costly in terms of time and money. That's another issue that we also need to consider when we're discussing permits and also the additional efforts that are taking place regarding the recreational harvest, for example, the development of the MRIP licensing, count my fish, etcetera, to have one permit versus two licenses. So, it's a very, very fragmented issue right now. We would like to have guidance from the council regarding the exploration of all the information that we have regarding these permits. And most importantly, what changes are taking place within the state jurisdictions that we need to account for when we're developing the EEZ permits?

MARCOS HANKE: We have Miguel, Nicole, and JJ.

MIGUEL ROLON: Okay. All this is good for the discussion, but we need to hear from the council, do you want to move forward with this? Because let's say we have a motion to pursue, not to establish, but to examine the possibility of establishing a permit system. I suggest that we put together a little ad hoc committee, where we have three chairs of the DAPs and three members of the DAPs each from the recreational sector, the two local governments, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the council. Of course, the staff will be supportive. That way the committee will be given the task to address these issues. The presentation by María Del Mar is excellent because you have the history of what we have done, where are we and what are the changes. And that committee needs to work on that one.

Julian's idea I think that we should follow with that. Once this committee put together something to move forward on we need to consult with the three DAPs and we need to address a lot of issues that are in section seven. I mean, in slide number seven, but the first question Mr. Chairman is, does the council wants to pursue this or table it again?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. let's take the time, Nicole, because you've been waiting for a long time, then JJ very briefly because we have Andy, and we have a motion by Carlos Farchette as requested. Go ahead.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Thank you very much. Thank you for the presentation. One of the questions that I was going to pose that I'm glad was addressed was whether this would fit into the strategic plan. Where does it fit into the strategic plan of the CFMC that we've spent much time working on over the past few years? As well as the recommendations that were forwarded last year by the SSC. That is something I think I'd like to see in a presentation. If that could be included in the presentation to the DAPs and include our technical advisory, Ecosystem-based Chairs, and SSC chairs. I think that would be a really great conversation and would help inform any motions or decisions that we need to make. So, I agree with the further discussion and also would like to see that additional information.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for your participation. Just be aware that depending on how we design we can touch on many of the priorities of the strategic plan as María explained, right? Data improvement, getting better data, and making possible better

data is one of them. That is contained in the strategic plan already. We have JJ.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. JJ Cruz here. I just want to say two things. The first one is from an SSC point of view would be great to have, if the council decides to go this route, it would be great in terms of data, and availability. Now, the second aspect was related to the specifics, but I would rather give the time for the council to decide before I talk about the specifics. The specifics have to do with the fragmentation. I think that's an important point. Also, with the extension of this permit to another sector. But I'll talk about that at another opportunity. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, JJ. Andy.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah, I'm certainly hearing a lot of support for pursuing an options paper to develop or at least look at a permit system. I'm supportive of that. Obviously, we'd be in the exploratory stage. María has done an excellent job of laying out a lot of decision points that I think would need to be made not only by this council but also by the district advisory panels and others in terms of the purpose and need for the permitting system, and what we would want to accomplish. But from what I've heard, obviously, from a data collection standpoint, it would be a huge benefit if we pursued a permit from just identifying the universe of participants. I think one of the key aspects from the federal government standpoint would be working with the territories closely so that we avoid what Graciela was talking about in terms of fragmentation of the permitting system. So, I'm supportive of moving forward with an options paper.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you very much. I want to highlight, I'm going to repeat this, the importance of the participation of Puerto Rico and Nicole DPNR in this process. Fragmentation is something that we need to address for sure. Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: *Carlos Farchette here. I move a designate an ad hoc committee to consider an option or to develop an options paper in the development of a federal permit for the EEZ.*

Maybe someone has better language in there, feel free to jump in.

MARCOS HANKE: Any second?

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Second.

MARCOS HANKE: Let's open for discussion. Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Cristina lo puedes poner en el screen.

CRISTINA OLAN: No because the person. Well, I can copy it and...

MIGUEL ROLON: Me avisan cuando estén ready para que Carlos se la pueda dictar otra vez.

MARCOS HANKE: Jocelyne in the meantime.

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Thank you. This is Jocelyn. Just on the suggestion about the way to handle the options paper versus further developments of any permit program. As you can see in the second bullet there, we have created an interdisciplinary planning team or other advisory groups. We have interdisciplinary planning teams and when they're made up of NMFS employees and things like that, we're able to have meetings and bring documents to the council without having those be formal public council meetings. And those are usually persons from the science center, persons from the regional office, and persons from GC. We have those for a lot of our amendments, and I think that would be useful to have here. I think that's maybe a separate issue from whether we want a formal council subcommittee that would work on recommendations to give to that planning team or to give to the council. I just want to make sure that we're sort of thinking of those separately and then any subcommittee of the council we just have to make sure that if they meet, those meetings are public. But I think they can do a little bit of homework and bring things back and report at a council meeting, for example. That's just on a process point of the potentially different roles for those organizations.

MARCOS HANKE: We have Andy. We have a chat, and we have a raised hand.

MIGUEL ROLON: point of order Mr. Chairman, you have a motion that you have to write first before you continue.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. I agree. Can you dictate the motion to put it on the screen to keep the discussion?

UNKNOWN: I'm hearing from folks online that they're having great difficulty hearing. That's why my face is right up against the microphone. If we could try and do that, they might have more success hearing. Thanks.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you. ¿Ya pudieron coger el listado?

UNKNOWN: Yes. Please, let me know if I wrote it down correctly or any other corrections.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: I'm going to change that. Okay. Completely. So it would be, to explore the establishment of a federal permit in the EEZ- to fish in the EEZ.

MARCOS HANKE: Let's wait for it to be clear. Is this your motion, Carlos?

MIGUEL ROLON: Then you need a second.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah, you have to reiterate your second, Nicole, to the motion? Yes?

NICOLE F. ANGELI: (faintly) Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah, we keep the discussion. Graciela.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: For clarification, all fishing, commercial and recreation, charters, everyone.

MIGUEL ROLON: No, no, we don't want to complicate things at this time. We just want to know if the council wants to have further permits in the fishery of the EEZ because this is more complex as Graciela and everybody else around the table are stating. The next step will be to put together a team that will look at this and that team should be the DAP Chair, members of the DAP, the two local governments, the Chair and Vice Chair of the council. I proposed that. And then the staff will be supporting. You don't know whether you are going to jump into a general permit or if you're going to have a pilot survey, etcetera, etcetera. This is the motion. If everyone understands what it means, then you can vote it in. If you want to add more language to make it more idiot proof we can do that.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. As part of this discussion, we have Andy. María, just to confirm, do you want to speak after Andy? No. Andy, go ahead.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Forgive me because I'm not as familiar with Caribbean processes and procedures. At least with the south Atlantic and Gulf, when working with them, they'll develop a scoping document, that'll engage your advisory panels. Then that morphs into an options paper. But we, as Jocelyn pointed out, would form an interdisciplinary planning team that includes council staff, and NMFS staff those are the people that are

responsible for developing those documents. It doesn't cut out the advisory panels from providing input, but as the document is developed, they have various stages in the process where input is received. And so from that perspective, my recommendation is not to form another committee with this council. Direct staff to begin the development of an options paper that would come back to this council at future dates and also be shared with advisory panels for input and consideration. You could certainly even engage the advisory panels early in the process before even that options paper has pen to paper, so to speak, so that it's informed by recommendations and input from the district advisory panels. If you're amenable to that, I can certainly make a suggestion to the motion.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, the problem is we did that before and it didn't work. Maybe this time it would work. If you agree with Andy's suggestion, then we need to ask what will be the best way to amend the motion that we have here. You have some alternative language, and then we follow that one. Then we will be able to engage around the process and all the different components. I believe that that's very...

MARCOS HANKE: Just to put on the record that Carlos just mentioned to me that he intended to request help on the language to pursue exactly what you were saying.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: All right so in that vein, my recommendation would be to modify the motion, if Carlos and the secondary are amenable, that would say, to direct staff to begin development of an options paper for establishing a federal permit to fish in the EEZ. And then I guess the next question, which could be part of the motion would be the purpose of that permit because the staff really needs to have the focus on what the intent of the permit is. And at least from what I heard identifying the universe of participants and data collection being kind of the two priorities of the council. So I would look to Carlos and Nicole, as the motion makers, if you would agree to that. That would then be narrowing the scope of what the options paper would consider.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah, I agree with that. I did mention the options paper originally, but I do agree with the language change.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Yeah. I would agree with that. I think that would help to address my questions regarding strategic planning and moving forward.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. You're going to add more language then?

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Well, I think if staff's okay. At least the conversation we just had; we don't need to necessarily add to the motion. They would understand the intent as they develop the options paper. At that point.

MARCOS HANKE: Damaris.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Could we consider stating the federal permits of the EEZ since we have several species there?

MIGUEL ROLON: Chime in Mr. Chairman. The thing is the language that you have here is very, you know. It says that the council would like to pursue this. How? By preparing an options paper. I'm glad that Andy was the one who said it because he's the one who tells the staff what to do or not to do. And the options paper has a lot of implications. But the options paper itself has a roadmap for the council to pursue. It doesn't mean that you are going to, the day after tomorrow, have a permit for everything that moves in the water. It's just that you will have a very orderly way of looking at this issue. And then you will be able to look at all the components and decide in the process, what will be the best approach.

The other important part is that if you will engage the DAPs, and scientists from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, you'll engage the public. And of course, the local government.

And then the other part that he mentioned is that it is understood that the priorities will be on data collection. Look at the universe, how many people are out there fishing? We are not going to jump into a limited entry system using this permit, which is something that Nelson was addressing before. So for the record, if you believe that this is clear to direct the staff to begin the development of an options paper for establishing the federal permit to the EEZ, we can add with the possible priorities of data collection and the other part and that's it. The record has to be very clear as to what is it that you want. And when that's the other part we need to address.

MARCOS HANKE: Andy.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah. One clarification of the modifications I made. Based on what I was hearing with the ad hoc committee and making sure we're engaging constituents rather than going straight to an options paper. My recommendation is the

development of a scoping paper for establishing the federal permit in the EEZ. That then allows for an opportunity for us to put the ideas out there and engage our constituents. And then from those conversations, we'll build an options paper.

MARCOS HANKE: Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: I like it.

MARCOS HANKE: Nicole. They said yes, both of them. I think we have enough discussion on the motion.

MIGUEL ROLON: We have Vanesa, she's a council member. Cristina, would you like to read for the record what she stated?

CRISTINA OLAN: Yes. Vanessa wrote. Comment, did we really need more permits? Knowing the issue that the state has with the process of permits and real fishermen are having a big deal to renew their licenses? who will help fishermen to complete more applications that are not in their principal language? For example, HMS and a small Caribbean fishing boat.

MARCOS HANKE: That's a very good point. And we have to take that into consideration, designing a process that is in Spanish and clear and easy for the fisherman to access. Thank you, Vanessa. Anybody else, María?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Thank you. María Lopez NOAA fisheries. With this guidance, I think what the council will maybe like to do then, is to determine ways of how to engage the constituents and provide that input that is needed. From the NOAA Fisheries perspective and the council perspective, in terms of staff, we will go ahead and create an IPT so we can start working on something and try to put the base layer on this, right? What are the things that are needed and what is the input that is needed for certain things? Because there are going to be things that are going to be set up by the federal government, but there are other things that need to be decided, right? That's some of the information that will be brought to other council meetings. Also, if there is a desire to do scoping, like for example, if the council desires to do a scoping hearing about this, we can certainly prepare some guidance for that so that the meetings can be guided. Um, If the council is interested in also getting input from their advisory groups, collect that information and that information can be reported to the council and that information can be provided to the IPT so they can include that information into a potential document and potential options eventually. Thanks.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. What the council is asking is just a scoping paper. It's just something that you can present to all the constituents, including the advisory bodies that we have. We are at the first step of the equation.

The other question is the timeline, something that María Del Mar requested from the council. What is the timeline that you envision for this? Next month, next year, 10 years from now? Because you have a bunch of other stuff that you have given the staff to produce for you. Other alternatives. María, what will be the best timing that we can think of that this will be a doable scoping document?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: At this time, I don't know, but given that this is a complex action. Um, I cannot say that we're going to have it ready for next year. I mean because this will- this doesn't necessarily mean that this is going to be a general permit for everybody. It could be a limited access permit, or it could be a permit for a certain fishery, etcetera. That is information that we currently don't have. And we need to find out from you, what do you need? Right? What do you want to do? Because this is a complex action and it's going to involve a lot of moving parts. I would suggest the council for a motion to start working on it and then the council will decide when they want to collect information and in what form so that information can be given to the IPT so we can start working on it.

I mean, I think this is something very important I wouldn't want to see being tabled. You all have expressed you want to move forward with it. Right? We can start working with it, we can create that IPT. I honestly don't know when it would be ready because it's complex. We can certainly know that the island-based FMPs, which were the other complex action it's almost done, then that could become a big project.

MIGUEL ROLON: Remember we don't want to solve everything in one scoping paper. That's the reason we have been working for the last 10 years on the same issue. Practical question, can we update the scoping document that was done on 14, 16? The one that you talked about. Because if we update that it won't take that much. And that document is the one that we are going to use to present to constituents, to the council, and all that. That document can be done probably for the first meeting of 2023. Just that paper, we don't want to complicate things. And there we identify the issues, we identify where we want to go. The

council as per the record today, we would like to pursue a permit to collect data first. We want to know the universe; how many people are out there fishing? They are very, you know, I remember fisherman telling me, "Miguel, if you go through with this permit, I will have to carry a wallet just for permits. And every time that I am fishing in the EEZ I will have to have all the permits."

Learning lesson from the HMS permit. We address that. We need to have the Spanish version, blah, blah, blah. If we can have a basic scoping paper based on the paper that we produce before 2016, that will be the beginning. Then by 2023, the first half of 2023, we will have a better understanding of what is needed to be done. Cristina, can we go back to slide number seven?

MARCOS HANKE: Andy.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Two comments, one related to the motion, but the first related to what you were saying, Miguel. In terms of timing, I think what would be very beneficial moving forward, given the number of actions before this council, is your team working with my team and Marcos as the Chair to outline what actions will be coming back to the council and when. And what action will be before the council, whether it's a public hearing draft or a final action so that we can start sequencing some of these and prioritizing them going forward? Just given limits on staff time and resources.

Um, in terms of the motion, I received a suggestion that I really liked and wanted to go back to the motion if we could for a minute. So this is very definitive about the goal to develop a scoping paper for the establishment of the federal permit. And I talked about intent earlier, and one suggestion I would recommend making is that let's say, the beginning development of a scoping paper for exploring options for improving data collection, including the establishment of a federal permit in the EEZ. So that's broader based- could include the permit, but also improvements to data collection working with the territories.

MARCOS HANKE: You have to go back to Carlos and Nicole.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: So moved.

MARCOS HANKE: Nicole?

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Second.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Perfect. I don't see any other hand; I have somebody on the chat.

CRISTINA OLAN: Vanessa Ramírez. Comment. There's another point that needs to be checked. Right now, some people and lawyers ask for money to prepare and get all the permits for new fishermen that came from states and want to establish here. I know one that told me he paid \$26,000 to get all the permits, commercial fishermen, HMS, Caribbean small, and fishing charter. How can we regulate that to maintain a real one-to-one, right? Local artisan commercial fishermen that don't have the capacity to pay for that and make their own transactions losing sometimes their effort when they get denied.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: I guess that you're ready to vote. Vanessa's points are the real life out there of what is happening with permits. That's what I said from the beginning. When you talk about permits everyone sitting around the table has an idea of what a permit is. But the consequences of the permit, everything has to be addressed and I believe that your motion here will be addressing that.

That paper a scoping paper, for those of you who are new, is where you collect all the information that you have about one topic that is of interest to the council. That document collects what has been done before. Similar to the presentation by María Del Mar today. You will also get information about the science behind the topics that you're going to discuss and the socioeconomic, etcetera of that topic. The scoping document, and scoping, remember the word means just to look around. In the scoping document, you take that to the poll.

Before COVID 19 we had the scoping documents, and then we took it to the public via a public meeting, etcetera. That can be done in person or hybrid or whatever. But the most important part now is that the council is initiating the process to examine this federal permit with the intent, number one, to improve the data collection system that we have. And I believe that you're ready to vote. And you're close to lunch.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, we are ready to vote. I think the discussion was very good. Well noted the comments, Vanessa. For the voting, I will start with James.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yes.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Yes.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: Vanessa? We are waiting for Vanessa Ramírez, that is virtual, to vote.

MIGUEL ROLON: María, sorry [laughter] ¿tú crees que pelagic species quince minutos antes del almuerzo? o ¿más tiempo? In that case, Mr. Chairman, maybe we can move to the afternoon. Dime Cristina

CRISTINA OLAN: Vanessa no entendió bien por el audio.

MARCOS HANKE: Vanessa we have- she's seeing the motion on the screen right, on the zoom.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: She can't see the slide. So, let me send her a picture.

MIGUEL ROLON: We can, you know, the procedure, we can, you have the motion passed anyway, and then we can tell her, and then she can afterward you can tell us.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah, Damaris just sent the motion to her. Let's wait. I'm really requesting a little time from this group to make sure Vanessa has the opportunity to vote and I'll make my final vote. And we. See the result in a few minutes.

MIGUEL ROLON: You only have 15 minutes before your vote is up. You're fine.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. We have 15 minutes to do this. You can say something halftime.

MIGUEL ROLON: Puedes cantar algo pero no puedes hablar mal de la moción.

CRISTINA OLAN: Vanessa, we see that you are trying to speak. Are you hearing us?

VANESSA RAMÍREZ: I vote, no.

MARCOS HANKE: The vote of Vanessa, just for the record is, no. and the last vote, which is mine is, yes.

We have one no and the rest of the group yeses, which is six votes, I believe.

MIGUEL ROLON: Six in favor, one against

MARCOS HANKE: *Six in favor. One against. Motion carries.*

María, we're going to move your presentation to after lunch.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Marco, it's lunch at 12.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Okay. It's almost 12. I would suggest if possible that the pelagic presentations be given right when we come back. So we can have a broad discussion about that. If needed.

MARCOS HANKE: Let's start the meeting at 1:15, a little earlier than what is stated on the agenda to make sure we make up for this time. Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. Um, when it comes to constituents since Saint Croix has a FAC meeting, every month. Would I be jumping the gun by bringing this up to another agenda item now? Or should I wait for the scoping meeting or gather information from now?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: If I may. This is María with NOAA fisheries. I think the coordination with U.S. Virgin Islands, government, and constituents, in Puerto Rico, is very important for this action. This could be something that if the U.S. Virgin Islands wants to start discussing, that will be great because that way when we request input, we can get the input from you. So, yeah. It's your decision, but I think anytime will be good to bring this up.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. We are going to break for lunch now unless there is anybody that wants to say something. No? there is spare time to do that.

Okay. Break for lunch. See you guys at 1:15.

MIGUEL ROLON: Lunch is across the hall here and it starts sharp at twelve.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 11, 2022.)

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AUGUST 11, 2022

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

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The Caribbean Fishery Management Council reconvened on Thursday afternoon, August 11, 2022, and was called to order by Fisherman Jadriel and Chairman Marcos Hanke.

JADRIEL: My name is JJ. I am helping to restart the meeting. The time is 1:15 pm. I will pass the mic to the Chair.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Mr. Fisherman, and partner. Thank you for your help. It's 1:15 pm still. Today we're going to restart the afternoon session. We are in Carolina, Puerto Rico in Marriott Courtyard.

Do we have a presentation that was missed from the morning session that we are going to start with, María Del Mar? With Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Pelagic Species Management

SARAH STEPHENSON: Hi, thank you. This is Sarah Stephenson with NOAA Fisheries. I believe. Yeah, is someone going to drive for me? Thank you. This is a continuation. Oh, can you hear me?

This is a continuation of the presentation that was given at the April council meeting for the consideration of management measures for pelagic species, new to federal fisheries management.

Next slide, please.

At the April meeting, the council received a presentation on management measures that could be considered for pelagic stocks, new to federal management under the island-based fishery management plans. If so, considered then those measures could be developed further through an amendment to the applicable FMP.

The potential management measures presented, included size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits. The

council directed staff to prepare an options paper with size and bag or trip limits for pelagic species managed under the island-based FMPs. A draft scoping options paper was included in the briefing book for this meeting.

Next, please.

This is a quick reminder of the pelagic species managed under each FMP. For our Puerto Rico dolphin and Pompano dolphin are managed together in the dolphin fish stock complex with dolphin selected as the indicator stock. Little tunny and blackfin tuna are managed together in the tuna stock complex and the king and sierra mackerel are managed together in the mackerel stock complex. All other species are managed as an individual stock.

Next slide, please.

Objectives for this meeting include providing guidance to staff on which management options if any to develop. If management measures are identified for development, provide guidance to staff on the draft, purpose, and need for the action. And discuss the prioritization of this action when compared to other actions in development and the potential timing for an amendment of pelagic stocks.

Next slide, please.

This draft purpose and need were included in the scoping options document for council consideration and may change pending council guidance. Texts for the draft need reads, the need is to develop conservation and management measures to protect against overfishing and ensure optimum yield for pelagic species new to federal management. Text for the draft purpose reads, the purpose of this action is to establish size limits, bag limits, and trip limits, and this is per council direction, for pelagic species new to management under the island-based FMPs.

If there's a more specific purpose or need that the council would like to meet, then these statements can be revised during the discussion following the presentation. For instance, if the council would like to implement regulations, that would be consistent with state regulations, language could be added to the draft needs statement that says, while ensuring that federal regulations for pelagic species are consistent with regulations under the state management programs of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Next, please.

The first management measure considered for the pelagic stocks is recreational bag limits. Three options were prepared. Option one is the no-action option and would not establish recreational bag limits for Puerto Rico pelagic stocks. Option two would allow the council to establish a recreational bag limit for an individual stock.

For example, the council could consider a bag limit of 10 dolphin per fisher per day or 30 dolphin per vessel per day. Whichever is less, which would be compatible with DNER regulations. Or the council could consider a bag limit of five dolphin per fisher per day, or 15 dolphin per vessel per day. Whichever is less, which would be a more restrictive bag limit when compared to the DNER limit. This more restrictive bag limit was recommended by the Puerto Rico DAP at the December council meeting.

Additionally, the council could consider a different recreational bag limit for dolphin or for any of the other pelagic species managed under the Puerto Rico FMP, which are listed here again for reference.

Option three would allow the council to establish a recreational bag limit for a combination of pelagic stocks. For example, the council could consider an aggregate limit for wahoo, king mackerel, and sierra mackerel combined of five of each species per fisher, per day, or 10 total per vessel per day, which would be compatible with the DNER regulations.

Or the council could consider an aggregate bag limit for a different combination of pelagic stocks or for one or more of the pelagic stock complexes. For example, which were the dolphin fish stock complex, the tuna stock complex, or the mackerel stock complex.

Next.

Since the Saint Thomas and Saint John FMP and the Saint Croix FMP only managed dolphin and wahoo pelagic stocks, the options for establishing a recreational bag limit under each FMP were combined into one slide. However, the council could consider different options for each FMP. Option one is the no-action option and would not establish recreational bag limits for dolphin or wahoo in federal waters off Saint Thomas and Saint John or off of Saint Croix. Option two would allow the council to establish a recreational bag limit for dolphin or wahoo. An option was prepared for each stock, but again, the council can

consider a recreational bag limit where wanted. For example, the council could consider a bag limit of X amount of dolphin per fisher per day, or vessel per day. And the same goes for wahoo.

Under option three, the council could, could establish a recreational bag limit for dolphin and wahoo combined. So an aggregate bag limit. As an example, the council could consider a bag limit of no more than 10 dolphin or wahoo per person per day, not to exceed 32 per vessel per day, and not to exceed four wahoo per person per day or 20 wahoo per vessel per day. This bag limit would be compatible with proposed U.S.V.I. regulations. Additionally, the council could consider a different aggregate limit for dolphin and wahoo.

Next.

The next management measure considered for pelagic stocks is commercial trip limits. For Puerto Rico, three options were prepared. Option one is the no-action option and would not establish commercial trip limits for Puerto Rico stocks, pelagic stocks.

Option two would allow the council to establish a commercial trip limit for an individual stock. For example, the council could consider a trip limit based on commercial landings information. The graph to the right illustrates the percentage of trips between 2003 and 2019 based on the pounds reported per trip. Just as an example, for dolphin, which is the dark blue bar, roughly 50% of the trips during that time period reported one to 50 pounds of dolphin. Triple tail, great Barracuda, and pompano dolphin are not included in the graph because the reported landings for these species were infrequent during that time period.

Option three would allow the council to establish a commercial trip limit for a pelagic stock complex. For example, the council could consider a trip limit that applies to the dolphin fish stock complex, which were dolphin and pompano dolphin to the mackerel stock complex, which were king and sierra mackerel, or to the tuna stock complex, which were little tunny in blackfin tuna.

If the council would like to develop a commercial trip limit for one or more of the stock complexes, then a similar pound-per-trip analysis could be prepared to aid in developing alternatives.

Next, please.

The Saint Thomas and Saint John FMP manages dolphin and wahoo as individual stocks. So the third option to establish commercial trip limits for the stock complex was not included as an option.

Option one is the no-action and would not establish commercial trip limits for dolphin or wahoo in federal waters off Saint Thomas and Saint John. Option two would allow the council to establish a commercial trip limit for dolphin and or for wahoo. As with the Puerto Rico slide, the council could consider a trip limit based on commercial landings information.

First Saint Thomas and Saint John, the graph illustrates the percentage of trips from 2012 to 2020 based on the pounds reported per trip. For dolphin, which again is the dark blue bars, a little more than 50% of the trips reported one to 50 pounds of dolphin. Whereas for wahoo, which are the green bars, a greater percentage of the trips were reported as between 151 and 200 pounds per trip.

Next, please.

The Saint Croix FMP also only manages dolphin and wahoo so the third option to establish commercial trip limits for stock complex was not included. Option one is the no-action and would not establish trip limits for dolphin or wahoo and federal waters off Saint Croix.

Option two would allow the council to establish commercial trip limits for either of those stocks. Similar to the graph for Saint Thomas and Saint John, the distribution of trips that reported landings of dolphin and wahoo from 2012 to 2020 were plotted. For Saint Croix, more than 60% of the trips reported one to 50 pounds of dolphin, again the blue bars. And then 51 to 100 pounds of wahoo, which are the green bars, per trip.

Next, please.

The third and last management measure considered for pelagic stocks is size limits. Option one is the no-action option and would not establish recreational and commercial size limits for Puerto Rico pelagic stocks. Option two would allow the council to establish recreational commercial size limits for one or more of the managed stocks. Again, for reference, those pelagic stocks are listed here.

This option is structured for both the recreational and the commercial sectors for simplicity, but the council could

consider a size limit for a specific sector or different size limits for the two sectors. If modified, we would just want to make sure that the rationale for those changes is documented.

For option two, the council could consider setting a size limit based on life history parameters as reported in the literature, such as the size at a given maturity level. For instance, the fork length for females at 50% maturity could be considered. Those sizes are listed here for dolphin, wahoo, king mackerel, and sierra mackerel.

The council could also consider a size limit based on other fishery information such as length data collected through the trip interview program, if those are available. Or from expert opinion, or to be compatible with state regulations where applicable. For instance, the council could consider a 20-inch fork length minimum for king mackerel or a 16th-inch fork length minimum for sierra mackerel, which would be compatible with DNER regulations

Next, please.

For Saint Thomas and Saint John option one is the no-action and would not establish size limits for dolphin or wahoo in federal waters off Saint Thomas and Saint John. Option two would allow the council to establish size limits for dolphin or wahoo. Again, the size limits could be based on life history parameters as reported in the literature. These are the same sizes that were shown for Puerto Rico based on the size of female dolphin and wahoo at 50% maturity. Or the council could consider a size limit based on other fishery information available. For instance, the council could consider the 24-inch fork length minimum for dolphin and 36-inch fork length minimum for wahoo that were recommended by the Saint Thomas, Saint John fishery advisory committee at the August 2019 council meeting.

Next, please.

For Saint Croix, similar setup. Option one was a no-action that would not establish size limits for dolphin or wahoo in federal waters off Saint Croix. Option two would allow the council to establish size limits for dolphin or for wahoo. And those again could be based on life history parameters, the same ones here for dolphin and wahoo, or could be based on other fishery information available.

Next, please.

As presented at the April meeting, the council could also consider revising the accountability measure provision for the pelagic stocks and stock complexes included in the FMPs to include size limits, recreational bag limits, or commercial trip limits as the responsive action that the council and NMFS take when the accountability measure has been triggered.

In other words, when landings exceed the annual catch target. At this time adding recreational bag limits as a responsive action would only be an option where accountability measures are already established for the recreational sector. That's what the asterisks refers to. As an example of how this would work. If the landings for dolphin exceed the annual catch target, then the council in NMFS could implement a commercial trip limit instead of another management actions, such as shortening of the fishing season for dolphin. So that they just are options that the council could consider if they didn't want to set a commercial trip limit but did want to use that as a provision under the accountability measures.

Next, please.

So to recap the action items that would be needed for the next steps are for the council to select which stocks or stock complexes, if any, to develop options for recreational bag limits. And for example, that could look like, we would like to develop bag limits for Puerto Rico dolphin fish stock complex, or for Saint Thomas and Saint John dolphin stock, or for the Saint Croix wahoo stock. You kind of get to pick and choose.

For the council to select which stocks or stock complexes, if any, to develop options for commercial trip limits. And for the council to select which stock or stock complexes, if any, to develop options for recreational and commercial size limits. For the council to make a motion, to develop an amendment, if so, desired. If yes, then NMFS could do the next steps and create an IPT. If a motion for an amendment is made, we would also want to discuss what would be the prioritization of this action when compared to the other actions that are in development, or that we discussed earlier today, for example, the federal permit or the troll gear action that we're working on.

And then finally, are there any changes that are needed to the draft, purpose, and need statements. So really, we're just kind of looking for which of these options do you want for which stocks and a little bit of the why, why would you like those particular ones? And with that, I'll take any questions.

MARCOS HANKE: The floor is open to questions. I just want to reiterate, Sarah- actually I want to reemphasize the need for people to speak directly to the mic, very close to the mic. Also, I was informed that we have different languages and accessibility for translation on their zoom. There is a globe icon on the right-hand side of your screen that you can use it. If you have any questions, please contact the staff. But anyway Sarah, can you- and there is for the in-person people, there are literal translators, radios, and apparatus for you to use if you need it. It's not a radius, I don't know the correct word here, but anyway, you guys understand.

Sarah, can you go back to the previous slide for a second? Okay. We going to open for discussion, but I want you to reiterate what you need from us. That's my question.

SARAH STEPHENSON: At the December meeting and at the April meeting Dr. Martin presented some information to the council on research that he had been doing tracking some of these species. So this initially kind of popped up again as potential management measures for the council to take under these new island FMPs but was kind of centered around dolphin and wahoo and the sargassum mat.

So that's all applicable, but we just wanted to find out, does that mean you would like these measures? For instance, let's just start with a recreational bag limit. Do you, do you want a recreational bag limit for dolphin in Puerto Rico or for dolphin and pompano dolphin together? Do you want it just for the recreational sector? Do you want it for both sectors that we manage, which are recreational and commercial?

So those are the type of questions which we wanted. So are there any stocks that are managed under the Puerto Rico, FMP that you would not like a recreational bag limit for? For example, triple tail. Like I mentioned in the slide that had the graph with the commercial landings. There are not a lot of commercial landings for triple tail. So it would be harder to develop those, I mean, we still could, but if that's not a species that you're interested in recreational bag limits, then just tell us and we get to write not interested.

And so then, we can really fine tune which species you're interested in and what management measures and for what sector. And then we could take that, form an IPT, we would know what's the reason for these management measures, is it to conserve? We just want to be a little bit proactive and conserve because we

know that they're heavily targeted as a schooling, you know, species, if for instance, you picked dolphin or wahoo.

And so just to really nail down kind of the purpose in the why, related to the management measure. And then I think an IPT could develop the specific options which would be eventually turned into alternatives and could come back with a more fine-tuned document for you. And then of course, if there were, like I mentioned on that second to the last slide, if there were some of these management measures that you thought might be useful in limiting effort, but you didn't want to necessarily apply them right away, you could set them as the provision for the accountability measure. So if the landings exceed the ACT. Because remember this pelagic stock, the accountability measure is structured slightly different than the remaining stocks in the FMP in that they have an ACT, an Annual Catch Target. So if landings exceed that annual catch target, then the council and NMFS would take a look at those landings and see if any additional action is necessary.

In the past for all of our other stocks, the action that is taken is a reduction in the fishing season. So this is where you could really kind of lean on some of these other management measures, such as a commercial trip limit, or a size limit to be a provision for the accountability measure, if those landings are exceeded, to just try to limit harvest and be a little proactive in what is caught. For instance, in size limits, you could set a size limit to try to protect the smaller size fish, which is what some of the discussion following the Merton presentations was.

I hope that kind of answers your question about what we're looking for. We could go one by one, or if you knew right from the bat that you really only wanted this for dolphin and wahoo then you just state, these are the species we're interested in. This is the reason why. Here are the management measures we would like staff to develop. I think that would be good.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. The reason I ask is because there are so many moving parts that are going to take a long time right now to discuss. I was just trying to find a way to get information from you guys. I have Graciela, then I have Nelson, then I have Julian.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So a question for the council members. Would you be interested in following through with any kind of commercial limits right now? The data that you have most recent is from the commercial sector. We don't have any recreational

data except maybe for tournaments, that's available for us to be looking at. The problem has always been one of allocation and the sale of the dolphin wahoo by recreational fishers rather than by the commercial sector. Probably you might want to consider if you want to include any kind of trip limits for the commercial sector at all. If you want to do, as you do with the other species that are under management, have a bag limit for the recreational sector. And I do have a question for Jocelyne for clarification, and that is, should the council be explicitly stating that there should be no sale of any of the pelagic by the recreational?

If we have anything to do with that right now. I mean, there is some prohibition on the sale by the recreational sector. You have to have a commercial business license in the Virgin Islands to do that. The recreational catch should not be sold in from the state waters of Puerto Rico, but do we also need to include something to that effect in our discussion of the pelagics?

MARCOS HANKE: Jocelyn?

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Sure. This is Jocelyn for the record. I think that there are definitions of commercial and recreational fishing that I can look up. I think that the definition of those would mean that recreational fishing is not fishing that's for sale. I just don't think it would be classified as recreational fishing if it was for sale, but I can confirm that. I think in any discussion that we have, we can state that recreational harvest should not be sold, but I don't know that there's a need to take additional action to specify that in any additional regulations. I think the regulations should cover that.

In terms of any of the territorial requirements for sale, one of the things that I want to note here is that those requirements sort of applies between the fisher and the territorial government. If there's legal activity, that's occurring in federal waters. For example, some recreational fishing and then persons go on the land with the fish. That sort of is between the federal government and the fisher and any state requirements are between the state and the fisher. But the state can't really make illegal what's lawful federally. So that would be a separate issue as to what state or territorial permits would be needed for the sale. Just at a high level, I think definitionally, you can't sell the recreational catch. So I don't know that we need to solve anything with any additional regulations there.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. I would like to ask to look around a representative what is the status of that? And whether you need to change it. Because when we discussed this before, it was almost impossible, according to the enforcement agents, to enforce the no-sale, because in the EEZ, unless you have somebody like a mothership buying stuff in the EEZ, it's impractical. So anyway, in Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands, do you have- I know the answer. Anyway, for the record, do you have a regulation, at present, that prohibits recreation fishers from selling their catches? and how is that enforced?

Damaris do you want to address that?

DAMARIS DELGADO: I think you know what's the status of our situation in DNER. Recreational fishers can't sell their catch. I mentioned that in our last DAP meeting. I reinforced that. So we have been trying to implement our recreational licenses but definitely, it's against the law for recreational fishers to sell their catch.

Thank you, Damaris. Nicole?

NICOLE ANGELI: Nicole Angeli for the record in the U.S. Virgin Islands, anyone selling any fish must have a commercial fishing license. We are also in the process of promulgating, recreational rules and regulations for fishing.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: So do you think that we need a compatible regulation in the EEZ for that activity, Carlos?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: I think it depends on what we're going to come up with here. Because I have some comments, especially when it comes to bag limits on wreck fishers.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Go ahead. You're talking about the details of the quantity. Okay. Graciela.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Graciela here. So Nicole, the recreational fishing license that you are going to be implementing, would that be in accordance with the MRIP, Count My Fish, Angler Registry that it's available for the EEZ?

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Yeah, Nicole Angeli. So those are two different programs. We are going to be seeking an NSAR, National Saltwater Angler Registry, exemption. We've been in discussions

with them at the headquarters level, that is currently mandatory for recreational fishers in the federal waters but to my knowledge, it's not enforced. We will be seeking that exemption and we had our rules and regulations reviewed by NSAR to ensure that we would be able to have that exemption if they are promulgated, which we hope to have soon.

As far as the MRIP program goes, that's currently being reviewed and reinstated within the Caribbean. We still do not have, as of our meetings last week, a governance structure which would be the preferred Caribbean option to join another FIN or have our own FIN, or just keep the status quo. Because we have so many different programs moving forward at this moment, I believe, we are quite possibly going to continue discussions on things like governance until we can conclude so many of these rules and regulations, changing island-based fisheries management plans are currently being amended. It simply didn't make sense to make final decisions before all of our changing rules and regulations had been completely promulgated and at a stopping point. I hope that answers that question.

MARCOS HANKE: I have the chat and then I have Julian and Nelson

CRISTINA OLAN: Comment from Sennai Habtes. Under the HMS permit, I believe there are sales allowed for the base species from chartered trips for a specific species, if they have both a charter HMS license and commercial endorsement and numbers are within recreational trip bag limits.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you for the comments Sennai, but we are really talking here about dolphin, wahoo, and blackfin tuna. We are not talking about skipjack tuna, Yellowfin, and the others right now. I just wanted to clarify that on record. Julian?

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julia Magras for the record. I have a couple of fishermen that do this for a living that I'm communicating back and forth with. We also presented, from the FAC back in 2019, to this committee some recommendations on the dolphin and wahoo. The strong message that I'm getting from the fishers in the Saint Thomas Saint John district are, that they would like to size limits for both the recreational and the commercial guys and definitely a bag limit for the recreational fishers. They're still having some discussions on what they would like to see as the commercial limits. I do have some numbers and if we're going to go slide by slide, then we can discuss it at that point. But right now, definitely bag limits and definitely size limits are the discussions that I'm getting feedback on. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you and Nelson and then the chat. I just want to remind the people that because of lack of time, we are not going to have a chance to go one by one through all of those possibilities we have under this discussion. Carlos going to present a motion to move this forward in a process that we can attend to this in detail. Nelson?

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo for the record. One of the reasons that I quit fishing for dolphin and wahoo, is that I cannot compete with the recreational. Every time I go out and come back with a good catch it's hard for me to sell it. Every time I go to the restaurant they say, no this recreational, this doctor, this lawyer, this recreational guy sold me the fish under the price. I don't want to pay the price you want for it. That's why I stopped fishing for dolphin and wahoo.

In my opinion, it's necessary to implement size regulations for both, recreational and commercial. A bag limit for the recreational is necessary, but a real back limit. In my personal opinion, I think 10 fish is enough for one recreational angler. You know, give fish to his friend to his family, you know, if you implement a size limit.

You cannot control the trip for commercial because this type of fishing is, the magic word, uncertain. You can go one day, and you don't find anything, maybe one or two. The next day you go, and you can get a couple of hundred pounds. I reaffirm the size limit is the key here to managing these species. Size limit, size limit.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Nelson. I want to add to what Nelson is saying that on the last discussion. We all recognize the influx of sargassum that we have, basically, Mahi on the small size, very small size available around the clock in Puerto Rico. There is not a huge market for it, but potentially that could happen. Right? And we need to be proactive on that matter. JJ, then we go to Carlos.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: JJ Cruz. Yeah, just to reiterate for the record. What we're finding in the ecosystem-based fishery management research, doing the conceptual models, is that recreational fisheries are one of the top five concerns across all stakeholders. We have interviewed around 250 individuals divided into seven different stakeholder groups and that aspect of the recreational fishery comes up as the main concern. That,

either licensing or doing this regulation should be attended.
Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for the comments. Carlos?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Carl Farchette so I have a motion. I'm not sure I'm going to be doing this right here, but I can always take all the help I can get. To develop an option paper, creating an IPT, to create an amendment. Okay, well, let's go back to that thing. I'll just use the wording that's there. That's what they're telling me. Go back to that last slide. I don't understand what the amendment is. It's not clear. So it seems like there's already a motion to develop an amendment and create an IPT but I don't know what they're talking about an amendment.

MARCOS HANKE: So can you clarify María? Just the language.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: This is María Lopez. Yes, because this is already an options paper, although it's very basic in terms of many of the options because we are looking for guidance for you. Once the IPT is created, and the staff has better guidance, we can move forward and start developing an amendment if that's the desire. But if you want to create another option paper that you can evaluate before moving forward with the draft document, then that's okay too. Graciela.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So it's an amendment or the island-based FMP. That's why we call it an amendment. That's what we're talking about.

MIGUEL ROLON: Graciela wait, but he's looking for language. Maybe between Graciela and María can help us develop the language for the motion.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: I think maybe Sarah already has some language that she can provide.

SARAH STEPHENSON: Yes. I sent that to Liajay.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCIA: Okay. Which one will it be? Sarah,

SARAH STEPHENSON: Hold on, I'll drop it in the chat.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCIA: Okay. Got it. Thank you, Sarah.

MARCOS HANKE: Carlos read and check if the language is what you're looking for.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Okay. Graciela, you guys want the same.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: I was going to ask you to read it for the record.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: *Carl Farchette here. The council requests staff to move forward with the preparation of an amendment to each of the island-based FMP to develop recreational bag limits, commercial trip limits, recreational and commercial size limits for pelagic stock that specified during the August 2022 meeting. María.*

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Just the clarification of what's in the brackets there. I believe that the council will decide what to do there, because if there's not a desire to do any of those things that were in the bracket, then there's no need to add to the motion, right? So if you, and this is a recommendation, a suggestion to discuss real quick, what is it that you would like staff to pursue? From what I'm hearing there was some interest in doing size limits for all harvest, commercial and recreational, and there was some interest in setting bag limits for the recreational sector. I also heard that there was not necessarily an interest to do a commercial trip limit. So based on that and other information that you can gather from the council, maybe that will be good for staff to start preparing. Also, think about if you want to have things that are compatible with the states in terms of size limits, for those species to have size limits already, or bag limits, etcetera. So those are the things that staff will need to start developing an amendment.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: There are certain things in there that I'm not in favor of, but that'll come up in discussions after.

MARCOS HANKE: Julian.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Well, I think everything sounds good. I think we need to take out the commercial trip limit though. I think our focus should be on the recreational bag limits and the recreational and commercial size limits, right now. Get rid of that commercial trip limits, because I think that will open up a whole different scenario. Thank you.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah, two comments. Related to what Julian just mentioned, I think it's important that the council discuss why you would be recommending limits for the recreational, but not for the commercial if you're going to pull that out. At this

point, keep in mind, we're early in the process so we can continue to keep the trip limits in, but you could always choose no-action and get feedback and input, obviously, from the industries you develop your rationale.

The second would be this pertains to all pelagic stocks. I recognize dolphin and wahoo are only in U.S.V.I., but Sarah and María presented eight species for Puerto Rico. Seems like we're narrowing in on more of a focused approach for dolphin, wahoo, and maybe mackerel, sierra mackerel, because those are the ones with size limits and bag limits currently are being proposed. I would recommend the council supportive of narrowing the scope of this action to those three species.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, Miguel and I will have comments on it. We really need to try to focus on ending this conversation in a productive way.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, the problem is when you start eliminating things in motion you are de facto deciding what to do. What you are asking the staff to do is to prepare a document that will cooperate all this. So the commercial trip limit should stay. And then when you get into the development as Andy mentioned, then you can say no-action and all that. But you need to assess all the angles and then you have specified during the August 22 meeting. So you can leave that as is. And then, in the record, you say for Puerto Rico, you want these three species; for San Croix, you want this other two, etcetera. That way the motion will move forward with the intention of the council to develop this document unless you wanted to include specifics in the motion at this time. But I believe that you have to be careful when you develop the record so that you don't come to conclusions before you even have your facts in front of you.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. I think Miguel synthesized, everything that was said. The intention here is to start the discussion and to drive the ball forward. Right? And very well noted the comments that Julian and Nelson did. That is on record already, do you agree with the language that it is Carlos?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. I agree with that language. Everything else will come out on the wash at the end.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. By the way, do we have a second for that motion? Damaris Delgado second. No se escucho Damaris.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Damaris Delgado, second.

MARCOS HANKE: Gracias. Thank you. Any further discussion? We are okay, María, go ahead. Let's go.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Okay, Thank you. I think it is pretty clear what we need to do, but there are a couple of things in terms of interest for the species. As Sandy mentioned before in Puerto Rico, there are a ton of species. If the staff is moving into preparing an amendment, that means that you have to do a lot of evaluations of a lot of these species. It will be nice to have some guidance. I mean, we already know that dolphin is a big-ticket item, and we also know that wahoo, etcetera. So, I mean, are you ready- if that's what you guys want to do at this time, then that's great and that's clear. Yeah, Miguel, go ahead.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, let's vote on the motion. And the second part will be just to answer her question because you have a lot of pelagics around. So, we can go by each one, you know, Puerto Rico, what are the pelagics that you want to include then, Saint Croix and then Saint Thomas Saint John. That way the record will be clear and we'll answer the last line that you have during the August 22 meeting, this meeting. These are the species. So the staff will know what are the desires of the council regarding the species that you want to address in each one of the areas.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Let's vote. Let's start with James.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yes.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Yes.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: Marcos Hanke, yes. Vanessa is not connected at this moment. Okay. We understand. Thank you.

Six in favor and one absent. The motion carries.

María- actually, I would like to answer the question that Andy did to us, why are we pursuing or focusing on recreational fishermen in terms of the bag limit and so on? But a question for you, isn't it better to develop the rationale once we have the whole document and guidance from this group?

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yes. Since the motion includes commercial trip limits. At this point, we would analyze a range of commercial trip limits. And at that point, you would build your rationale as to why you would or wouldn't require trip limits for the commercial sector or the recreational sector, etcetera.

MARCOS HANKE: I just want to make sure that I don't want to waste time.

MIGUEL ROLON: Okay. Well, not to waste time, but you need to tell the staff, what are the species that you want too. So I propose a question to the council, on Puerto Rico's side, which species do you want to address? And tell the staff, that these are the species that we would like to pay attention to.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. I will pass the voice to Damaris to Nelson, and I also have a comment on it.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes, Damaris Delgado for the record. So I would recommend dolphin fish, mahi-mahi, wahoo, and tuna. I would have to check that one.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. We have the mahi, the wahoo and on our list is the blackfin tuna. Yes. She's affirming that this is what she meant. What Damaris meant. Nelson?

NELSON CRESPO: I think we should concentrate on dolphin, wahoo, and mackerel, that's it? That is the most important regarding the size limits and everything. The rest are important, but the most important are those three.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. I have a different opinion about this because we manage all those species. We can establish an open limit for some of those species we can decide on it during the discussion. I think the bag limit for recreational should include all of the species. You can be more flexible in some of them, and more restrictive in some of them, but that discussion is for the future.

I think we shouldn't exclude species just because we want. Right now, we need to pass through the process, to analyze the biology, the fishing pressure, the landings, and all the elements that we need to take into consideration.

MIGUEL ROLON: Marcos, but the reason for having these four species is to address those that are our top priority. Of course, when you have a document like this is dynamic as you get more information, you will include more species as we do with

the management units for each one of the island-bases. But in this case, what we need from Puerto Rico, and from what I'm hearing, you're talking about four species. So the staff can take a look at them and provide us the information that we need to assess, well not the status, but assess what information we have regarding those species. And we're talking about the dolphinfish, the mackerel, the blackfin, and the wahoo.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Yes, and the cero, and the king mackerel. So both species.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. But my point and I understand Miguel to focus on those species, but my point is- we have a raised hand. My point is that we have the recreational being able or capable of catching the cero, the king, the triple tails, and the other ones.

MIGUEL ROLON: No, you're not discarding any of them. You are just giving priority to those species.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Just giving priority, not discarding the possibility of addressing them in the future, those species that I just mentioned. We have a raised hand.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCIA: Yes. Sarah Stephenson and Marcos was the one that prepared this.[laughter]

SARAH STEPHENSON Hi. Yes. This is Sarah Stevenson. I just wanted to verify, it sounds like for Puerto Rico dolphin and pompano dolphin, wahoo, the two tunas, and the two mackerel. So that would exclude the barracuda, the triple tail. And maybe just those two for the,

MARCOS HANKE: For the moment. Yes. In Saint Croix.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: This is Carlos, Saint Croix would be dolphin and wahoo.

MARCOS HANKE: Saint Thomas.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Yes. For Saint Thomas, it will be wahoo and dolphin.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. I have a raised hand from Julian. Are you going to say something?

JULIAN MAGRAS: Well, just two quick things, Julian Magras, for the record. Dolphin and wahoo I agree with that. And then I just

wanted to reiterate what Marcos was saying. The more I think about it here, sitting down, looking at some of the species or looking at all of it, looking at some for commercial guys, those five that were chosen are great. I think his main concern as being a recreational fisher is the bigger picture of looking at all of them due to the fact that the recreational fishing numbers are so high here in Puerto Rico. I would just like to side with him that I think all the species should be looked at just because of that reason instead of just picking a few.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. Well, that's not the case here. You need to tell the staff, what is it that- for each one of those species you have here, you have to have the life history, the statistic, on and on and on. Those other species, you can add later in the process. And then the staff can tell us, you know, in order for you to add this species, this is what you need.

We got 4,000 plus species in the Caribbean. We only manage less than three hundred. It's the same thing that we have here. We are not throwing away any of the species that are of interest to any of the sectors. I believe that what Marcos and Julian are saying can be taken into consideration for the rest.

At this time taking into consideration, the time, and the personnel that we have by giving this priority for the staff to work on, we are not saying that we are going to eliminate all the other species. Probably when we come back and get a report from the staff, they will say, well, we got 13 more that you need to address, but that's what they want.

You won't be able to have- every species that you can think of I have a decent report by the time that you get them back to us.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Just to make it clear, because I need to be clear on this, we already chose what is a pelagic species for the island-based FMPs for Puerto Rican and for each island. What we are talking about is, I understand that we can do in a process that we do the first step and a second step. But the point is what Julian just said, I'm going to give you this example, the bag limit for dolphin and so and so, and I was a poacher or was a recreational fisherman that fished for the dolphin now is hard for me to do it. Then I shift my effort to the king mackerel and to the cero and it's still going to affect the commercial fishermen. We need to address that. That's why I made the recommendation I did to be considered and evaluated for the future. That's why I did it.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So if I may. There is one thing that you need to remember. The commercial landings is the data that will be available up to 2017. Since 2017 there is no recreational data. And if there is, we request them from the local governments that we have access to that data that's not part of the Southeast Fishery Science Center database. MRIP did have an effort-based approach in Puerto Rico up until 2017. We're working on trying to get it back, but if there is any data out there that we can use, but if not, we are going to be limping around without recreational data from the Virgin Islands and from Puerto Rico for their most recent years. Having said that, that also includes all of the biostatistical data that we don't have from the recreational sector. So just to make you aware of the situation that we'll be in. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Thank you. We have on the chat. Andy, the chat and we need to close this discussion because they're getting way behind the schedule. And I left a little extra time because this was a very important discussion for the council, Andy.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah. And thanks Marcos for the extra time, I think this is important and it'll help with the IPT development of the action. I just wanted to get, I guess, a little bit of clarification because it's really important to go back to the purpose and need here. Right? And so we've talked about the importance of compatible regulations which I think can be a component of this as well as obviously just general conservation to be preventative of overfishing.

With regard to the actual options being considered for the trip limits and bag limits, we had options for both individual trip limits and bag limits, as well as aggregate trip limits and bag limits. Is it the council's preference for us to evaluate both?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, both.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Okay. And based on the species that have been recommended

MARCOS HANKE: This is not my opinion. This is what the council has been expressing over the years that their intention is to use both.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Okay. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Well, this is a battle that I'm going to lose, but when it comes to the recreational sector, I'm a recreational fisherman. That'll come up in further discussion, but there's absolutely no reason for a recreational fisher who fishes for fun and relaxation to have 30 dolphin as a bag limit on a vessel.

But I'm going to lose that battle because I noticed that the federal and the local state waters are similar in bag limit sizes from what I saw, but I'll fight it again. [laughter]

MARCOS HANKE: We're going to those details later. We need the virtual participant to give deference to them now.

CRISTINA OLAN: Si Vanessa Ramírez on the chat commented. I agree with Nelson for PR dolphin, wahoo, and mackerel are the most targeted.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Vanessa María. And just to wrap it up.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Yeah, I just want to, this is María Lopez. I just want to clarify to Carlos nothing is said right now. These were just examples of bag limits. This is now with the guidance that the council has provided, the staff will create an IPT and we will start developing an action and we will start creating options based on what you all have said. For example, if there's going to be a bag limit created, remember the U.S. Virgin Islands can be different than Puerto Rico. Saint Thomas can be different than Saint Croix. There are many things to consider in there, but that's an option and there are going to be several different options for the council to choose from. And for each one of them, we're going to have a discussion of the pros and cons. Okay so this is the next part, and one of the rationales could be compatibility with the state, but it doesn't have to be that. So that's why it's important for the council to set a purpose and need for this. If there needs to be further discussion about this we can do that in another meeting as well.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Thank you, María. Graciela

MIGUEL ROLON: Graciela just for the records. For the next time, you like tables. Can you prepare a table in 2023 about the data gaps that you just mentioned? So that way we will centralize ourselves and what are the things that we can do and things that we cannot do for those species.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Before we move on, Damaris.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes. Thanks. Just wanted to say for the record that we agree with Nelson about the mackerel as well, and the barracudas that were mentioned here. They're also important as mentioned by Sarah. I'm getting information from my team that other tunas like the yellow, the albacore, and the skipjack are also important. I know that we have to prioritize, but just for the record that this is information I got from our biologist.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. I really appreciate that. Some of those are already addressed by the HMS office, right? Those species and María, can we go on? Okay. Let's move on. The next presentation, which will be, was changed first for Kevin McCarthy.

**NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC)
Update— Kevin McCarthy, NOAA Fisheries**

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Kevin McCarthy. Thanks, Marcos. We've got two presentations one of which will inform the last discussion when it comes to prioritizing and what sort of data is available. And I'm already forgotten which one was going to go first, but I'm, so I'm going to look at the chat for my conversations with the science center staff.

Let's see, So I think Stephanie Martinez Rivera is going to go first and she's going to talk about what's called, variously, the data matrixing and the species prioritization for stock assessment. So we're calling it a data triage. So this will help inform some of the work that's upcoming for SERO staff. Both Stephanie and the following presentation by Rachel Eckley are members of the Caribbean fisheries branch at the Southeast Fishery Science Center. And both are based out of Miami, although nobody's actually in the Miami building right now, due to the COVID upsurge. So we'll start with Stephanie's presentation. So I'm going to pass it over to Stephanie.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: In Spanish?

KEVIN MCCARTHY: No, we're going to go with English today. But she could easily do Spanish. I think we're going to show the linguistic skills of the Caribbean Fisheries Branch at a future meeting.

MARCOS HANKE: Adelante, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE MARTINEZ-RIVERA: Buenas Tardes, Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

CRISTINA OLAN: Yes.

STEPHANIE MARTINEZ-RIVERA: Okay, so I'm Stephanie Martinez-Rivera. And today I will be presenting an update on the Cedar stock assessment matrix project.

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So first we have the objective for this project. We want to develop a standard process to prioritize the species that the branch will recommend for SEDAR to attend a stock assessment. So we can then identify all the federally managed species that have enough data for the stock assessment.

We also want to identify species to recommend for research and data collection. So in the future, we can actually recommend it for stock assessments. This project is going to focus on federally managed species, and we are using the island-based fishery management plan to get the list of species for the project.

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Okay. So here we have an outline of the process. In phase one, we organized the federally managed species into groups to add them to what we call a data triage table. So right now, we are working with group A, those are the indicators of species based on the fishery management plan. Then we move to phase two and here we identify some data sources and created the data triage table to annotate the information available for each species.

We are looking at catch that is commercial and recreational landings. We're also looking at any biological information that includes size compositions and life history. And lastly, we are looking at abundance information and that includes any feature independent surveys and the catch rates on features.

After that, we going to move to phase three and here we are going to analyze further each species and the data available. We want to review the data in detail so we can determine the spatial and temporal distribution that we can identify any other data sources that we may have missed in phase two, and that we can work with any other issues that are species specific.

Then we complete the project moving to phase four, here is when we develop the matrix, and then we can make the recommendation for species, for the SEDAR schedule to attempt a stock assessment and recommend species that require more data collection.

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Okay. So where are we right now in the process? So this is the preliminary results of- I'm showing you the data triage table for Saint Thomas and San John. Here, we have the indicator pieces. So this is group A, and first of all, we have commercial landings available, we didn't find any recreational landings at this time.

We know that the U.S.V.I. division of fish and wildlife started a project to collect recreational data. So that would be helpful in the future. Then in this table, we can look at the biological information. So most of the species or all the species have sites, but some have, or we have to look and investigate a little bit more about data, and then we have live history. And this is based on a study by Stevens in 2019.

This is just preliminary data. Now we have to go and do further research and a literature review to investigate the life history information for each of the species. Next, we have the abundance information and here the table can show you what species are in the brief visual census, that's a survey. We also did a preliminary estimate of the catch rate, and the table can show you which one has enough data and which ones we consider at this moment that have low data.

Next slide, please.

Next, we have Saint Croix preliminary results and I'm showing here the indicators species again here like San Thomas and Saint John, we have commercial landings information. We didn't find any recreational landings.

Moving on to the biological data. We at least have enough size composition information from the trip data. We still need to further analyze the life history data available for these species, as well as the abundance information. If there are any other fisher independent surveys, and to look into the data in more detail.

Next slide, please.

Okay. And lastly, we have the results for Puerto Rico. Again, these are the indicator species. For this group, we have commercial landings and recreational landings, but these are from the MRIP program, and that data ended in 2017. We know that

PR DNER has started a project to collect recreational data that will inform the future of all these species.

For the biological information, we have size comps for all these species. Again, we see that life history is something that requires more investigation to determine if there's enough data for these species to attempt a stock assessment. As well right now for the abundance of information so we need to find reliable estimates of abundance.

Next slide, please.

Okay. So now we're going to move to phase three, which is further research. So we need to explore the data in more detail. And first, we need to identify any other data sources available for life history information, for abundance, and for recreational data. After that, we going to do a literature review using the Caribbean research inventory and that's to investigate the station and temporal distribution of the data.

And at the end of phase three, then we can determine if the data available is enough to attempt a stock assessment, and then we can build our matrix to prioritize the species.

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Okay. So the next steps, we still need to develop the scoring system for the matrix. We want to update commercial landings to include data until 2021.

We then want to develop a program to automate the data triage table, using the information from the Caribbean research inventory. So that would be the final product for the project.

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And that concludes my presentation. Thank you. And I'll take any questions.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Stephanie. This is Marcos. I have a question for you. I recognize how challenging and super important is the job that you just presented. I'm seeing here that there is a big need to have close and constant communication with the people that are acquiring the data for the stock assessment, instead of waiting a long time to then need the data and not to have the data ready and confront problems that we didn't oversee. How are you addressing that problem?

For example, for the next stock assessment exercise, we have the weekly reports and the monthly reports from them. How is the progress of the job happening? I don't know what is feasible to do, but I'm seeing this as something that we should be focused a little bit on. At least for the researchers, for the person that is working to know, listen, we need your data, or do you need my support? Do you need some more materials? Do you need some other kind of support for this data to be available? That kind of coordination is where I'm going. Either yourself or Kevin, if you want to help me to understand that.

STEPHANIE MARTINEZ-RIVERA: So I cannot just- if Kevin wants to add at the end. I think that's what we're going to focus on now. That includes what we are going to do for phase three when I mentioned, look for data sources you can contact me. My email is in the slide, or we going to start looking for collaborations and start communicating with people that may have data to coordinate that.

And then the scoring system, we are trying to develop that so that we can know okay like there's information, but they still require maybe two more years to have that actual data. So we can use that in the scoring system and then prioritize by that. If that makes sense. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Kevin.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Thanks, Marcos. This is Kevin. So just following up on Stephanie's comments. I think we've got, you know, there are a couple of challenges when it comes to this and there are a couple of different ways to look at data availability, right? So there's if you've got a new project, you know, when's that going to be done? If it's a life history project or if you've got a new survey, when will you have a sufficient time series to add useful data?

For example, in an index of abundance, you're not going to get much if you've only got two years of data, but when you've got five years when you've got six years now, you've got a time series that may be a little more meaningful. So there's that kind of problem. And then there's the just general data availability where we're relying on a data supplier to give you the data. And so if it's within NOAA, we have a much stronger ability to get people to provide on a timely basis.

I would also say that our partnerships with the Puerto Rico staff and the Virgin Island staff are excellent. Everybody that

we've been partnering with has been very responsive in getting information to us. So that's working really well.

When you're dealing with independent researchers you rely on their willingness to provide data in a timely fashion. And most people are pretty good, but it is a challenge of a stock assessment that you've got lots of data inputs and lots of people providing it. So it's another challenge.

I don't know if that's a great answer, but that's the reality.

MARCOS HANKE: That is a great answer. Actually. I can focus my question better. I'm going to use, for example, lane snapper, which I'm donating and helping with the assembly. Right? And if you're going to address that in the near future you guys have that communication to build. A system of communication with whatever researcher is doing that job or is collaborating with others to get that job. To know the challenges because of the weather, because of COVID because of these or that. That's going to mess up the SEDAR schedule. This is my worry, right? We need to make sure that this channel of communication- because maybe with the support of somebody else during this problem that might show up, we can solve it and still do SEDAR. And I'm just requesting attention on that because sometimes, with time, we can be ready for the inconvenience.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: This is Kevin. So once this matrix is complete, we'll be able to turn it over to you all and you can look and see that we've got six species or eight species or a dozen species that we think have the data to attempt a stock assessment. Well, that's a lot of years in the future, right?

So then the next tier down will be a list of species that maybe it's missing life history, maybe it's missing some size comp. So in the five, eight years while we've got species that we think we have a good shot at getting a stock assessment, we can direct resource dollars at those other species and fill those data gaps. That may be in five or eight years they'll then be online, be ready to go for a stock assessment or at least to attempt a stock assessment. So I think that then we identify as a priority for research lane snapper that maybe is missing some data and in the 5, 6, 7 years while we're assessing the species that have information, we can complete that research. If that makes sense.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you very much. You, you got my point, and this is for just for good reason.

The other question I have for Stephanie is that I made a presentation and a point on the council on how important was to

consider the industry to support this data flow to get better and quicker. what is the plan? Not the idea, but the plan to include the commercial fishermen in data collection?

KEVIN MCCARTHY: So, this is Kevin. I think I'm better placed to answer this than Stephanie. So in Puerto Rico right now, we have some cooperative research going on with commercial fishers. So we've got some work on gear selectivity. We've got some work on collecting lobster size composition data for a recruit index that we're building.

So we've got that going on. And in the Virgin Islands, we've got some cooperative work also with gear selectivity. One of the challenges that we need to overcome in the Virgin Islands is to have a mechanism to get funding for that cooperative research. Here in Puerto Rico, we've got contractors who can coordinate the day-to-day work with the fishers. They can subcontract with them. I don't have a way to do that. They carry the insurance so that they can put a scientist on board.

So we have to build a similar structure if there isn't one already, and I'm not aware of one in the Virgin Islands and I don't claim to be an expert on what's available. But we need to have that kind of way to identify fishers, ways to get them paid, make sure people have insurance, ways to get observers hired, or scientists to go onboard the boats to do some of the work and, and develop a group of fishers who are willing to work at that.

When you start to fund things with federal dollars or they involve NOAA, the rules get very complicated, very fast. That's why we like to go through a contractor who can- they still need insurance and all of that stuff, but we need to be able to have that system because I can't directly hire a fisher to do cooperative research. I have to have that middle person to take care of a lot of the logistics

MARCOS HANKE: I understand. Thank you very much. The last comment on this issue is Julian. And we go to the next presentation.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras for the record. Well, this is a comment on what Kevin just said. And Kevin, the Saint Thomas fisherman's association would love to talk with you guys about what we can do to help. We have access to a lot of resources. I think it would be a good opportunity for us to sit down and we can have a discussion. So, yeah, just let me know and we can do that. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. The next presentation is going to be done by Cruz Motta, Dr. Cruz Motta's SSC report. Oh, I'm sorry, sorry I'm getting nervous.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: I've got one more, one more. I've got Rachel Eckley who's going to give us an update on our strategic- no worries. Rachel's very, very good and very quick. So I'm going to turn it over to Rachel Eckley so she could talk about some of our strategic planning we've been doing. And I think it dovetails very nicely with the strategic planning that the council's been doing.

RACHEL ECKLEY: All right. Thanks. Kevin. Hola, buenas tardes yo soy Rachel Eckley, trabajo en la sucursal de Caribbean Fisheries en el Southeast Fishery Science Center. Muchas gracias al consejo por el tiempo en la agenda voy a presentar un resumen del taller y proyecto de Caribbean strategic planning o planificación estratégica. Voy a presentar en inglés, pero quería dar la introducción en español.

MARCOS HANKE: Muchas gracias.

RACHEL ECKLEY: All right. Thank you. Okay. So the purpose of this project in collaborative exercise is to develop a strategic plan to improve the stock assessment and the services that we at the Caribbean fisheries branch provide to the council and the SSC. This is a multi-year project in which the first year focuses on the goals of the Southeast fishery science center. And then in year two, we will include regional partners and stakeholders to expand on some of these ideas.

To accomplish this objective of developing a strategic plan. We are using the Hoshin Kanri strategic planning method, which helps to prioritize activities that are aligned with our identified strategic goals.

We held a facilitated workshop in May of this year, in which we went through the Hoshin process and identified our long- and short-term goals for the project.

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This project is a big undertaking, and it was a huge team effort for those at the science center who are involved in Caribbean work. There were members from five divisions and 10 different branches who have been and continue to be involved in this project. During the process of soliciting help for the project,

we aim to bring in personnel with a variety of expertise for increased diversity of perspectives that would contribute to the regional issues that were to be discussed during the workshop which is why we involved so many different groups here at the center.

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Now I'm going to summarize the work that was actually performed during this workshop. So the Hoshin process is separated into three stages: pre-work, idea generation, and deployment.

For the pre-work stage. We reviewed previous work and efforts to understand what has, and what has not worked in the past. Next, we performed a PESTEL environmental scan, which stands for political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal. During this activity, we identified key factors that would influence or impact our goals in the future. The next activity was the SWOT analysis in which we identified internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. This helped us to identify ongoing efforts that we could potentially leverage as well as some impacts we needed to think about during our planning process.

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The last of the pre-work activities was defining our vision, mission, and our long-term goals. Our vision is for effective science and management partnerships and processes in the Caribbean region. Our mission is to conduct and communicate science, to support sustainable and resilient fisheries, ecosystems, fishing communities, and economies in the U.S. Caribbean. And from the mission statement, we derived two long-term objectives: One, conduct effective science, and two, strategically communicate science.

So at this level, we purposefully developed broad and higher level goals here to not limit any efforts moving forward. And then in the next few exercises, you'll see that we narrowed the focus more.

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Okay. So moving on to the second phase of the Hoshin process, which is the idea generation phase, we begin with brainstorming and the prompt for this was that we're five years into the future and we're wildly successful. Looking back at those five years, how have we achieved this success? So during this

exercise, we came up with over 100 ideas and tasks that would help us achieve success and attain our goals.

Then we performed affinity grouping in which we grouped liked brainstormed ideas together and created category names on the groupings, which became our first level goals. Then we created tree diagrams in which we took the broad and larger-scale ideas and translated them into smaller second-level goals. And then we took it even a step further into smaller actionable items or local projects as we call them, that we could accomplish on a shorter term that worked towards achieving our long-term objectives.

So on the screen here is a very simplified example of what the tree diagram looked like. I apologize for the formatting error at the top; I just see that now. At the top, we have our two long-term objectives. An example of a first-level goal is to efficiently manage and automate data. A second-level goal would be to implement agile project management procedures. And a local project that we could accomplish in the shorter term is to train staff in desired project management tools.

So in reality, each of these first-level goals has multiple second-level goals. And each second-level goal has multiple local projects. Next in the process, we performed arrow diagrams in which we analyzed all of the second-level goals and determined what type of relationship each goal had with the other goals. We performed this by lining all the second-level goals in a circle and then we drew arrows between to indicate which goal drives the other. And then finally we tally the arrows going in and out of each goal in an activity called driver's means and outcomes to identify the top driving goals and projects.

So when we started planning this workshop, what we didn't want was just a lengthy to-do list, which is why we chose this specific method of strategic planning. We wanted to be able to prioritize these projects and see how they interconnect at the next highest level.

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So here are all of the first-level goals, in white, that we identified during the affinity grouping. Indented below each of the first-level goals is an example of a second-level goal, as well as how many other second-level goals were identified during the workshop process. There were 24 of these second-level goals

in total. Remember that each second-level goal, again, involves multiple local projects.

So our first-level goals are to improve data collection efforts, accurately analyze data, efficiently manage and automate data, incorporate EBFM and socioeconomic impacts, enhance internal culture and communication, increase external collaboration and communication efforts, and address funding and securities.

And it's important to remember that these indented second-level goals are still pretty big-picture items. For example, under data collection, the goal to collect and compile life history data of priority species is still a really large task. As Steph just presented in the data triage, there are multiple steps to identifying life history data of priority species but there are so many smaller actions or local projects that would be associated with that specific second-level goal.

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Moving on to the final stage of deployment. We built what is called an X matrix, which helps to visualize the strategic plan in a single document view that makes it easy to understand: the current tasks, who's involved, and how they relate to higher goals.

To do this, we place those prioritized projects from the drivers means an outcome exercise at the very top of the X matrix. These are the most impactful actions that we've already begun addressing in working groups because they will allow us to accomplish the other actions later with high success.

These projects correspond to the first-level goals on the left side based on the interrelationships in the top left corner, as well as all the other corners on this board. On the far right, are the team members and leads for the project and in the center to the right of the X matrix are the measures and metrics for completing these current projects.

There are going to be multiple rounds of this selection process in which we identify and prioritize new projects to begin as the prior ones come to completion.

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So here are those seven top driving projects that we are focusing on first concurrently in working groups. These are those items listed at the top of the X matrix. To enhance

internal culture and communication, we're doing a few things. One of which is to plan the year two workshop, which will involve regional partners, including SERO, the council, and academic researchers, as well as some others. To improve data collection efforts we will identify steps to fix commercial landing database issues. To efficiently manage and automate data we have already trained staff in desired project management tools; so this project is our first one to have come to completion. To address funding and securities, we'll identify internal and external sources of funding as well as prioritize Caribbean initiatives. So, as I mentioned in the near future, as we finish accomplishing these initial seven, we'll prioritize the next round of projects that we'll focus on in the next few working groups.

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Okay. So moving on to some things that we learned during this process and some help that we need moving forward. This was the first real strategic planning exercise the center has done that was Caribbean-centric. We were really pleased with the participation of everyone that was involved as well as the diversity of perspectives that we had during the process. We had some really great discussions and ideas that came up.

We also learned that communication is key, be that both external and internal communication efforts, which is why we identified communication and collaboration as first-level goals for us. And lastly, we learned the importance of this process and strategic planning in general, based on the number of local projects that were identified throughout this workshop process.

In terms of help needed, we need continued support from the central leadership. And I want to add that they have been very supportive thus far and very pleased with our efforts thus far. Finally, some challenges that we always face are dedicated funding in the U.S. Caribbean and personnel in order to accomplish these goals that we've identified.

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So that's all I had for this. It was just a brief report out of our Caribbean strategic planning workshop. And I'd be happy to take any questions on this. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. This is very promising; it's going to take us on a much more productive route. Thank you very much. Any question? I have time for one question.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So, I mean, I think that from all the presentations that we've heard from the science center, one of the main things that we should follow through is in the request for any kind of missing pieces that we don't have access to, to come forth and provide us with that information. My question is, and it goes to both, the exercise that we're doing in the strategic planning, which merges with the strategic plan from the council and other regional office strategic plans, which is great. I want to see where all those come together in the end; so that, I think it's going to be optimal. But how far do we want to go back in terms of acquiring information that's been collected? Do we want to go through data mining exercises, from way back when? That might be the only information that we have available. Do we want to do it from now forward?

You know, in terms of both, the strategy of how we're going to do it, and where does it fit in. Because the science center had many branches that have been conducting business here for many years. So how are we going to do that? Does that come in at both stages, at the planning for the future and the data mining that we have in the triage matrix? See, that's where I'm hitting in my thinking.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: So are you asking a database manager or an assessment biologist? Because an assessment biologist wants to go back to the first fish ever caught and a database manager wants to go back to the time when the data was in good shape. So it's a tradeoff and I don't know that we've determined what that tradeoff is. I think as we identify data, we find ways to use it. So if there's data going back it may require some resources, right? If there's data on paper that needs to be entered into an electronic database then, you know, that doesn't mean we don't want to do it, but it does mean we are going to have to find some resources to get it done. If that's helpful.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Oh, that's very helpful because the ecosystem-based fisher management technical advisory panel and the efforts of Lenfest, etcetera are data mining, are bringing quantitative data to the table. One of the main problems that we are going to be facing is managing all that data and storing all that data and making it accessible for the general public to do other, research, or other ways of looking at the fisheries in the area.

So we are heading in the same direction. We have the same problem; we're trying to find resources to deal with data

management, and data storage, and to actually provide us with a very good platform for the EBFM.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Graciela. The next presentation. And thank you very much, Kevin, and for the two presenters for a great presentation. Next is JJ.

**Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Report—Richard
Appeldoorn, SSC Chair**

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Thank you, Mr. Chair, if we can have the presentation, please. Thank you. JJ Cruz, for the record, I'm here on behalf of the Chair of the committee, Dr. Richard Appeldoorn, who couldn't be here. I'll try to summarize this presentation as much as possible. So to make up some of the time.

Next one, please.

We talk about four aspects. The main ones, the two principal ones were those two. We talked about SEDAR 80 and also research recommendations.

Next one.

So with SEDAR 80 first of all, we recognize that the approach that was presented was novel, was very interesting and as you will see later, we had some issues, concerns. But what I can tell you is that we covered all aspects of that SEDAR from the data that was used to do the SEDAR all the way down to results and recommendations.

Next one, please.

However, most of our concerns came out of the data that went into the SEDAR. These were the four types of data that were used for these SEDAR 80: landings, length structure, and abundance indices. There were two types of indices, one based on visual censuses coming out of NCRMP and the other based on trap catch effort.

Next one, please.

Main issues with landing data, and I'm going to go really quick on this one because it's the same issue— It's not only for queen triggerfish that we have this issue. We have had these issues for many years. Actually, I've been on the committee only three

or four years but before that, we have been having all these concerns.

Here are a few things that I can mention. One is the famous expansion factor. One thing that I want to say about this is now we have a port sampling report that might help evaluate these expansion factors once that report is independently reviewed. The data series that we looked at had some issues. For example, it changed the users of gear, down in the list, has changed since 1983 it has not been constant

Diadema was the other important point we addressed. We don't know what the potential effect of the Diadema die-off in this data series is.

Next one.

Based on our discussion, the model requires estimations of landings before 1983. In addition to that, the first two years of that data series had declined in landings. So a different pattern from what we observed in the rest of the data series. There were questions then related to that. What happened before 1983? What was the effect of the Diadema die-off? was that decline related to that Diadema die-off? Then we realized that the total landings across all species were also declining at that time.

Next one, please.

Also the length structure, we thought was the most robust data for the assessment. However, it had two issues that we identified. First, the length data alone would not provide reference points for the estimates. And second, the assessment was very sensitive to estimates of L_{∞} .

Also, the growth estimates were based on local stocks. This was very important. There were two individuals that were used in this modeling that disproportionally affect the estimation of L_{∞} . But we'll see that later in what we're going to do about this in the future.

Next one

Similar things happen with the NCRMP data or with the visual census data. The main concern that is listed there is that that data changed the methods that were used over time, right? So there was a lot of uncertainty associated with that. Not only

did the method change but the places where those visual censuses were done changed through time.

Very important, depending on the year of sampling or through the sampling period, the size classes changed, and it was not clear how that was dealt with. We also believe that the places where NCRMP is performing this are not typically queen triggerfish habitats.

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But then what about all these? The science center- and I think this is a very important point in the discussion that is about to come- pointed out that before we move forward there are a few options in addition to a stock assessment, that we can do, and we can follow based on the science center recommendation.

Before we do that, we need an assessment. We need some basic information on where to start following this species. For example, I was proposing that during the meeting, we could follow and adapt the management approach using some sort of index. But the important point is we need something to be done, so we need to move forward which is the second point on the list there. However, before we move forward, we believe that some aspects require more attention. And for that, we asked the science center to run additional analyses such as alternate assumptions or running sensitive analyses. It was even proposed to use a Monte Carlo bootstrap simulation to resolve some of, or to attend to, some of the issues we have raised.

Now, what is going to happen is that there will be a short webinar with the science center in the months to come in which those alternate scenarios will be decided on. No? out of all that stuff that can be done, what exactly are we going to do? what is the sensitive analysis that we're going to do? What are the different alternate assumptions that we going to run? And then based on that short webinar, the science center is going to work on those new simulations, and they will be presenting again at the next SSC meeting.

Next slide, please. The next one, this is the same one.

As I mentioned before under the recommendation of the science center, they're going to work on this alternative modeling, and they will bring them back to the SSC for review. Time at which we hope we can provide a recommendation to the council.

Next slide.

In terms of research recommendations. Right? I would like to- we haven't advanced much in relation to the previous report that was presented to this council. It's still a list. If you look at the research recommendation, it is still a list, it looks more like a wish list, right? It's like, these are the things that in our opinion need to be done.

Next one, please.

What I want to stress from this new discussion is the last point on this slide. As you can see we did minor adjustments to what we presented before so that's why I'm not going into details about those. I want to talk about the last point, and this is very important. Whatever recommendations we make to the council need to be justified by asking, what is the use for the council? The prioritization of those recommendations needs to be based on what are the needs of the council. It's not just like, I believe this should be the most important research. It is, what is the research that is more important to answer the specific question of the council?

In this regard, but this is going to be detailed in the EBFM report I guess, the work that has been done in the concept modeling, a work that most of you have participated in, will give quantitative evidence to prioritize these research priorities.

Next one.

So I won't go through the list because as I mentioned before, it's a list it doesn't have a ranking. What I'm going to emphasize is that those research recommendations were divided into big groups, preliminary big groups. The first group is to improve research directed at improved commercial, recreational, and charter landings data.

Next one, please.

The second big group is a collection of biological data for life history and population parameters. Within that one very important or another one that is done below is for research designated at estimation effort.

Next one.

There is a big component that is related to EBFM and ecological aspects. However, this group will be developed in detail in the EBFM group.

Next one, please.

A very specific one is, prepared for H-2 flexibilities and monitor- No, sorry. No, this is not the last one. Monitoring and surveys are other important groups.

And the last one is socio-economic data for management. I believe this is a new component in addition to the other ones you had already seen in the previous report. But please note that it's about collecting data in a frequent manner that has not traditionally been collected for the region that has to do with the socioeconomics.

It is proposed by the committee that all of the above should be facilitated through MOUs between the council, the science center, territories, and other organizations.

Next one.

I mentioned there were four aspects, so this is the third one. It was a minor comment that lasted about 15 minutes. The SSC is requesting the council's written guidance for the SSC members. The SSC noted that the MSA guidance perhaps is too general and that other councils had more specific details. But I believe this will be addressed during this council. So I will not give further detail.

Next one.

This came up in the last part of the meeting. It has to do with a conflict of interest that I also- well, I don't know if it will be addressed today, but basically what happened was. I'm going to read this because it's delicate. During the meeting, Virginia Shervette, as an outside listener, posted in the chat that there was an appearance of a conflict of interest between Todd Gedamke as an SSC member and the NOAA-funded Puerto Rico port sampling and catch validation project that was conducted by MER. MER is the MER consultants of which Todd Gedamke is a principal partner. The general counsel stated that conflict of interest within the SSC is limited to recommendations on peer review and reminded us all that SSC members are required, annually, to submit financial conflict of interest forms.

Next one.

Todd Gedamke reminded the SSC that this accusation was reminiscent of previous allegations of conflict of interest coming from the U.S.V.I., which were not sustained. And again, requested a formal clarifying statement from the general counsel. He then recused himself from all further SSC business until his name and that of MER consultants is clear in a document from the general counsel.

So basically, this is a request to the council. This is about the final slide of the conflict of interest. However, the Chair of the committee, Dr. Appledoorn, asked me to read his individual view on this matter, which I believe is the next slide.

Yeah. So these are the comments by the Chair.

The council is reminded that this accusation, in addition to being identical to those raised in 2017, follows the similar accusation made by Mr. Julian Magras, within the context of his DAP report at the last council meeting. A formal request to the council concerning the validity and consequences of the accusation at the last council meeting is still pending. The role of the SSC is to provide independent, scientific advice. This cannot happen if the SSC is subject to bias, pressure from stakeholders, or fear of removal on the basis of uninformed and unsubstantiated charges. Unfortunately, this may lead to changes in how SSC meetings are conducted, with discussion limited to SSC members and those presenting reports to the SSC.

And I think there is one more slide or that's it.

Yeah. This is more on a happy note. We will be presenting next week at the national join SSC meeting all the work that we have been advancing in the region on EBFM. If you want to join. the details are there. It will be Tuesday morning.

If you have any questions, I'll be happy to take them and answer them as best as possible. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. Most of the information that is in there was presented to us at the previous meeting. The sensitive issues exposed by JJ that happened at the meeting will be addressed in a closed session. The council is taking careful action with the advice of the legal counsel. Jocelyn, do you want to say something, or should we move on?

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Sure. Thank you. On the agenda, I believe for tomorrow, is a little bit of discussion of the code of conduct and conflict of interest. So in connection with that discussion, I think I'll just provide an overview of some of the regulations and guidance that exist and apply to the SSC regarding peer review. Those specifically talk about conflicts of interest as JJ noted in his slide and then there are requirements for financial forms. So we can touch briefly on that as well as developing a document that just sort of explains what the conflict rules are and how those relate to financial conflicts or objectivity concerns in reviews so that there's some clear information. We can talk a little bit more about that tomorrow. Then, with respect to the role of the SSC, as the slides mentioned, that role is defined in the council's statement of organization and the operating procedures and practices, and also in the Magnuson act. I have some slides on that. It might be useful to show those at an SSC meeting, or you can circulate them to the council, or I can do them now if that's helpful. But I think these are ongoing discussions. And I can speak a little bit more tomorrow about the conflicts when that's on the agenda.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. We have a raised hand. Please be brief. Nancy?

NANCIE CUMMINGS: Can you hear me now? Hello? Can you hear me? Okay. Thank you very much Chair. I'm Nancie Cummings, I'm technically, officially an analyst, stock assessment analyst from the Southeast fisheries, but I'm speaking on behalf of myself as a taxpayer and also as a stock assessor, stock assessment research analyst.

I was the presenter or tried to present this stock assessment to the SSC on the 1st of August, that was last Monday, and it continued to Tuesday. There are a few things, I just want to say, that I don't feel are accurately reflected in the summary. Most, I think the majority of the summary, I do agree with. It's particularly the additional and follow-up analysis because we always know that we need that just to remind the public and the council that I was doing three stock assessments.

Normally an analyst does one stock assessment in a year. But we did have an opportunity. I was prepared to present sensitivity analysis in particular regarding one of the questions having to do with what the exploitation history looked like if we started in 1985 instead of 1983, but I was just allowed to do that by both through a disruption set of episodes that occurred, but also the Chair did not fit that into the agenda. There was time

to present some additional work that we had done, but it just did not happen. I wasn't allowed to present that material.

The other thing I think that can- this is just a good, strong suggestion, is that when SSC members are invited to participate in the technical working groups or topical working groups that have been set up through the operational stock assessment, process, SEDAR take advantage of those opportunities. We had life history, what topical working group. We had a set of indices, IPT type calls plus an index working webinar that was five series. We also had a fisher slash retention selectivity three days of those webinars. And so the folks that were the strong adversarial individuals to account or didn't participate in those sessions. That really could have helped I think progress this assessment along the way. We have more to learn and I'm eager as I think all the staff is eager to participate, but we do need to be allowed to do our job, and that is to present the information in a structured and uninterrupted way.

The other thing is the terms of reference for this assessment were never even addressed, even though I presented them, no one from the SSC or no member looked at the terms of reference and said, did we address that term of reference? The next term reference. And most of the slides indicated which term of reference the material was addressing.

So I think that would've been also one thing that we could have been evaluated on, and if I have forgotten anything. Thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. JJ, I will hand the turn to you and then to John, and we need to wrap it up because we want to keep going on the agenda.

I just want to reiterate that the council is addressing this with the support of the legal counselor. I want to remind everyone that this is the first time that I see the discussion of the SEDAR 80 or the CSSC, this is an ongoing learning process for everybody. The council will address this in order to have a productive meeting with parameters and way to conduct and all the things that were discussed and well explained by Jocelyne already.

Uh, JJ briefly, please.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize. I tried to summarize too much, and I didn't have time to recognize the amazing work of the people at the science center. I testified

the availability and willingness of Nancie Cummings to do all the sensitivity analysis on the spot. I just wanted to certify that. Thank you very much. Yeah. I'm sorry we couldn't work on this part and all that. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: It's a project in evolution and I also thank you, Nancy, for all your dedication. John Walters.

JOHN WALTERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to move us forward because I think we've seen from this process that stock assessment is hard. Reviewing assessments is almost equally as hard and challenging from a scientific standpoint, but we've got more work to do because we need to give you, the council, advice that you can use to manage the stock. And I think that's what we have to keep our eye on the goal moving forward.

To that end, one of the key points that we need to get an agreement upon is this second SSC meeting. Ideally, for early October, we think it can be a couple of hour webinar, but it's critical that we as a science center, work with the SSC to bring a proposal forward for addressing some of these concerns. I'll state that we cannot address every one of the concerns in this framework and in the timeframe to provide management advice. There is a time clock for everything, and we work with the science that is available at the time. We can't incorporate everything, but we can put a proposal forward that will address a number of these concerns. And as Nancy, our really competent analyst mentioned, she's willing and able to address them. We just need to get that on the books and be able to, I think, federally register notice that and try to make that happen so that we can then determine what's going to be in the November meeting and whether we will address SEDAR 80 in the November SSC meeting, or whether it will be solely SEDAR 57. Where there's a decision point before the council is, is there a prioritization on 57, which is spiny lobster and getting operational, if there's a short amount of time for that November meeting, in which case it might be solely just reviewing SEDAR 57 or- and if that's the priority that would be good for us to know.

And then if there's additional time, do you want us also to try to fit in SEDAR 80 in that November meeting, knowing that SEDAR 57, is itself going to be three assessments? So there are two questions there. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel will address that. I was at the meeting. I want to address that too. Okay.

MIGUEL ROLON: Okay, it's also a question for Graciela. Definitely, we want to prioritize those two this year. Graciela

the October meeting is a reality? Can we do that and look at 57 then?

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Well, my question was going to be specifically about the date, because if we can get the spin lobster update- but Kevin had mentioned November earlier. It would either mean like a one-day meeting, would that be enough to deal with the SEDAR 80 issues? Oh, so I'm trying to decide if we can have a one-day meeting in October, that can be virtual if we're going to deal with SEDAR 80. Then the spin laughter update will take probably a day and a half. It depends on how much, so that's what I'm trying to figure out. And then you have SEDAR 84, which is coming up next, and the SSC needed to look at the terms of reference. So the dates, I think that we should talk about the dates and see if we can set it up.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. What I was thinking of, at least for the record is to ask if Kevin and John were to decide our time here, what would be the best use of our time between here and December? For all the things that you need. You don't have to say now, but at least Graciela will be able to confer with you too and be able to decide on the timing and how much time you need, etcetera, for those two.

I believe that the council understands that the priorities are 57 and 80, the spiny lobster is the number one. And then we will leave it to the discretion of Graciela and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center as to the dates. Because Graciela has to look for the timing when the majority of the member would be available. And of course, the people of the service design center. You don't need to do it now, but if you want we can do it now or think about it. And tomorrow we can come up with it.

MARCOS HANKE: Kevin.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Just so long as we leave here with the decision and a way forward. If you need to move on today we can meet with Graciela to map out something. And as long as we get a decision tomorrow, by the end of the meeting, we'll be fine.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Please meet with Graciela do the right thing and prioritize both. This is what we need on the council. And we discussed a little bit on the SSC about that, about the peculiarities of 57, and I think it's doable and you guys can do it. You have our support and tomorrow we can find a space on the agenda to make a quick decision reflecting this intention.

MIGUEL ROLON: And if you're looking today, just write a motion that can do that tomorrow. If we need a motion for tomorrow, write some language so we can move forward. So we don't have to rehash the whole discussion again, just for tomorrow not now.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Graciela. the next presentation will be by Sennai Habtes. I had the opportunity to talk to him and he told me that it was a very short presentation. It will be verbal. That's correct Sennai?

SENNAI HABTES: I have a presentation that Liajay can put up. But to make sure we don't stress you out too much, Marcos, I'll go through it pretty quickly.

MARCOS HANKE: Please go ahead.

**Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Technical Advisory Panel
(EBFM TAP) Report—Sennai Habtes, EBFMTAP Chair**

SENNAI HABTES: Right afternoon, everyone. Apologize for not being able to make it this time in person. I'll just give you a brief update on where we are with the EBFM technical advisory panel.

Liajay, next slide. Is it Cristina, that's turning it, I apologize.

CRISTINA OLAN: Yes, it's Cristina. The one driving the presentations.

SENNAI HABTES: Thanks, Cristina. Just a reminder to everyone this is the charter for the EBFM Tap. I'm not going to [unintelligible] as you guys have seen it before.

Next slide.

Under this charter, we created an overarching goal for developing a fisheries ecosystem plan to promote ecosystem-based approaches to ensure healthy, resilient, productive Marine ecosystems in the fisheries resources dependent upon those ecosystems. Then the context of the unique, biological, ecological, economic, social, and cultural characteristics of those fishery resources in the communities dependent on them for the U.S. Caribbean.

Under that framework, we've created the following goals, which you've all seen before, so I won't go through them. For anyone that has not seen them, if you have any questions, you can feel

free to reach out to me and I'd be happy to provide more information. But due to time, we'll just continue moving on to the next slide and get to some of the updates of where we're at.

So next slide.

What we've developed is based on the Lenfest loop, which is identifying a group of objectives, components, and frameworks, following a circular process for developing fishery ecosystem plans.

The major point of where we are now is trying to articulate a vision for fisheries ecosystem planning in the U.S. Caribbean. That's to look at previous efforts and create a broader vision for how it works. Identify strategic objectives, which is how we develop an ecosystem framework for management in the U.S. Caribbean. Identify the risk points and prioritize strategic objectives, meaning, what is the strategy that we need to follow? And then create operational objectives that can be used in a plan that the council can use to make options and decision support systems using EBFM as a management tool for fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean. So that's what we're trying to do, and we're following it through the existing Lenfest loop that's been developed.

Next slide.

Where we are now is, we've developed a set of working groups that we have models working on the different components of what we're using to build the FEP or the Fisheries Ecosystems Plan. I've already presented those so I won't read out all the members and the outcomes of that. But the broad-based points of these working groups, one, is to meld the conceptual models that have been done for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix districts within the U.S. Caribbean. Identify the important ecosystem indicators that can be used in ecosystem-based fisheries modeling. Go through a risk assessment process that would allow us to identify the best indicators that can be used in the FEP. Create a strategy for developing the necessary data management, coordination policies, and infrastructure necessary to do EBFM through a fisheries ecosystem plan in the U.S. Caribbean. And finally, the drafting of a fisheries ecosystem plan, which contains all of those components and a plan with decision-making protocols that the council can use to make decision support systems useful for U.S. Caribbean fisheries.

Next Slide.

As part of that, we have a lot of partners and collaborators, which I've enumerated before. Much of the work is done outside of the EBFM Tap. We're using a lot of that information to summarize and develop an FEP that can be used by the council going forward.

Two of the major partners are JJ, who's sitting with you guys there, and Tarsila Seara's project that they were funded by Lenfest to develop conceptual models for the U.S. Caribbean, as well as the Southeast Fishery Science Center that was given a grant to create an ecosystem indicators report, which I believe they have drafted, it has not been finalized, which will probably be a basis for a lot of what goes into the first part on background for the FEP.

Next slide.

Where are we now? The conceptual models have been completed. They've been done by partners through Mellivora Consulting, (unintelligible), and Lenfest. JJ's group is in the process of merging the terminology across models to create a singular U.S. Caribbean model, in which we can then identify the process by which we can create either island-based or district-based conceptual models, and understanding what is necessary for developing those within the context of an FEP. Those indicators will be used to develop a large-scale conceptual similarity analysis to identify what is similar or different across the different districts. And we can use those components to create a larger, better-melted model for ecosystem indicators. That can be part of indicators from the ecosystem status report or other available quantitative data sets that have been compiled by partners for the FEP.

Next slide.

The largest process that's been ongoing has been the data procurement in the simulation process that you've heard a little bit about so far today, by JJ and by Graciela. I won't go through all of the individual ones that are on there, but we're going through a process currently. Thanks to the work that JJ's doing to do a lot of multi-varied ordination statistical approaches to identify how those ecosystem indicators can be used for looking at time series data and understanding changes in the fisheries. At the present, we've completed an inventory of the EBFM necessary data within the U.S. Caribbean, which will be summarized within the FEP.

Um, from that we can create operational systems as well as operational products that can be identified for use in EBFM data models, as well as, hopefully, eventually, stock assessments within U.S. Caribbean.

Next slide.

Um, last but not least just some ongoing things. A lot of what we're doing now is the reporting process. We have a couple of presentations that are being done by partners like those that were done at ICRS by both JJ Cruz Motta and Tauna Rankin. I've listed some of those there. The partners from the SSC that has developed the ecosystem status report that you're waiting on and then the upcoming presentation from JJ, which would be at the NSSC meeting on multivariate approaches for EBFM implementation and the peer review.

In addition to these, we are working with potential collaborators through the ongoing working groups to identify the infrastructure necessary for the implementation of the EBFM. A large portion of what I want to stress today is the need for a little bit more clarity, either from council staff or for the council itself on how we can work with outside partners to either go after the funding necessary for this infrastructure or developing a plan for who will manage and use the infrastructure necessary for housing EBFM indicators, and data associated with that.

All right. So with that, I'll move on to the last couple of slides. This is just a timeline, you can skip that, Cristina. Those were all on that first one. Skip a couple forward so those don't keep showing. One more. All right.

So we've reached the point where we've completed all the conceptual models. We're in the melding process now, as well as using that, to identify the indicators. We'll be doing that through the model melding working groups that hopefully can have all of that completed by December of 2020.

Next slide.

Then over the course of 2022, we plan to be working on the strategic objectives and drafting of the FEP through the individual working groups, creating measured performances that can be used as a management strategy for the council and decision support systems related to U.S. Caribbean fisheries, as well as developing a feedback mechanism for that management.

All of these we hope to do in a draft FEP document that should be completed by August 23. As I mentioned, a little clarity on how we can engage partners who have been willing to provide funding for developing and helping to draft the FEP from either the council or council staff would be appreciated. Um, same as with developing the draft plan for managing the data needs, which are substantial, towards getting us to a point where we can do EBFM within the U.S. Caribbean.

All right. Last slide.

As I've talked a little bit about some of the partners who've been wanting to provide expertise and help. Some of those include the Net Gains Alliance, which we are in ongoing conversations with, for potential collaborations for data repositories and a sharing and management agreement. We also had communications with Smithsonian Mangrove Project Groups and Steven Canty and Susan Kotikot for data storage, as well as PNLL or the Pacific Northwest Laboratory who was working with aquaculture and wave energy projects in Puerto Rico. All have expressed interest in helping us on developing the data repository and sharing needs for EBFM within the Caribbean.

Um, so with that, I'll open it up to any questions or discussion.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. And like you reiterated; you are restating where we are for the new council members and everybody. Once this keeps developing, we will be open to questions in the future. Right now, we're short on time. If you have any questions, just post them on the chat. Any questions for Sennai, thank you very much. And we have, Graciela, do you want to say something quickly?

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So I mean, we are trying to figure out a way of managing the data. As I mentioned earlier, we're trying to look for storage. We are talking to Caricoos, and Sennai is asking specifically about types of collaborations that we can go into, for example, with Net Gains or any of the other groups that might have a bit more experience in data managing and helping with the EBFM.

One issue that we have is that Orian Tzadik has gone to work for protected resources in NOAA and he's a member of the TAP. We need to know if he will remain as part of the team, or if he would become part of the staff, you know, and helping on the side. And in that case, who can replace him? We also have that you know PEW and others that have been working on other projects

that really have a lot to do with the EBFM. So we need to know exactly how we're going to work with all these collaborators and how we can bring everyone on board because we're all pushing in the same direction. So these are things that we are working on—I mean, Caricoos would be a specific solution to the problem, but others have the same capabilities. So we need to identify both people. And funding opportunities for collaborations. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Graciela. Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yes. Graciela, the Chair, and I can take this task and report back to you in December.

**Report on July 20, 2022, District Advisory Panels (DAPs) Meeting
on Deep-Water Reef Fish Fishing— Marcos Hanke, CFMC, and DAP
Chairs**

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you, Miguel. The next presentation is the district advisory panel and it is a special meeting on deep-water snapper. I was the Chair of the meeting, but the real drivers of this meeting are the DAP Chairs. And basically, the meeting discusses the main problems or main situations that involve deep-water snappers. You guys are going to hear briefly from each of them on each of the topics. We are going to start with Nelson.

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record. I'm going to be really quick. Although, at present, it has not been possible to verify if traps were begun used, or not, to catch the queen snapper, we believe it's pertinent to close this door in order to avoid possible damage to this fishery in the future. Also, I think that before the local government starts granting more permits for snappers it is necessary to study how much the resource can hold. In order to do that, I suggest the development of a stock assessment in the future.

Also, the falsification of the permits for Snapper Unit 2 is a serious and worrisome matter. I want to know if there's any update on this investigation. What I hear out on the field is that this situation is increasing dramatically, and I want to take action really fast. I don't want this matter, to get out of control.

Lastly, I would like to tell you something that I consider very important. Snapper fishermen, before, had a mental barrier that made them think that they couldn't fish deeper than 1,300 feet.

When the Okeanos Explorer started publishing that the queen snapper was observed at, at least, 1734 feet deep, the fisherman began to explore. At present, considerable catches are being reported at a depth of 2000 feet plus. In other words, the fishing area for this species was expanded by around 600 feet more, increasing exponentially.

The fishermen are catching other species like the black queen snapper, and the alfonsino, which were not very common before. Opening the door to create a constant market for this species. For the rest of the report, you can check the briefing book. I think it speaks for itself. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Nelson. Julian.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Hey, good afternoon. Julian Magras, for the record. I'm going to speak on three points out of the report. The first one that was a very hot topic at the meeting was, to prohibit the use of traps by recreational fishers in the EEZ for all species. This has been an issue that has been coming up at several council meetings. The people in attendance at this meeting highly recommended that the council visit the banning of all traps for recreational fishers in the EEZ. I hope we can have some kind of discussion about that at some point.

The second item was to develop a deep-water Snapper Unit 2 permit for the EEZ of all tree islands for all commercial and recreational sectors. I think this is important. There are some rules and regulations in place already. I think for areas like- I'm going to use Saint Thomas Saint John as an example, where its fishery is underdeveloped, I think it's a great opportunity to develop licenses, permits as we would say, for the recreational and commercial sectors. Um, and it's also a great opportunity since it's an unfished fishery. Very small amounts are landed. It allows fishers to have a different way of fishing. Instead of putting pressure on other areas, you can relieve pressure off of certain fisheries and you can put pressure on this area. So that's also something that we would like to discuss.

Then my last topic was identify and address data gaps for future stock assessments for deep water snappers. I am going to say this, I'm going to expand a little bit on just deep-water snappers, but I think it's for all stocks that we are doing assessments for. I think if we know and identify the assessments of the species that we are going to be doing, they can be looked at before doing that assessment to ensure that we have the information that is needed to do the assessment. Because what

happens- and I've seen this with several assessments that have been done. We spend all of this time and a lot, a lot of money and when the results come out, we don't have enough information to complete the assessment. Then it raises the biggest word that has been used over the past few years, uncertainty.

When uncertainty is driven into the factor of making decisions on certain annual catch limits or any rules and regulations, it has to be taken into account and the fishers are the ones who receive it. So my recommendation there, is we look at what is needed and let us work together and get what is needed. This way when we do the stock assessment, we can have as much, I'm not saying we're going to have all, but we can have as much available to proceed with that assessment so the SSC, at the end of the day, can have the tools that they need to do their job. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. Eddie, participating virtually. Can you hear us?

EDWARD SCHUSTER: Yep. Anybody can hear me?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you, Eddie.

EDWARD SCHUSTER: Okay. Good afternoon. This meeting was held on July 20th, 2022. I'll talk about the two points here. The allowable gear for the Snapper Unit 2 should be determined by staff and should not include traps, and pots for both commercial and recreational sectors based on each island consideration.

Second one. Improve the data collection system for the collection of total landings and biological information. I'll expand a little bit more after reading the most pertinent points.

The last one would be that data reporting should be mandatory for all federal permit holders. When this is developed, failure to submit this data may trigger the cancellation of the permit. I want to say that this fishery is underdeveloped, but since certain restrictions have come down on the fishermen, they're expanding their ways to make a livelihood.

Saint Croix is a unique place. It's surrounded by deep water. This fishery has protected itself for many years. To bring traps into it, fishing for these species would be detrimental. I just want to say that this fishery has protected itself due to the strong currents that surround it and the hook and line method would be the perfect way to do it.

And that would conclude my report.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Eddie. Miguel and I have, with the leadership of Miguel, an idea on how to follow up with the results of this meeting. I would like you guys to hear the idea.

MIGUEL ROLON: On the screen, you have the 10 topics that the group addressed as recommendations to the council. Some of these recommendations are not within the area of responsibility of the council. The way they recommended for the council to proceed was to take those recommendations put them in a letter signed by the Chair of the council and send them to the appropriate entities. In this case, it will be to the commissioner of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the secretary of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico. Of course, with a copy to the two representatives, Dr. Angeli, and Damaris Delgado.

Some of the topics need to be discussed with the local governments. Like the presentation by Nelson, for example. Our idea is perhaps Mr. Chairman, we can have a- I hate the word committee, but anyway, a little group that will include Nelson as Chair, Damaris Delgado, you are Chair of the council and maybe staff Graciela, and I can participate, to look at what we have, what we need and who is responsible for what? Graciela put together a table some years ago, which is still valid, where you have all the different regulations. Then we can have a zoom meeting that the council can put together. I need to hear from Damaris, whether this is a good idea or not. Then we'll take it from there. If we do it between here and December by the next meeting, we'll be able to report back to you on the outcomes of that meeting.

We also propose the same thing can be done in the case of the U.S. Virgin Islands. I would like to have, for example, a group led by Julian in the case of Saint Thomas Saint John, we can identify the appropriate people that we need to talk about and move this forward. Then we move to Saint Croix and there you have Eddie Schuster, Carlos Farchette, and the appropriate members of the government of the Virgin Islands to make sure that we are clear of what we have.

For example, when we talk about traps at the meeting in July there was no legal counsel. Jocelyn D'Ambrosio gave us a presentation and María Del Mar Lopez, with the actual regulations that we have for trap fishing, etcetera. In Puerto Rico, there is a- it's not a rumor it has actually been

documented by Wilson Santiago, that there are people using traps. They have been using traps for many years to fish for what we call chillo, yellowfin snapper, and blackfin snapper. And in some cases, rarely, but it occurs they have been able to fish for, to trap, queen snapper that comes to the shallow. For a queen snapper to come into the shallow, we're talking about 100 fathoms, because most of the time they are at the realm of 300 fathoms and, and beyond.

So if that is agreeable then Graciela and I can contact the appropriate people and then we will be able to report back to you. Remember, this could be a zoom meeting. It could be half a day, let's say, and we need to consult with the local authorities. Certainly, we will be knocking on the doors of Dr. Angeli and Dr. Sennai Habtes fishery division and then look at what we have. Then we can report back to the council in December.

MARCOS HANKE: We're going to send a letter inviting people representing each region to participate. With the results of that, we will keep the discussion alive at the next council meeting or find a way to follow up on important outcomes of this special meeting.

MIGUEL ROLON: The last thing is, if you look at the different recommendations, some can be done by the council, or at least recommended to the council, to the secretary, which is the action agency head. That will also be identified; which of those activities we can undertake on the EEZ can be recommended by the council. But in this case with those letters, with the possibility of having these three meetings, we can report back to you in December.

Nassau Grouper Kits

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. Thank you to the DAP Chairs for this effort and for requesting this meeting, especially. I'll give my turn on the presentation because it's a related presentation made by Nassau Grouper Kits, for personal reasons, Michelle Schärer has to leave the room early and we are late on the schedule. I want to consider that element. And Michelle, can you present ahead of me?

MICHELLE SCHÄRER: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for accommodating me, and glad to see you all again. For those of you that don't know me. My name is Michelle Schärer. I'm a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico, and I've been working in fish ecology, etiology, and bioacoustics for the last 20

years. I'm also a freelance researcher, that's basically what we do. Full disclosure I'm a member of the SSC.

Today I'm going to be talking about an ongoing joint project. It is based on work that originally started with the council in 2013. Back then the focus was on the spawning aggregations of Nassau grouper, and we've been providing information to this council for a variety of decisions that have come up.

But today we're going to talk about something a little bit different. This is also based on a pilot project that was funded by this council and thanks to the leadership of Stephania Bolden and Miguel Rolon, we did a pilot project to identify the critical habitats of Nassau grouper in Puerto Rico.

This was already presented in this council but based on this we were able to move forward and write a proposal for section six through the department of natural and environmental resources of Puerto Rico. So that's why all those three logos are up there on the right. So we have section six, which is NOAA funding, DNER, which is program manager because those funds could only be received by the Puerto Rico government and the council is helping us to tie in some of these goals for this project.

The grammar is in Spanish, but I'm going to continue in English. I just, for the benefit of us not getting lost in translation, I decided to write everything in Spanish

Next.

Some people may ask, why should we try to recover the Nassau grouper? It's a valid question. Luckily, we have a series of laws that have recognized that it is our responsibility to conserve and not let these species disappear. Nassau grouper is very important for our Caribbean region. During some parts of the year, it used to be wall to wall, Nassau grouper at the fish houses like this one in Culebra, back in the seventies.

So we have the advantage of a series of laws at different levels. The wildlife law in Puerto Rico, the endangered species act federally and other agreements throughout the Caribbean that are all focusing on recovering the populations of the Nassau grouper

Next.

So a lot of people get confused with the type of endangerment that the Nassau grouper is in. I just wanted to make clear here,

that under the laws of NOAA in the United States of America, we are going under the endangered species act, and under that, it was listed in 2016 as a threatened species. Recently, though, it was reclassified as critically endangered throughout its range. That was done by the IUCN group. This is because of the drastic population declines that have been documented.

One step we need to look at, under the endangered species act, is the critical habitat. I believe that's coming soon. Another one is the 4d rule. Some of the conversations that we've had around this table are, you know, why isn't it protected federally? Well, it's because we need this 4d rule. It hasn't been put in place yet. Hopefully soon.

Next slide.

Just a little bit of background because the Nassau grouper was one of the most common species throughout the Caribbean. We actually have really good data from Cuba from the '50s to show how this species was exploited throughout the past. Even in one year, they had landings recorded of three and a half million pounds. The statistics in Cuba are pretty significantly well documented.

That was commercial fishing. Commercial fishing, without any limits or controls back in the sixties. Also in Florida, there was some recreational fishing, that's the bars on the right where you can see how these numbers reported also have declined significantly.

One of the reasons that has been well documented of why this was so important was because they were fished during their spawning aggregations. Why? Because they're predictable, they come back to the same places, the same times of the year, and the same moons. And it's really easy to fish them out

Next.

What evidence do we have here in the U.S. Caribbean? I have a graph on the left from Daniel Matos. This is the DNER-reported data for about 20 years. And you see how it increased up into the '70s end of the '70s, and then declined. I want you all to be very aware that during the seventies, we had a fleet of fishers that used to go to other banks outside of Puerto Rico.

So a lot of these landings are actually from the Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos, and Saba. So we have to keep that in mind when we look at these trends in the past Nassau grouper

landings. But on the left, what you have is groupers, lumped. They used to be called a first-class catch. That's how the statistics used to be, previously. We have to also keep in mind that there's a mix of species here.

The work that was done in the Virgin Islands was very specific to Nassau grouper aggregations, and they actually documented the biomass that was extracted from spawning aggregations specifically in the '70s. That information is all available for anybody who wants to look it up.

Next.

More recently, what regulations are in place? In the economic zone, we had, first a minimum size for Nassau grouper to be landed. There was also a close season. Since the '80s and in the '90s, there was a total species ban, but this was not compatible in Puerto Rico until 2004 and was actually implemented in 2005.

So on this graph on the right, we can see how in the '90s, there were still Nassau grouper landed. And actually, after 2004, when it was prohibited, you also see some Nassau grouper landed. Bear in mind, that this may be a translation issue, not a misidentification issue because some fishermen use the common name that is the Nassau grouper, and then when it gets translated back into English, it seems like it's Nassau grouper, but it's really red hind. So it's not a misidentification. They know what they're catching, they just call it that and they always have.

Next.

We have a glimmer of hope thanks to the Virgin Islands. They have been documenting their spawning aggregations of Nassau grouper for a long time. The great work that they've done there has shown- the graph on the right, if you look at the bottom, that was 2004. When the Grammanik Bank was closed to fishing during a few months of the year. And then in 2005, they also prohibited catching Nassau groupers. From then on, if you look up, you'll see that range of sizes of fish that are arriving at the spotting aggregation get really wide.

Some of the indicators that we use to look forward and project what's going on in the population is when we see more young fish arriving at the spawning aggregation. All those dots on the left of the bar up there are small Nassau grouper that are coming back into the aggregation, which helps us see the effectiveness of these closures on the population in the Virgin Islands.

They've also seen the sex ratios approaching one, which is good, another indicator. Some fish are larger, but the key is more small groupers coming in. So thanks to the Virgin Islands and all the protection and compliance they have, we're starting to see that spill over into Puerto Rico waters.

Next slide.

Today we have a lot of sightings of small juvenile Nassau grouper throughout our reefs by members of the fishing community, but also divers. It's throughout the Puerto Rican archipelago, specifically off the East coast, but throughout. We also know that it takes between five and eight years for these fish to grow into adults so that helps us have an expectation of when we should start seeing them increase again if they recover.

Based on studies, previously, we know that their size at reproduction is about 21 inches or a three-pound fish, basically, already has the capability of reproducing.

Next.

We also are pretty aware of what are the threats today, at least in Puerto Rico. So we know there are impacts on their habitats. That's why we need to recognize what their essential fish habitat is, and what their critical habitat is because it is threatened by development pollution, and climate change, specifically at the aggregations where they need cold water as a queue for them to spawn. If the waters are warming that's an issue. Also, when the Sargassum mats come into shore and cover their critical habitat.

We are aware that there is incidental catch or bycatch and we also know there is illegal and IUU non-reported fishing throughout the region. As some of you may have heard on this table, we have a governance problem here. We have very low compliance and very few of the interventions, actually, end up in fees or somebody paying the consequences of their actions

Next.

Part of the project, which was the pilot, that led to this, has already been published. We have a report that was presented at the last council meeting. If somebody wants to get access to this, there'll be a link at the end, of the PDF that you can pull it from. Basically, we were trying to define the critical habitat, collect some information to estimate the population, and have some tissue for DNA. This is something that has been

conducted collaboratively with fishers that have an incidental catch of these fish. It was a pile of projects, so we didn't get very far, but the information has been published

Next.

How did this start? This actually started because the fishers were the ones telling us they kept on seeing these fish and they knew that this fish used to be abundant and they wanted answers, scientific attention to their doubts, and their questions. So how many fish are we seeing? Are we seeing the same fish over and over, or is it actually different fish? Where are these juveniles? and are they surviving to the bycatch?

So based on this with partners, we developed this proposal to section six and we're working with DNER collaborative and we're moving forward with monitoring and addressing the compliance issue here in Puerto Rico.

Next.

To do this, we first need people to actually know what the species is, how to call it correctly, and how to identify it correctly. Because there are other species that look like it in our waters. All the really good information that we found was in English.

One of our first tasks was to get a bilingual guide for locals using the local names so that they could quickly identify these fish and let them go because they were prohibited. We also tried to address the different compatibility in the regulations. And I have some of these guides to share with you here today. These will be given out to those fishers that actually encounter these species.

Next slide.

We got a request from Graciela to actually try to explore the fisher science kit that was used in the Virgin Islands in the past. This was a collaborative project where fishers were given the tools to actually collect, vent or descend the fish when they were caught incidentally. They also had to report, they had a little card. Based on this idea I am willing to provide my technical advice and knowledge to help the council develop this kit. We'd have to look at what rules and regulations apply if we're going to do something like this because once there's a 4d rule, any federal actions are going to be subject to it. We have to take that into mind and we also have local regulations that

we have to address when handling threatened species. Then, who's going to do the DNA? Who's going to use this data? I think it's something that we should look forward to, and hopefully, in the future, we'll have a better recommendation for how to handle this bycatch.

Next.

This is a sample of what is the descending device. Marcos is going to show you more about it. Basically, if you encounter a Nassau grouper, incidentally, and you have one of these, you can just rig it up, and put a weight on the bottom, that hook doesn't harm the fish that much but it'll help it make it to the bottom before the sharks.

Recent research from the Gulf of Mexico has indicated that is not recommended to vent the fish anymore. That was something that was done previously to release the gas from barrel trauma fish, but human error is leading to more deaths than fish making it to the bottom. So the descending device is the preferred alternative right now.

Another hint that we can recommend is to avoid using J hooks. Use circle hooks instead, and don't use stainless steel, because they'll never get rid of it if they happen to leave with a hook in their mouth. If you're out fishing, and you're likely to encounter a Nassau grouper, just have your descending device ready. Uh, if you can take a picture fine, but if not, just give it back to its habitat as soon as possible and help it get down there and hide from the predators.

Next.

Something that we had developed already with our critical habitat project was a way to report your sightings. So anybody that has either snorkeling or diving or fishing and encounters a Nassau grouper, especially the juveniles, because that was our area of focus for the critical nursery habitat.

We have this app where you can go with your cell phone, if you're on-site, it'll take the coordinates off your phone and you can report it. So it's a few very simple questions. If you have a photo or a video, it helps us know it's not the same fish that we're seeing at the same site over and over. If you don't want to give a coordinate, you can just loop a circle around an island and it's still valid. The depth and the habitat and if you saw it alive or dead because that could also help us address enforcement needs.

Next.

If anybody here wants to help us to move this forward and provide support to the council to help recover the Nassau grouper, you can go to our Meros Puerto Rico site and put in your information and be part of this team to try to recover Nassau grouper.

Next.

If you need to get in contact with us, these are our handles, and we're happy to answer any questions.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Michelle. I would like to ask a question to the council. I will address the technic with more details about the descending device later. But addressing the kit that you presented, Michelle, Council members, do you guys think it is a good idea to explore, to redesign, with the technical advice of Michelle and the experts, those kits? That includes probably a descending device with the best practices to release the fish. What do the council members and the people in this room want to do? James?

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yeah, most definitely. I totally agree with that. You know, I dive all the time and I'm always seeing Nassau grouper. I think we can even, you know, definitely a descending kit. We can educate our recreational fishermen to do that.

Oh, my goodness. James Kreglo Saint Thomas. Yes, I think that-- I dive all the time. I see Nassau groupers almost every time I dive. And then I think with the descending kits, we can work with our recreational fishermen, our commercial fishermen to release them.

But I think also we can work with our dive organizations to do the reporting of the viewing of the Nassau groupers. Because we have so many dive groups that just go every day. And that's it for now.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, James. Anybody else? The DAP members? John, I'm sorry.

JOHN WALTERS: Yes. Thank you, Michelle, for the great presentation. I do want to say, I'm glad to see that the species recovery grant was helping to facilitate this. I was actually going to mention that I thought that was a good route for this and perhaps also to help support the descending device outreach

as well. In particular, there might be an opportunity there for maybe additional funding through that recovery. Particularly because if the descender devices are the way to help those fish and help them recover, then getting that word out, getting the community to use those more, I think is a good option for that species. Thanks. I'm glad to see that going forward.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, John. That was a very important point and a good route that you guys can talk a little bit about it later. Julian?

JULIAN MAGRAS: Hey Julian. Magras for the record. Excellent presentation and yes, I'm in favor of the descending device. You know, I think it would be a great opportunity that we can capture, to help more of the recovery of this species. I've seen numbers and numbers, as a trap fisherman, of the groupers over the past couple of years. We've been using the deflating device. I know I spoke with you Marcos about this new device. I think it's a great idea. Also, I'm hoping that I can get Elizabeth Catterson- she's working, I forgot what the other scientist she's working with, that actually caught the Nassau grouper spawning and they have it on video. I'm hoping that I can get them to do a presentation at the December meeting so that everyone can see the extensive work of what they all have been doing and we can share that with everyone here in a room to see the recovery of this species. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Julian. Nelson.

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson, for the record. I think that the descending device for me is a great tool, not only for recreational but for commercial fishers too. I think if it's possible, you can develop a short workshop that we can bring to the fishermen's village or Nautic Clubs to cover all the sectors that are going to be very helpful.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. Thank you very much, Nelson. We have a hand up. Alida?

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Yes. Michelle, wonderful presentation. What Nelson said is what I wanted to ask. How do you take that information to the DAP in Puerto Rico and a workshop or a meeting in a community? Because I think this is information that has to be made available to all the people. Everyone that fishes, the people that eat this fish, the people that sell it. So I think that what Nelson is saying about promoting a workshop is a wonderful idea.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, for sure the multitasking, the workshop, and whatever else we can do with an initiative like this are perfectly matched for what we do here in the council. Michelle, you want to respond to Alida.

MICHELLE SCHÄRER: Yeah. For the next three years, you'll be hearing a little bit more about this project. But today the first step is, the guides, let's start with baby steps. We need to have everybody call the grouper by the same name and make sure they recognize it quickly so that they can let it go. I think that's number one. Of course, we can continue conversations to expand, address, and redesign, if needed, this descending kit or release kit, maybe we want to call it. It's not only for Nassau it could move into a lot of other species that also will help us sustain our fisheries. But definitely, I'm here to help explore those things and move them forward. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, Miguel and the chat.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yes. Thank you again, Michelle, for that presentation. We wanted to bring to the attention of the council the things that they can help and do because this is a three-year project. As John was saying there's an opportunity for expanding, probably getting some funding for the things that she needs. One of the things the council can do is help Michelle and others to put together these workshops. Rather than have a go-crazy kind of workshop, we want to just start like baby food. Once at a time, for example, we can take the opportunity that James Kreglo is here and he can organize with a group of people that he mentioned. And then Michelle, I just asked her if she's willing to travel. This way we will be able to fill out the interest of the people on this kind of thing. At the same time, we provide the right information. The council is involved, and you will see it tomorrow, on a campaign throughout the entire Caribbean, not the U.S. Caribbean, for a management plan that just was adopted by the- Well, I don't want to spoil the surprise you'll have to wait until tomorrow to see what happened because Laura is here. We have some good news, but the point is that the key thing that the group identified, the spawning aggregation working group identified in 2019 was the original location so we have a campaign and everything.

In the U.S. Caribbean, we have things that we can do. We have the benefits of having Dr. Michelle Schärer and others with funding addressing the Nassau grouper. Mr. Chairman, just for the record, I will work with Michelle to identify the things that we can do, and probably, by the December meeting, we will

be able to give you an update. And if something can happen between here and December, fine, we can do that.

So Graciela and I from the staff and the styling one Liajay Rivera we will work with you and see what is the best approach that the council can help you with.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. Just rounding up. What I understand is that there is full support for this initiative, for the kit, once it's evaluated the best way of doing and redoing the council will support that initiative in whatever way we can, because it's super important.

MIGUEL ROLON: We are going to identify the things that we can do. That will be between Michelle and me and Garcia and Liajay. Then we will report back to you. And I believe that you will be involved one way or the other without knowing it.

MARCOS HANKE: Well, anyway I can help. I have time for one more question. Does anyone else want to follow up with the presentation? No. I know that people are asking for a break but, no? No. Okay. Let me try to be quick with my presentation because it's a good segue with this presentation. Liajay, can you put my presentation up on the screen, please? Cristina, can you put the presentation on the screen, please?

Let's go on a five minute. A five-minute break seems like it's needed. Let's come back in five minutes.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

MARCOS HANKE: We going to keep going with the meeting. Please take your seat. We are recording already.

This is the most important presentation of the afternoon. I'm just kidding. No, but because mine follows up with yours, it's like a unit of happiness. Anyway, we will stay until five o'clock. Heather, from NOAA Fisheries, just spoke to me and in order for her to address the group with enough time and your attention we will decide if we move the presentation maybe keep it for today or tomorrow. You guys are going to guide me in whatever way you want it. We have that flexibility. Okay. Thank you. Now let's get ready. Okay, guys.

Good afternoon. This is Marco Hanker. I going to take off the chairman hat and I will put on the hat of a captain that has worked on the east coast of Puerto Rico for 30 years, fishing since I was two years old. This is my passion. That's why I'm

making this presentation today. This is a very low-hanging fruit that the way I see it, I want to share after many tryouts. Sometimes in the water, many people advise me about the technical part of this presentation. I want to share this with you.

Please, pay attention. It is the end of the afternoon. I have to say that. Go ahead. Next slide.

Just to make sure we need to know a few things beforehand for you guys to be able to follow. Some of this is not new for some of you. A descending device is a simple mechanism, highlight simple, or tool that allows recompressing one or more fish to the desired depth, increasing the chance for post-release survival. When deep-water fish are brought rapidly to the surface, they can experience barotrauma and descending devices are an effective tool to minimize harm to the fish.

The next important part is the vocabulary, which is barotrauma injury caused by the rapid drastic change in pressure during the ascent to the surface once you're fishing, right? It causes the expansion of gases in the swim bladder, and that creates potential injury for the fish that can be addressed with the descending device. For example, bringing a fish from 33 feet correspond to one atmosphere, 66 feet, to two atmospheres difference in pressure. Those drastic depth changes will expand the air bladder twice or more of its natural volume.

Barotrauma signs, this is super important. Fish showed at least one of the following external signs; expanded abdomen, you touch the fish and it looks like a drum, right? With an expanded abdomen. Bulging eyes, inverted stomach, this sometimes you can see it through the mouth when the mouth is open. Other symptoms such as internal bleeding and the scales popping little bubbles or air depend on how acute the situation is. All those symptoms could be fatal, the fish can die from those if we don't do anything.

Next slide.

These are just some articles that I highly recommend people to read up on them. The first one is "The Use of Descending Devices in Fisheries Management to Reduce Discard Mortality: Regional Experiences and Considerations," and the other one is "Effectiveness of Descending Devices to Mitigate the Effects of Barotrauma Among Rockfishes in California Recreational Fisheries." Like this, you're going to have two different areas in the U.S. addressing our interests on the same approach to

address fish mortality caused by barotrauma and other considerations.

Next slide.

Here is a little busy slide, but we made sure to have it this way because it can be used for reference. A quick reference for you guys with the new things that are happening around the descendant device at councils' level around the nation, including the Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic.

First, the actions related to the descendant device in the Southeast Region. In July 2020, note it was very recently, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council addressed a regulatory amendment 29 to the snapper-grouper FMP. Among other things, requires descending devices to be on board a vessel and readily available for use on commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessels while fishing for or possessing snapper-grouper species. All the sectors are included.

On January 2022, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. The Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices Act of 2020, (DESCEND Act) 2020. I'm just going to read the bold letters, because it's the part that is super important, not to consume too much time on this, but this presentation will be available on our website for you to read carefully later. Requires fishermen on commercial vessels charter vessels and head boats (for-hire,) and private recreational vessels to have descending devices or venting tools rigged and ready to use when fishing for Gulf reef fish in Federal waters. The other highlight point is, what is a descending device? It is a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to the desired depth or lower on the water column. Below it states that the device is capable of releasing fish to the desired depth. That is part of the definition explorer on those measurements, addressing descendant device minimum weight of 16 ounces.

I want to highlight, the 787 initiative, which is creating data to donate to students for their master's degree or whatever, this data is available to any student who wants to follow up on this. I will donate the data set that I collect on my charter to this initiative. We also found out that 16 ounces or more were the minimum weight, which matched perfectly with those reports from the south Atlantic Gulf of Mexico and the federal level. They are readily available to use. It is super important, sometimes people will overlook this, and they make very cool descending devices that are not practical for use. We are going

to address this in this presentation, creating the Caribbean-style descending device, that matches the needs of our vessels and the way we perform fishing in the Caribbean.

Next slide.

Now that's the romantic part and the part that I want you guys to really, really pay attention to. Based on my experience in the field, a lifetime on the water has taught me that the best fishing practices are just the minimum expected from a responsible Fisher.

The use of descending devices increases the potential for the fish you released to survive. I'm not saying that all of them survive but it increases the chances. Help build your legacy as a responsible fisher caring about future generations.

This is the way you're going to have JJ. The future of fisherman that was sitting by my side this morning to have a future in the fishery and see some of the benefits, and the fishing activity and the fishing resource, the way we saw and experienced them.

These tools have been proven to be effective on groupers, snappers, and other deep-water species including the Nassau grouper. As we just heard from Michelle's presentation.

Next slide.

This is for me, when I was doing this slide, I was super impressed. Because when you think about discards or release, you think like a unitary thing, right? Okay, yes, we release the fish, but we don't know how many things come with releasing it. We don't think deeply or about the details. Look at this. Regulatory releases that we are responsible for. Fish that don't comply with the minimum size, you have to release. Bag limits that were just discussed about dolphin and others that you need to release the fish, that's another reason. Incidental hook-up operated species like Nassau grouper, goliath grouper, etcetera. Closed seasons for mutton snapper and others, and other groupers, you have to release. Fisheries closed due to accountability measures, when ACL overage occurs, you have to release. Catch and release species by sport fishing that claim to be responsible and environmentally friendly but if you don't use the right tools or don't do it the right way, you're not doing much, right? This is part of the reason we have to aim for the best practices.

The other reasons are factories, the economic discards, more associated with the commercial fishermen, which are non-marketable species of low value, and are too small or too big for the market. I forgot to put something there which is related to this. The ciguatoxin fish also produces discards and other forms of selectivity. I mentioned another one.

Fish that suffer from barotrauma might die and feed frigates birds and sharks. This is what we are hearing from the fishermen. I don't want to see those free floaters on the water anymore. What can I do? Here's the solution. What they can do as a fisher to ensure that the fish you released survives and potentially reproduces next year, don't float away.

Next slide.

Okay. Popular types of descending devices. The Seaqualizer is a brand and is commercially sold. Number three is the inverted hook or Shelton Fish Descender device. Both follow the same logic. The number two is the Shelton. The Shelton advantage over the inverted hook is that you can accommodate potentially more than one fish and descend them at the same time. The inverted hook depends on the side of the hook. You can release one or more fish using it. The weighted basket, which is mostly used on party boats and by trap fishermen that want to release the butterfly fish, and the discards with this method probably address multiple fish at the same time.

On the number four is the Shelton custom made by myself that you see a red grouper being released on my boat there. And the first number one I would have to say, thank you to Landon that we made a video. This is a screenshot of a video. That descending device, which is similar to this one that I'm going to circulate here for you guys to see how simple it is, can be made with a little bit of knot skills, knowing how to deal with the fishing line to make a knot on the boat, right? There is no excuse. You can manufacture a descending device on your boat with the things that you already have. In that case, you have two weights of eight ounces, which make the 16 ounces that match with the federal requirements on the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.

Next slide.

Okay. This is, for me, super, important. I exposed this idea to the fishing community and said, okay, I have this idea, where are the faults? What do you see here that might not work? How can I fix it? From that conversation, the cable idea came up because they said, "Oh, I'm going to release it and the sharks

going to eat it. I'm going to lose the descendant device. I'm going to put garbage in the ocean or lose my materials." It happened to be that, on the videos which I don't have the opportunity to show you today, we release over 60 fish in an area where there are a lot of sharks that eat the fish. We didn't have any interaction while filming with the camera, of a shark attacking or eating the fish, using the descending device, so far. I'm not saying that it doesn't happen, but it's also not going to happen all the time. Right? And the cable that you see on that rig is to prevent losing the descendant device. If that were to happen.

This is what I use on my boat. This is mine. This one you can circulate from the other side. Please, I put a little cover on the tip of the hook because the hook is very sharp. Please watch out.

The Caribbean-compatible clip-on inverted hook descendant device is a way that you don't need a special rod. You don't need a special spool or anything. You have the same fishing rod that as long as you have 20 or 30 pounds of line resistance to it, you can clip on, on your jig, on your line, and with the same rod that you're fishing, you can descend the fish right there, right? You don't need the hassle of too much gear on the boat. It's compatible with kayaks to big boats. It's inexpensive and can be done for less than \$2.

Actually, I made one, a tryout with one, that I'm going to report later that basically uses recycle material, which should have no cost and be easy to make, easy to store, and useful for releasing most of the species on the reef. It can be used by recreational and commercial fishermen. It can be used to release fish to the desired depth, which is part of the regulation in the South Atlantic. You need to be able to descend the fish to the desired depth which is a minimum of 60 feet because this is the requirement of their regulation. In this case, you can do it to the bottom of the 60 feet and comply with that. The weight can be expandable. You have a ring on the weight that you can clip another weight to it if you have a bigger fish that needs more weight to go down. Compatible with kayaks and large boats. Compatible with multiple retrieving methods, with hydraulic, manual, rod and reel. Any way you want it, this baby can match the challenge, right? It can be rust-proof and long-lasting like mine. This one that you guys are seeing around has five years with me on the boat. It is very quick to release the fish using this idea. Minimal potential harm to the fish versus the venting tools. Michelle Schärer already explored that.

My opinion is that we should focus on descending devices much more than the needle. If you want recreational fishermen, that don't have too much expertise with where their bladder is and so on, poking fish with the best intentions but hurting the inside, their organs, is not a good idea. This is safer for everybody. It's easy to use and has a single-person operation. You can do it alone. You don't need another person helping you out. When you get the trick and do it a few times it just becomes a natural process during fishing.

Next slide.

Limitations. I felt that I needed to put out there the limitations of either from a single descended device, which is I'm circulating some examples around the room, and also the weighted basket. The single descended device releases mainly one fish at a time. Mainly, because like I told you before, it's possible to release more than one, in some cases, depending on the size of the fish. It's possible to release more than one fish at a time using those devices. The basket is more appropriate for party boats or commercial fishermen who may release many fishes at once. I already explained that. It's bulkier for use in small boats or kayaks. It's more expensive and might require two people to operate.

Next slide.

Don't forget guys, take this home. If you're going to forget everything, just take this home. Descending devices are effective and low cost. Descending devices are easy to use. Descending devices help to eliminate free floaters

Next slide.

Next step. Discuss, if the use of descending devices can be helpful for our fisheries, here at the council level. We need to know what we are going to do, and the steps. We already made a commitment to do the outreach and education, which is part of this initiative. But there are other things that we might be able to do in the future. If so, we should define what a descending device will look like in the U.S. Caribbean. We can use the definition that is on the federal regulation of other places and adopt it. It is compatible with ours. There are a few things that we have to consider because they include circle hooks and other things in their actions and instructions. Here, what I'm presenting to you, is what I think is a no-brainer, which is the use of this descending device as a tool alone.

I want to finalize by saying, this council is engaged in the WECAFC initiative about spawning aggregation on Nassau grouper on mutton snapper. The language that I use here, pretends to be inclusive to the whole Caribbean. Imagine us here, in Puerto Rico, in this council, being the leaders in promoting the descendant device. Exporting this idea to the Caribbean-wide region, where the resource is very connected, we can benefit from that idea and from that leadership. This is what I'm looking for from this council, to engage and recognize that we have leadership in the wide Caribbean. This is my presentation. Thank you very much. I'm open to questions. Okay.

Just a very quick question. Miguel said I'm really tight on time. Nelson?

NELSON CRESPO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson, for the record. This is an item that in a year should be in every fishing vessel in the Caribbean. I want to talk to you when we are joined because I want to explore the possibility to use it for deep-water snappers. Maybe I want to do a try-out with a GoPro camera to see how it's working the waters. It's very interesting. And I think it's going to work.

MARCOS HANKE: Julian?

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras for the record just a quick comment. Excellent presentation. You know, we always talk about bycatch, and here's another great opportunity to reduce bycatch, again. We already have the two-inch mesh in place for the traps. We have the vent for the compressed fish. And here it is, now we have a fisherman that has identified another way that we can reduce bycatch. So great job. Continue to go to work.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Damaris?

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes. So, I also agree that this was great. Great presentation on a great initiative. I would love to have captain Marcos Hanke doing a webinar with us at DNER so that we could spread the word through PEPCO. The PEPCO method that we have through Wilson and the support from the council that he can send information to all the many fishers and also through the eReporting application. I would love to start coordinating that. Thanks a lot.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you for your support. Andy?

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Marcos. I want to commend you on the presentation and your thoughtful ideas on conservation. You

know, yesterday I talked a little bit with you about the importance of outreach and education. Certainly, I could see this moving forward as well with regulatory requirements for this. What we've done in the South Atlantic and Gulf is trying to mirror the regulations as closely as possible, not reinvent the wheel, and based on the device that you shared with us, I think that's even consistent with those regulations, right? So, I think there's an opportunity here where we could require devices like this, for fishermen to use, but also develop some outreach and education around this. One thing that I would suggest, in the Gulf of Mexico, because of dollars flowing in for the deep-water horizon oil spill, they have implemented what's called the return them right program. It's an education program for, essentially, people doing a short educational video, learning about how to use the descending device. Then, they actually receive the descending device after they partake in the training. This may be an opportunity for them to come and present to the Caribbean council, what the work has been done in the Gulf of Mexico and how that could maybe apply to the Caribbean going forward.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Anybody else? No?

MIGUEL ROLON: Not to prolong the discussion, but I believe that what Andy just said is a way for you to consider. One, look at the possibility of adopting similar regulations that they have in the Gulf and the South Atlantic, we don't have to invent the wheel, even if the language is there. And then the original education we can contact the Gulf council. We have a committee that Diana goes to actually, we have a meeting- Okay. We will follow up on that. And then we will report back to you at the December meeting. Let me join all the people congratulating you, because this is a very excellent presentation, and it will provide the platform for us to move forward

MARCOS HANKE: Graciela, María Del Mar, and Carlos.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So, Marcos, I didn't hear anything about the specific depth that you're working on, but Nelson mentioned the possibility of doing the research for queen snapper. So I encourage the queen snapper fishers to come forward because we do have the project ongoing that will deploy cameras to depth. So it would be an excellent opportunity to see if that works at- ¿que son 200 brazas? So, it would be a good test.

MARCOS HANKE: You have all my support with the device that I use to film and record the release of the fish and to see the release condition. If you want to, I'm available. María?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Yeah. María Lopez, NOAA Fisheries. Thank you, Marcos. I guess the question would be if there is an interest from the council to pursue regulations regarding the descending device at this time or a future meeting. Just so that we have that clear because to implement regulations with the requirement for a descending device, we will have to amend the plan. Because that's the way things work over here. So just to keep into consideration that that will need an amendment. Is there an opportunity perhaps to piggyback on one of the amendments that we are currently developing? the ones that are not that advanced? That could be something that we could explore. Otherwise, it could be something you're interested in pursuing in a future amendment that could be done as well if that's the interest of the council.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, María. Carlos. Do you want to say something? Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Okay, so I'll make a motion. Seems I'm on a roll with motions today. I'll make a t-shirt.

To include, this motion. So I have to go with the screen. Should I do the rationale first? Or we already have a rationale for what Marcos presented.

MIGUEL ROLON: Actually, Carlos, you can do this quicker by just telling the staff to put together something regarding María Del Mar's idea. You can discuss it at the December meeting. But it will be up to you really?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. I'd rather go through this. *To include the descending devices action in the trawling and net gear amendment to the island-based FMPs.* Oh, okay. You are at action in the trawling and net gear amendment to the island-based FMPs *that is currently being developed.* This action would require descending devices to be available on board for all sectors readily to use when fishing for reef-fish species managed by the council.

MARCOS HANKE: One second readily.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Well, you don't have to put readily. To be used when fishing for reef-fish species managed by the council.

You don't need that word readily. Yeah. Take that out. Just put it to use when fishing for reef-fish species managed by the council. When fishing for fish species managed by the council.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. That's the language presented by Carlos. Do we have a second?

DAMARIS DELGADO: Second.

JAMES R. KREGLO: I'll second.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. We have two seconds. We have Damaris and Kreglo. For the discussion, the rationale was already discussed in the presentation and all the support for the idea. María Del Mar, you requested to speak?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: It was just a question regarding the motion. Is there any interest in expanding the requirement for fishing for other species that are not just reef fish? For example, pelagic, is there a need for doing that, or is this just for reef fish?

MIGUEL ROLON: That's what I was trying to say. If you drop reef fish is for all species managed by the council. That's applicable

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. But you won't, I don't think you'll be using descending devices on pelagic.

Sounds good. So for fish species managed by the council,

MIGUEL ROLON: I mean, don't kill it. You already have the information; everybody knows what we're doing. For the record. Just vote on it all in favor.

MARCOS HANKE: All in favor?

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yes.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Yes.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: Uh, I'm sorry. Jocelyn?

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: I just, I'm sorry, this is Jocelyn. I was wondering if there's a typo in the first line. Is it supposed to say, "to include descending device actions in the trawling and net gear amendment?" Just before you vote on it, thanks.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, With the correction made by Jocelyn-Damaris, James, and Carlos, do you agree?

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yes.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: The motion reads on the screen, "to include descending device actions in the trawling and net gear amendment to the island-based FMPs that is currently being developed. This action will require descending device to be available on board of all sectors to be used when fishing for fish species managed by the council. Motioned by Carlos Farchette second by Damaris Delgado and James Kreglo"

All in favor, no opposition. Andy?

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah, just a comment. I mean, I don't want to modify the motion at this point. The second sentence really is getting into the specification of how you would develop the regulations in an amendment. Right? At this point, I think, you know, it's understood that we're going to be coming back to you with an amendment and wording in action, and that may not be how we ultimately implement it. So I just wanted to clarify that the wording there will likely change.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Right. So don't you think it's better to just delete that second sentence, Andy?

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah. I think that would be best.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. Okay. Delete the second sentence.

MIGUEL ROLON: A point of order. You don't need a second for a second. Second by Damaris Delgado period. Yeah. Quita "and James Kreglo."

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. It's just that the process is not like that. We all recognize that he is also in agreement.

MIGUEL ROLON: He can't second to the second. That's why.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Damaris and Carlos are both of you in agreement with the language change.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Yes.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. Thank you. End of discussion. And we have another presentation.

MIGUEL ROLON: No, pero tienes que votar.

MARCOS HANKE: All in favor, Say, aye. Think we did that already. No? I'm sorry. It's too late in the afternoon. All in favor, say aye.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Aye.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Aye.

DAMARIS DELGADO: Aye.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Aye.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Aye.

MARCOS HANKE: Aye. no opposition. Vanessa said yes. She's also in favor. *Unanimous motion carries.*

The next presentation- I was approached by Heather a little while ago and for her and us on the council, to have enough time, because it is a very important presentation. Unfortunately, it was placed at the end of the meeting, so we have to pass this presentation for tomorrow.

I will explore space on the agenda to accommodate it, probably first. Do you want to do it now? No, no, no. I'm just following up on what I heard.

BRENT STOFFLE: Well, I don't want to be the most heated guy in the room.

MARCOS HANKE: No that will never happen.

MIGUEL ROLON: Mr. Chairman, I just talked to- the time constraint is the interpreter. Okay. And you cannot go beyond a

certain time because of laws and regulations, but he granted me half an hour, so we can take Brent's presentation now and tomorrow Heather, so you won't be hated. The two together, you have half an hour to talk about it. Okay.

HEATHER BLOUGH: So you want us to go now?

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. But you have until 5:30 and then tomorrow we'll start with the presentation. Actually, after the first two presentations, before lunch tomorrow.

**NOAA Fisheries Draft Strategy for Advancing Equity and
Environmental Justice (EEJ)—Heather Blough and Brent Stoffle,
NOAA Fisheries**

HEATHER BLOUGH: I'll put it up here too. Okay. So again, for the record, I'm Heather Blough I'm with NOAA Fishery Southeast Regional Office and my co-presenter here is Brent Stoffle. He is a fishery anthropologist with the Southeast Fishery Science Center. We're both super happy for this opportunity to present to you all our agency's first-ever national strategy for advancing equity and environmental justice through our mission-related work. While we've been addressing environmental justice in some aspects of our work for decades now, last year, our agency leadership convened a national work group to improve information sharing and coordination on the topic through the development of this draft strategy. Brent and I, our regional representatives in that working group, the strategy was a substantial effort developed by staff across the country. We're really looking forward to hearing your feedback both on the draft strategy itself, but also on how we might best respond to this in the Southeast region.

Next slide.

So while our renewed interest in EEJ stems in part from the issuance of two new executive orders last year by the Biden administration. The requirement to account for environmental justice in our decisions, really initially, stems from a 1994 executive order. And it's also been incorporated in several of the federal statutes that underline our work, including the Magnuson Stevens act and the national environmental policy act, which you all routinely work with.

So the topic isn't necessarily new to us and much of the content of our draft national strategy, isn't novel, but rather it's more of a commitment to a renewed focus on the topic. We're super excited about that because we think it's really important

that we better consider how the work that we're doing could even unknowingly be contributing to inequities. And also, how we might be better using that work to improve and advance environmental justice inequity in the communities that we're serving

Next slide.

BRENT STOFFLE: So our draft policy includes three key terms, equity, environmental justice, and underserved communities. Equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

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Our definition of Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, gender, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies including but not limited to: equitable protection from environmental and health hazards, equitable access to decision-making processes, equitable opportunity for disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized.

HEATHER BLOUGH: So while we've been working with environmental justice for some time, we haven't had like a common definition across the agency that we've been using. We adopted this one from the EPA it's been in use for some time now. What we really like about it is, in addition to the traditional view of environmental justice, it is looking at the adverse impacts of government decisions on communities. For example, like where we're citing toxic waste facilities and things like that. This definition and our draft strategy incorporate also concepts around making sure that the underserved communities are included and engaged in the decisions that affect them and also able to take advantage of the opportunities and services that we offer.

Next.

BRENT STOFFLE: So finally, we refer to underserved communities as those that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. These include geographic communities as well as populations sharing particular characteristics such as women and girls; Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Native American persons, Asian

Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; persons facing discrimination or barriers related to gender identity; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

HEATHER BLOUGH: So in addition to the more obvious members of fishing communities with these characteristics, we also want to consider members of non-fishing communities with these characteristics who might be impacted by our habitat conservation, protected resources, aquaculture, and other mission-related work. For example, you know, are we typically funding and citing our habitat conservation-restoration work in areas that primarily serve the more affluent communities? We think that underserved communities are going to vary by region and by the barriers they face. It'll be really important for the region-specific and sustained activity to identify these communities.

BRENT STOFFLE: Next slide.

So as we were coming up with the draft of the EEJ strategy, we thought about two types of things: we thought about barriers that exist and objectives. What kinds of things do we want to see happen? In considering the barriers and considering how we could fulfill our mission to provide vital services equitably for the entire nation, we identified a number of common barriers to environmental justice, which we've been in these six categories. There may be other ways to do this, and we welcome your feedback on this along with other suggested approaches.

The first one is unawareness. The first barrier is a general unawareness of who the underserved communities are. We can't document or address their needs if we don't know who they are.

The second is structural. The second type of barrier is structural in the form of laws and policies. These can unintentionally deny underserved communities, equal opportunity, or maybe even unknowingly exacerbate the unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural benefits. For example, if we defer to historic participation when allocating fishery resources, we may deny opportunities to participants from underserved communities who in the past didn't have equitable access to the fishery during the qualifying periods.

Third, access. We identified language, time, and financial barriers to accessing our services. Much of what we do is subject to numerous requirements to ensure transparency and opportunities for public participation. But it takes a lot of time to successfully participate in the regulatory process. Many people don't have the time to take off of work, to attend a public meeting, or may not understand the materials informing our decisions.

The next system complexity. System complexity can present a barrier to stakeholders, especially those who have not previously received such services. For example, some of the forms, and the other things we need to do to get a grant, are very complex and difficult for unknowledge to work their way through.

Expertise. We continue to have gaps in outreach, social science, language, and cultural literacy expertise.

Representation. Our current efforts to be diverse and inclusive still fall short in reflecting stakeholder perspectives from some of the communities we serve. And we want to be mindful of that barrier as we may unconsciously prioritize outreach in our communities because of familiarity, easy access, and preexisting communication paths.

Next slide.

HEATHER BLOUGH: So the draft strategy identifies six objectives to address these barriers. The first is to expand the research and monitoring work that we're doing to identify and characterize underserved communities so that we can better understand and address the impacts of our decisions on their livelihoods and culture. That'll require us to ensure we're equitable, allocating resources for that work. And also, that we are trying to include members of underserved communities in our research and monitoring projects, to the extent that we're able to do that.

We want to incorporate EEJ into our policies, programs, and plans in a way that helps us to better serve the communities that have been under or even unserved in the past. And that'll require us to specifically consider their needs when we're developing new policies, and also, maybe, to take a look at our existing policies and plans with an EEJ lens so that we can identify and work to remedy any existing inequities there.

Our inclusive governance objective aims to ensure that all of our stakeholders are equally welcome and encouraged to participate in the decisions that affect them. That means, you know, making sure that folks have the time and ability to travel to in-person meetings when we're holding those or considering the availability of broadband internet to support remote participation, access to interpreters, things of that nature.

We want to more equitably distribute the benefits of our work to underserved communities and that means increasing the shares of grants, opportunities, habitat conservation, and other services to these communities. Also, trying to identify and address systemic barriers. So, you know, for example, how can we better prioritize the needs of underserved communities when we're defining grants priorities? Are there things that we can do to help these folks be more successful in applying for our grants? Things like that.

We want to make sure that our communication and outreach platforms are effectively reaching underserved communities. So, you know, are we speaking and writing in plain language? are we translating documents into appropriate primary languages? Are we considering alternative platforms and methods to reach diverse audiences? For example, you know, considering the use of video for scoping meetings, things of that nature.

Finally, empowering the environment really is at the center of all of this. That just means that identifying EEJ is a priority at all levels of our agency and really working with you all and our other partners to meaningfully incorporate it into all the work that we do.

Next slide.

So this draft strategy because it's national in scope it doesn't try to address all of the regional issues, right? It does provide us with a framework and after it's finalized we'll be asked to develop regional implementation plans that tier off of the objectives in the national strategy. Really the goal is to come up with a regional implementation plan that's specific and responsive to the needs of each of our respective regional communities that seek to remove barriers and promote equity in all that we do.

Next slide.

BRENT STOFFLE: There are some key guiding questions we considered when drafting the strategy and we ask that you consider these as you review and comment on the document.

The first is, who are our underserved communities? The second is, how can we better serve them? Third is, does everyone have equal access? Fourth, We are an enormous science agency and partner with others to do fish surveys and other work, how are we prioritizing this work? Are we neglecting important local fisheries that may not compare with others in terms of national gross domestic product? Is this something we need to correct? The next is, do some communities carry more burden than others? And last, how can we make our management system more inclusive?

Next slide.

HEATHER BLOUGH: This just shows where we've been and the next steps. You can see from the red arrow that we're currently in the middle of our public feedback on the national strategy. The public comment period's open until August 31st. After we finalize the strategy and response to public comments, we'll begin work on our regional implementation plan and are really looking forward to your input and suggestions for how we can best work with you all on that.

Next slide.

BRENT STOFFLE: We need your help, not only to craft an effective strategy but to partner with us in ensuring more equitable outcomes for our stakeholders. The comments period has been extended to August 31st. We hope that you'll take this information back with you, to your fellow constituents, to your fellow fishers, to your fellow divers, and that you'll share this information with them and find a way to work with us. Collaborate with us. To create a better environment for policy decisions and policy making.

You can feel free to reach out to us either through our email addresses, or there's also an opportunity to comment online. In addition, just so you know, one of the key things we talk about, in step one, is increasing communication and outreach. We have translated the executive summary into 14 languages. And so, we are hitting- this isn't just a Caribbean thing or a Southeast thing. This is a national thing. We're working with native Alaskans and Pacific Islanders. We're working with Spanish here in the Caribbean. We're working with the Vietnamese of the Gulf, and the Haitians of Miami. As we said, step one is you have to convey the message and then you have to be able to feel

comfortable to comment on that. And so we're trying to open that up as our primary goal is to get this out and get everybody involved as much as possible. And we rely on you guys to help us to convey those messages.

HEATHER BLOUGH: Just one more thing quickly. We're also working on a related initiative to build a communication network with our underserved communities in the Southeast.

We just recently onboarded an intern to help support that work. She's from Smith College. She was going to be on virtually, but I don't know if she's still on with us today. If any of you have a suggested contact for us that we could work with to help build our list in the Caribbean. We'd be really grateful if you reached out to either Brent or me, or we can put you directly in touch with her. Her name's Leah Jacobs. So thanks all for your well...

BRENT STOFFLE: Next slide.

HEATHER BLOUGH: Oh, next slide. It's questions. [laughter]
Thanks all for your time.

BRENT STOFFLE: And we wanted to get a good Saint Croix fish box in there. [laughter]

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Thank you very much for your presentation. There is a lot of diversity on that ice box. Right? Miguel?

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. Because of the time and the importance of this topic, I will make sure that all the DAP Chairs, the members of our committees, and council members receive, especially the last slide, where you have the address and people can submit comments. The people who are around the table, I would like for you to think about this. Also, tonight, if you have a question for tomorrow, probably we can address it somehow. You must participate.

You tend to think that the U.S. Caribbean is a minority group, everywhere you go. But we have gradients, and this is in tune with the national approach now. We are not the only ones discussing this. The CCC, the group of counselors is working on this with the headquarters in Washington.

We would like to make sure that the group here will receive this presentation. The presentation will be uploaded to our webpage, but most importantly, you will have the address so you can send

it to them. There is one thing about EEJ that we were discussing before. We are also talking about opportunities to get funding in this area for specific projects. There's an opportunity now that- okay, we are fighting for three positions in one important committee. John, can you briefly tell us about it and how can we help make sure that at least when one guy from the U.S. Caribbean is considered?

JOHN WALTER: Yes. Thank you. Executive director and Chair if I may. John Walter Southeast Fishery Science Center. One thing that I did want to bring to people's attention is that there is a call for applications for the American Fisheries Advisory Committee. This is a new committee that's being formed to develop the priorities for the Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program. And also, to provide recommendations to the secretary for the projects that would get recommended for funding. If you're familiar with the Saltonstall-Kennedy grants, they are grants designed to support the fishing industry, really all sectors of the fishing industry, from capacity building to product development to improving fishing efficiency. It's supposed to have a regional focus on where those priorities go and it's very likely that the administration's emphasis on EEJ, would mean that putting its focus on that, would say that there should be representation for the territories on those committees. In this case, the committee, specifically what Miguel was talking about, there are going to be three representatives from each of the regions. The region that the U.S Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are part of also has all of the states from Texas to Florida. So eight different entities are competing for three positions. That is rather tough competition for those positions. However, there's likely an opportunity here that I think could be utilized to get representation, if indeed that is the goal, and it is of the EEJ pilot strategy.

The request is open right now. People can apply for it. I was talking to the person who is administering that, and they are still developing how they're going to make those decisions. Probably if the council were to identify good candidates and make some recommendations, that would probably be very effective and helpful for whoever would get put forward.

I'll note that those three positions are commercial, recreational, and a science person. People who have experience in one of those three. Perhaps all three, if a superhero was found, but probably any one of those would be quite valuable in being able to put forth the best person or persons for that. Thanks.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. Heather?

HEATHER BLOUGH: Just a couple of other things. It looks like the deadline for that application that John's talking about is September 24th. Cristina's going to upload the draft strategy to the briefing book in English and Spanish so you can find the full document there. And the link that is on the last page of our presentation takes you to the national website. On the national website is a link to an online form where you can put individual comments in. It will not allow you to upload attachments and whatnot. If the DAPs wanted to submit a letter or if the council would like to submit a letter or anything like that, we can make sure that it gets to the right people at headquarters.

MARCOS HANKE: We will make sure that we channel all the feedback to you guys and I just need from John the basic details that you just mentioned and with that, we can work. We have raised hands.

CRISTINA OLAN: Cristina Olan, for the record. As Heather said, we are going to add the documents to the briefing book, but also, we are going to repeat the post again. We already posted it on our social media in July, but with the different deadline, now that the deadline changed, we are going to post it twice before August 31.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Cristina. Miguel?

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. Taking into consideration what John mentioned and the competition that we are going to have from Texas all the way here. You talked about Florida, you have the west of Florida and the east of Florida. We are competing with all of these people. Maybe we suggest that the Chair of the council is considered for this. You have more weight than me, for example. That way, if you all agree, we can at least try. It doesn't mean that he's going to get it, but maybe the people thinking about it, maybe they can extend it. I believe that the letter has to be tied in with the EEJ presentation that you have today.

There's no secret that when you have a few boxes, they stop at the Gulf and the South Atlantic because that's gravity. You know, you gravitate toward where there are more fisheries where they are higher up, the high rollers, etcetera. But at the same time, we all know that the nation has this thing that we call the MSA they're supposed to cover everybody from Guam to the

U.S. Virgin Islands. Don't be ashamed. Don't be timid in submitting the name that you think could represent the entire area. Send it to the appropriate people.

I suggest that, if nobody opposes it, we can submit the Chair of the council at this time. Whoever is the chair. Our fellow here, hopefully, will last 20 more years, but this is his last year as Chair of the council. At least we will be able to put our foot in the door and see what happens.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. And I want, in order not to lose the opportunity, you guys need public comment. We're very short on time, please, everybody that has a comment, at least by saying, if you support this put it on the chat and you guys can use that as participation and endorsement to your presentation and ideas.

I also want to state that the committees like MAFAC and other national-level committees should consider a position for the Caribbean to have a voice on it. That was already explored by us at the MAFAC meeting in Puerto Rico. Also, research money allocated to promote capacity building for researchers and the fishing community to better manage the fishery so that we don't compete with the big fisheries and we have something to count on. Kevin and us and the industry, everybody, can plan and make better use of a new opportunity for the benefit of our fishing communities.

Julian? The last participation, and we need to end.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras for the record. Excellent presentation. Marcos was touching it before he can touch it. We had an opportunity to present at the MAFAC meeting. It was the first time we were offered that opportunity. The three Chairs from the Caribbean, the council chair, and Miguel, were all present at the meeting here in Puerto Rico. We were well received by the group, a lot of high hitters, and a lot of powerful people from NOAA, but it was an excellent meeting, and they took what we had to say completely into consideration.

That was the first meeting that I attended, and I heard about your presentation, which is a very powerful, powerful presentation. And it needs to be taken seriously by everyone. I look forward to working with you guys. Know that you will receive comments from the STFA because I think it's very, very important to know where our community stands. Thanks again for that presentation. I look forward to looking at it again and thanks to everyone.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: It's two minutes after the time we were supposed to wrap it up. I believe if you follow the presentation, well done by the two fellows here, you will be able to submit your comments just by answering the question that was posted on the screen. From the council, you know, we want to make sure that that's a good way to follow up whether we are doing the right thing or not.

This is similar to section 504 or whatever the name is. Remember that we needed to make sure that our documents are accessible to people with disabilities. This is something that is not taken lightly. My assignment will be to make sure that everybody receives a copy of this presentation and then look forward for them to submit comments to you. This goes also for the local governments. In the case of the local government, they have a lot of programs and things that they have been working on. So they are also welcome to submit comments on behalf of the two agencies that they represent.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. Don't forget to post on the chat as part of the public comment, because we are going to adjourn the meeting. There's still an opportunity to endorse or not the ideas presented by them. It is important for our voices to be heard, Right?

BRENT STOFFLE: If they don't want to present it in the chat, they can send the comments directly to us and we can incorporate them. If they don't want to have their name out there. If they just want to make their comment, they can send them directly to us.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Are we ready to adjourn?

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. We still love bread. So we'll see you tomorrow. The Chairman is ready to- what? No, no we already asked. Nobody wanted to say anything until tomorrow.[laughter]

MARCOS HANKE: We explored the room and there were no public comments.

MIGUEL ROLON: So we can adjourn until tomorrow.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, Do you have another presentation? No? Okay. In 15 minutes, we're going to have a closed session. Thank you very much for your time, especially for the people on the translation and the equipment back there.

Thank you for the support of the council. We were able to accomplish a very good meeting in my opinion and thank you for the support on everything. Thank you.

It's 5:35 PM on August 11 and tomorrow we're going to start at the same time at 9:00 o'clock.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 11, 2022.)

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AUGUST 12, 2022

FRIDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Caribbean Fishery Management Council reconvened on Friday morning, August 12, 2022, and was called to order at 9:11 a.m. by Chairman Marcos Hanke.

MARCOS HANKE: Good morning, everyone. It's 9:11 AM. We had a little technical problem starting the meeting it's all solved now. Thank you. We are on the second day of the CFMC meeting 179, August 12th, 2022. My name is Marcos Hanke. I'm the chairman of the Caribbean council and we do a roll call again?

Yeah. Yeah. Roll call Cristina. Let's start with you.

CRISTINA OLAN: Good morning. Cristina Olan, council staff.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA: Buenos días. Liajai Rivera council staff.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Good morning. Buenos días, James Kreglo.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Good morning, Nicole Angeli.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Morning, Carlos Farchette.

LAURA CIMO: Good morning, Laura Cimo.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Good morning, Andy Strelcheck.

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Morning. Jocelyn D'ambrosio. NOAA Officer General Counsel.

JOHN WALTERS: Good morning. John Walter Southeast Fishery Science Center. NOAA Fisheries.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: Good morning. Kevin McCarthy Southeast fishery Science Center.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Buenos días. María Del Mar Lopez, NOAA Fisheries.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Buenos días. Graciela García-Moliner, council staff.

MIGUEL BORGES: Miguel Borges. Good morning. NOAA Office of law enforcement.

NELSON CRESPO: Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo DAP Chair, Puerto Rico.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras. DAP chair, Saint Thomas, Saint John.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Good morning. JJ Cruz, SSC.

HOWARD FORBES: Good morning. Howard Forbes, DPNR enforcement.

JOHN MCGOVERN: Morning. John McGovern, NOAA Fisheries.

HEATHER BLOUGH: Good morning. Heather Blough, NOAA Fisheries. when María staff.

KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI: Good morning. Kate Zamboni, NOAA general counsel.

MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY: Buenos días. María Irizarry, council staff.

HELENA ANTOUN: Good morning. Helena Antoun, NOAA Fisheries.

JANNETTE RAMOS GARCÍA: Buenos días. Jannette Ramos García, Puerto Rico Sea Grant.

WILSON SANTIAGO: Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico Fisheries liaison.

YASMIN VÉLEZ-SÁNCHEZ: Yasmin Vélez, The Pew Charitable Trusts.

SOLIMAR GARICA: Solimar Garica, Fisher mom.

JADRIEL: Jadriel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Miguel Rolon, council staff.

MARCOS HANKE: Well, thank you very much. This morning we are going to have a very important presentation but before we do that let's hear the list of the zoom participants, virtual participants.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA: Okay. In zoom, we have Ana E. Salceda, Yamitza Rodriguez, Adam Bailey, Alida Ortiz Sotomayor, Andrew Richard, Christina Package-Ward, Cindy Macknowski, Damaris Delgado, Daniel Matos Caraballo, Edward's iPhone. I believe that is Edward Schuster, as he spoke before. Iris N. Oliveras, Jaime Morel, Jesus Rivera Hernandez, John Walter, Loren Remsberg, Lieutenant Cameron Box, Manny Antonaras, Martha Prada, Matt Wailea, Nicole Greaux, Rachel Eckley, Rachel O'Malley, Sarah Stephenson, Stephanie Martinez Rivera, Tania Capote, and Vanessa is connected twice, also by phone. if I am missing anybody else, please speak up now. And that is all on the list.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Liajay. Thank you, Cristina. To start the meeting, I will pass the mic to Miguel Rolon to introduce the first presentation.

**Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) 18th
Session Update—Laura Cimo, NOAA Fisheries**

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is honored to introduce Laura Cimo. She's from the office of international fisheries trade and commerce. Today she's going to talk about the latest events regarding the WECAFC, The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission. I met Laura several years ago. I have found that probably she's one of the best members of that office that has worked with us on Caribbean issues. Rachel is the other partner in crime. She's in the room here and both of them have done an excellent job representing the United States, and the NOAA Fisheries in all these endeavors in the international arena of the Caribbean. So with that Laura and also for the record, you can introduce yourself officially.

LAURA CIMO: Gracias, Miguel. So once again, my name is Laura Cimo and I'm with the NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs Trade and Commerce. I'll be giving a presentation on the Western Center Atlantic Fishery Commission.

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For those of you who are not familiar with WECAFC, I will basically give a brief overview of the organization. Then, I'll discuss some of the outcomes from a recent meeting that just concluded of WECAFC. I'll share some information on some upcoming meetings that may be of interest, contact information, and then hopefully have time to answer any questions.

Next slide.

WECAFC operates as a regional fisheries body under article six of the FAO constitution. Essentially, that means it's basically under the umbrella of FAO. So it's not an independent organization and it acts in an advisory capacity to promote effective conservation, management, and development of living marine resources in the wider Caribbean. None of the measures adopted are binding. It's comprised of 34 members, including the United States and the area of competence is actually shown on the map by the area shaded in blue.

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There are 11 working groups under the auspices of WECAFC and they focus on either species or fishery-specific issues. As you can see, there's basic representation by member countries, but also, we have representation from subregional, regional, and international organizations. Upon invitation.

I've basically put a star by the organizations that the United States is most actively engaged in. So that includes the working groups on Caribbean spiny lobster, queen conch, fish spawning aggregations, illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing, recreational fisheries, Moored fish aggregating devices or MFADs, sharks, and fishery data and statistics.

I would note the United States is very interested in the working group on deep-sea fisheries. However, this group has not met in nearly 10 years. I also want to highlight a relatively new working group focusing on flying fish and dolphin fish. As background, back at the commission meeting in 2019 at the recommendation of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council, the United States basically asked for a working group to focus on dolphin fish and other pelagic species that are not covered by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas or ICCAT. As a result of that, the commission decided to expand an existing working group on flying fish and the United States does plan to be very active in this working group. I'll be discussing it a little bit later in my presentation. Just to

note, there's also a working group on shrimp and groundfish, but it's focused on the north Brazil Guianas Shelf.

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Now I'll give you some of the outcomes from the 18th meeting. It was held virtually at the end of July. The United States chaired that meeting, but just to note that our chairmanship has ended so the current chair of WECAFC is basically the country of Nicaragua. Also, note that we had 17 member countries participate. We had a used delegation represented by the state department, but we did have good representation.

Basically, we had staff from my office from the NOAA fishery Southeast Regional Office María Lopez. We also had representation from the Caribbean, South Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils. I do want to just take a moment to thank Miguel and Marcos who assisted us in preparing for the meeting and attended the meeting. We really appreciate your engagement and your guidance. We also had participation from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. And then just to note that Nancie Cummings of the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fishery Science Center participated in her capacity as chair of the WECAFC scientific advisory group and chair of the fisheries data and statistics working group.

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Among the outcomes, we had several important non-binding recommendations and documents that were adopted. These basically were developed by the working groups with U.S. participation. The first outcome we had was the adoption of a data collection reference framework, which will provide guidance for the standardized data collection on key species in the region. Just to note that this was based off an interim framework that was adopted in the 2019 meeting, it had been refined internationally. Also to note that basically, anything that's collected under the framework, will be contributing to a regional database that's called the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Information System. This will provide information for the monitoring of key species for stock assessments, as well as help with any needs that are identified in the region.

There was an accompanying recommendation that actually strongly encouraged members to use the framework. There was a recognition that investments are needed to enhance the capacity of member countries for data collection and reporting.

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Another outcome was, there was an adoption of a regional fish spawning aggregation FMP that's focused on Nassau grouper and mutton snapper. Again, just to note here that the United States through the Caribbean Fishery Management Council had supported the development of the plan and an accompanying communication strategy. So again, want to thank the council for its leadership on this. I think Michelle pointed out in her presentation yesterday, but I'll reemphasize that, of course, conservation of Nassau grouper is a U.S. priority since it's included in Annex III of the specially protected areas convention, we call it the SPA Protocol, as well as it is listed as threatened under the endangered species act.

There was a recommendation that members implement this plan and also improve data collection and assessment of fish spawning aggregations. And there was an agreement that WECAFC members and the secretariat should promote communication outreach for the conservation of fish spawning aggregations. That will include some of the work that Ana Salceda will be presenting at this meeting. And finally, there was a call to mobilize resources for priority research and monitoring.

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There was also a recommendation adopted on IUU fishing that calls for strengthened fisheries governance, actions to control and regulate trans-shipment activities, and the development of mechanisms to share information on fishing vessels consistent with any domestic confidentiality requirements.

The commission reaffirmed its commitment to implement the regional queen conch fishery management plan. We agreed that we would be monitoring the progress of implementation on an annual basis so we can assess any progress or identify gaps. Members were encouraged to participate in genetic research to identify the special distribution of queen conch and to provide information on connectivity and traceability. Members were strongly encouraged, as I mentioned, to participate in this. So we hope we have the work undertaken soon. We do also have a recommendation that the queen conch working group collaborate with the working group on IUU fishing to help take actions to combat IUU fishing in queen conch.

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There were also several documents related to MFADs that were adopted, however, on an interim basis. This includes a Caribbean regional management plan for MFADs and a guide for improved monitoring and assessment of the impact of MFAD fisheries on stocks. The MFAD working group is charged with finalizing this plan and the guide, so it can be considered and hopefully adopted at the next commission meeting.

The secretary of WECAFC was also asked to support a regional assessment of impacts and mitigation measures for MFAD fisheries in the region. Finally, members were encouraged to promote data collection and analysis of MFAD fisheries to support stakeholder communication and outreach campaigns and to encourage research.

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We also adopted a regional plan of action for sharks. Just to note that this basically was based on works that began in 2017, that the United States supported. The plan of action sets forth five objectives, and there's a long table of actions to undertake, to achieve those objectives. The commission also supported WECAFC becoming a signatory to a non-binding coordination mechanism for ocean governance. There was support for an exchange of letters of cooperation between WECAFC and ICCAT to facilitate collaborative work on areas of mutual interest.

Just to note, there was a strategic plan was renewed and updated through 2027. And we have a work program that was also adopted through 2024. And at the request of the United States, it was amended to include a meeting of the flying fish, and dolphin fish working group. And a meeting of the recreational fisheries working group.

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Just to note some upcoming events. In late January, we'll have the fifth meeting of the working group on spawning aggregations to be followed by a one-day meeting of the queen conch working group. We also, as I mentioned, hope to have the first meeting of the flying fish, and dolphin fish working group. But that would be at a date to be determined.

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In this working group, the plan, of course, is that the working group will identify any key issues to be addressed. We'll develop a work plan as well as our terms of reference. So NOAA

Fisheries is, you know, seeking information from stakeholders on any issues, challenges, and opportunities that they would like this working group to address. So certainly, invite input from the council and you can share your input either at this meeting or subsequent to the meeting.

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If you'd like more information on WECAFC or any of the documents that I mentioned I wanted to share the website. Of course, if you have any questions or want to discuss WECAFC further, I've provided my contact information as well as the contact information for my colleague, Rachel.

Next slide, please.

That's it. So thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for an excellent presentation. Very detailed, precise, and very good everything. Everybody must be very clear about what is going on with WECAFC. Any questions? JJ.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Thank you. How difficult or what is the process to start a new working group? Thank you.

LAURA CIMO: Thank you for the question. So the process is that at the meetings of the commission, we usually have a member who will recommend the creation of a working group and once it's adopted by the commission, that sets forth the process for a working group to be established. I would note that there was concern at the last meeting, when we asked for the creation of this working group, that there are so many existing working groups already. In fact, that's why we decided to merge the dolphin fish and other pelagics with an existing working group because there was concern about resources to be allocated to the working groups. So I would note there's, there was some hesitation by some members to create a new group. But still, if there are issues we identify of priority, certainly, there's an opportunity to get a working group established.

MARCOS HANKE: follow-up.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: For example, if there is an idea like these three working groups could be merged into this general overall idea, would that make sense?

LAURA CIMO: Yeah, in fact, I think there is a growing interest in having better collaboration between the working groups. I think many of the members on the call, I know who participate in the working groups, see that there's connectivity between the different working groups, so there's likely going to be a need to have potentially joint meetings in the future or to have greater collaboration. That's certainly an option. Thank you for the suggestion.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Graciela?

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Thank you, JJ. Following on that same topic. We were thinking, well, at least I'm thinking about ecosystem-based fishery management and the actual oceanographic connectivity of the wider Caribbean. So that was way back when in the '80s, I think there was a lot of interest in that oceanographic connection. I think that has tied off. Since we have all these shared resources, I think that the connectivity among groups makes a lot of sense. So, I'm echoing JJ's idea, and I know that it's difficult, but I think it would be worthwhile looking into it. Thank you for the presentation because it just makes sense. Thanks.

LAURA CIMO: Gracias, Graciela.

MARCOS HANKE: Anybody else? I'm sorry. I cannot see because of the light. Andy, go ahead,

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Laura. Thanks for the presentation. Two questions you mentioned the endorsement of a management plan for Nassau grouper and mutton snapper spawning aggregation. Process-wise, is that developed across the member countries of WECAFC? and then, because it's non-regulatory, it's not really binding then for them to implement, is that correct?

LAURA CIMO: Yes, that's correct. So the expectation would be that the member countries go home and implement it. But as you mentioned, it is not binding. It's just at this point an endorsement encouragement.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: And then to add on for the Caribbean Fishery Management Council that already protects and manages many of the spawning aggregations. How does that work? We've already kind of met our obligations and any additional work that may be needed.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yes. A couple of points, WECAFC, when we talk about members it's the country, not people. We have to keep that in mind because sometimes we have good ideas and when we go

there, the prime minister, believes that's not a good idea. But going back to this. We teach by example. When we go to these international meetings representing the delegation, by the way, thank you for having María Del Mar. Because of this, we re-engaged again with the contact of the Southeast region. After this meeting, the South Atlantic and the Gulf Council, are engaging again in the WECAFC.

So, the two plans were prepared by the CFMC, actually. We hired two experts. We prepare the management plan, and then we went through a whole process, similar to what we have here. We have the SSC, the Southeast Fishery Science Center, it doesn't look like much, that line, but for WECAFC to adopt those two-management plans is a success story.

The countries that belong to each one of those working groups. Already placed to adopt the management plans. The problem is that you have countries like the United States with a lot of money. Then you have island countries that don't have that much money to implement anything.

The other issue is socio-economy. In each country, the socio-economy varies. So when you go to country X and tell him you should not fish for Nassau grouper anymore, he will say "what else are my fishers going to do during those three months?" So it is very complex. Going back to your question, the United States tries not to push, but to show by example. What is it that we are doing to manage the species that we are interested in managing?

Remember, since the get-go, the Caribbean council was authorized to work on this international bodies because we share the species that are upstream, and whatever happens to them, as you all know, will have an impact on all of us. Going back to JJ's question and Graciela, The WECAFC mostly deals with a classical approach to fishery management. All countries are moving to ecosystem-based management, and they are doing that with the help of NGOs because most of them don't have the capacity to do it. Then you have countries in Central America that are interested because their economy, is in the Pacific, not in the Atlantic.

So, in one sentence, we have been able to achieve something that took us about 20 years, which is to have management plans for the species that we are concerned about, the United States is concerned about. The species that we manage in the states, that at the same time are impacted if whatever happens in other countries.

In the spawning aggregation working group, the poster boys are the Nassau grouper and the mutton snapper, but the management plan encompasses any other species that aggregate to spawn. We provide scientific advice, Southeast Fisheries Science Center. We have an expert like Dr. Nancie Cummings, she has been a champion and opened this, and now she's the president or the Chair of the scientific advisory group. Too many acronyms. She had done an excellent, excellent job. At this last meeting, I was very proud to hear her presentation because it was a lot of work and that presentation convinced the countries to move forward, and adopt the management plans and now they are in the process of helping other people get assistance from the European community. Even China is here to help them implement those plans.

In the council, we have a coordinator for the effort, Martha Prada, Dr. Martha Prada. She is coordinating the queen conch working group effort from the U.S. side. Also, the spawning aggregation working group. That spawning aggregation management plan was put together by Yvonne Sadovy and Martha Prada working 24 hours because Yvonne Sadovy is in Hong Kong. When she was awake, she was working on it and Martha was sleeping and vice versa. And they were able to put that plan in record time. I shout out to both of them because Yvonne Sadovy is a well-known authority on species of fish and we are lucky to have her still interested. She said to me, "Miguel, this is the last plan I'm going to be working on for you." And she had told me that twice already. So I hope that it is not the last one.

But anyway, I would like to thank Laura for coming here. I want also to thank Alexa, the boss, because Alexa gave us a presentation at the CCC about everything that the Office of International Fisheries Trade and Commerce is doing. Rachel and Laura helped with that speech. She was able to mention all the working groups that the CFMC is working on.

The effort is a teamwork. We have NOAA Fisheries in Washington, NOAA Fisheries, SERO office María Del Mar and before María Del Mar, there was Bill Arnold and the CFMC. Several years ago, I convinced them to accept the chairman of the council to be part of the delegation so since then we got Carlos Farchette and Eugenio Piñero, and now Marcos that participate in this meeting. Participation in these meetings is by invitation only and you go through the U.S. Department of State. They are the head of the delegation, but now we have the International Fisheries Office. I have to say that name very quickly because they keep changing it. I hope that this afternoon they still have the same.

But anyway, I think that we'd like to thank you again for what we have done. A key part of this effort is outreach and education, and that would be followed with that. But I get-James Kreglo has a question.

JAMES KREGLO: James Kreglo. I just have a question about the British Virgin Islands, what interaction or agreements do we have with them? And of course, I believe it's all under the British government.

LAURA CIMO: To answer your question, there is representation, their members basically participate and then on behalf of their territories and regions. So there is, for example, we do have territories and islands represented at WECAFC, but again, it would be by the member governments. But there is attendance by those basically based on the island as well, who know the conditions and situation better. So yes, there actually is engagement in the Caribbean. But as I mentioned it would just be from the government who would basically be in attendance at the meetings.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for the question. I want to restate to please state your name like James just did because we are family. We all know each other, but virtual people need to know who is speaking. Just state your name very loudly and clearly. Anybody else? any questions? Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm kind of interested in your working group for flying fish. Is there something that I can read up on what they're doing? Because of climate change and shifting stocks, I don't know what's going to happen in our region with flying fish. I believe sometime in the future I'm going to be talking about the management of flying fish.

LAURA CIMO: Yeah, thank you for the question. So yes, there's been actually, there has been quite a bit of work by the flying fish working group. So actually, I can send you some documents or as I said, those should be available online. There's basically a management plan that was put forth by the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism and they've been the ones who've basically been leading that working group and trying to promote actions for conservation and management. Certainly, I'll be happy to share that information with you. Thank you for the question.

MARCOS HANKE: Any other questions? Well hearing none, thank you. No? where? Oh, I didn't see you. I'm sorry, María, go ahead

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: It's a comment. This is María Lopez with SERO. So Carlos for that flying fish dolphin group, we're also going to have representation from our office, from the Caribbean branch, Sarah Stephenson, which is working with pelagic action, she's going to be part of that group too so we will be able to have that integration. And also, from the South Atlantic Branch of sustainable fisheries Nikhil K. Mehta he's the person that works with the dolphin fish in the south Atlantic. He's also going to be able to participate in that group as well so that way we have all bases covered as well from this side.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Thank you for that because we have some fishermen that are doing flying fishing, so I'd like to talk about it with them.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel

MIGUEL ROLON: Very quick. The name of the new working group is flying fish dolphin wahoo. The emphasis on the dolphin wahoo is because the countries are interested in pursuing the management of the dolphin fish. After all, the dolphin fish is beginning to be part of the economy of these countries for recreational purposes. The council participated years ago in a Pan-Caribbean workshop on dolphin fish. And also, they included the wahoo for the same reason. Wahoo and the dolphin fish, as you all know, are very important in recreational fisheries in the U.S. that are becoming more and more important in other countries.

So far, many other countries use dolphin fish in the commercial sector. The wahoo is also part of the commercial sector. Flying fish is the number one fish in many other countries, especially in the Southern part of the Caribbean. So much so, that the dollar, the easy dollar, they call it "have a flying fish." It's not the president is a flying fish behind. So it is very important. In the U.S. Caribbean flying fish are not considered high on the totem pole priorities. But as Carlos was saying, here it's becoming a concern because flying fish, as you know, is used for bait as well as other uses so it's becoming something that we would like to address.

In the presentation, you saw the recreational fishing working group. The reason for that is just because of what I just said, you know, it's becoming more important to consider the recreational sector. The reason why the countries are considering the recreational sector is because it created visas for the government. An example I was giving, for example, in Puerto Rico, a tournament for the biggest dolphin fish you had,

it had to be bigger than 70 pounds and nobody caught it, but they left, at this fishing port, \$90,000 net income per day. It doesn't look like much, but it's a lot. Every year they have something like that.

That's what we are trying to export, best practices in the U.S. to all other countries. Also, to learn from them. The moored fish aggregating devices, work that is been done in Barbados and other places, is the beauty. They have scientists dedicated to that effort and we are copying as much as possible best practices from each, each of these areas. It's a two-way street. I don't think that you mentioned article 14. No? we don't want to?

LAURA CIMO: No, I can if you'd like.

MIGUEL ROLON: Okay. You've heard a lot of articles already, so we don't have to mention any more of them. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Seeing no more hands raised in the room. I want to wrap up this by saying, as the Chairman of the council, I recognize the island-based fishery that we are going to follow up on that line of thought. Is represented by the comment that Carlos just made about the flying fish. That is something unique to the Saint Croix issues, right now. I will make sure that we'll be sharing the information and you guys have the list of working groups that WECAFC works with. Please, as council members, if you guys have any concerns or any consideration, any something, something that you need to share with us to best represent the council on this engagement with WECAFC get in touch with us and we will make sure that everything is well connected. Thank you very much

MIGUEL ROLON: Now, Mr. Chairman, we have Ana E. Salceda. She's ready. Cristina. Okay. There she's ready.

**WECAFC Spawning Aggregations Working Group, Big Fish Campaign—
Ana Salceda**

ANA E. SALCEDA: Good morning. Yes. Thank you, Miguel. Good morning, everyone. Greetings from San Francisco, California. My name is Ana Salceda, and I'm lucky enough to be the coordinator of the communication strategy of the WECAFC spawning aggregation working group that compliments the fisheries management plan.

Thank you very, very much for opening today a space for me to present the work that we have been doing at the communications subcommittee of this working group with the continuous support of several organizations, but especially NOAA Fisheries, NOAA international, and the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council that has been supporting and rooting for these communication efforts since day one. Thank you all. I'm going to share my screen to start my presentation.

Recovering big fish is a communication strategy for the conservation and management of fish spawning aggregations in the wider Caribbean region, the WECAFC region. We started working on the research and testing in 2018 and the strategy was officially approved by WECAFC in 2019. The education and outreach strategy starts implementation with a three-year trailing with a public engagement campaign called Big Fish.

This campaign is designed to help protect fish spawning aggregations initially focusing on two species, Nassau grouper and mutton snapper, which are the focal species of the management plan and as many of you know are both in danger.

I understand that many of you don't have much information about the work that we have been doing. So I will try my best to briefly summarize what we have achieved until now and the next steps ahead to be able to launch this campaign in the spring of 2023.

The name of the campaign, Big Fish refers to many of the attributes that are foundational to this strategy. It suggests the size of the fish that aggregate to spawn, the big money that is at stake, the size of the fisheries crisis, and the number of people and countries that are intimately connected to fisheries throughout this big region.

Our target audiences, as you can see on the screen, are the fishing community and we will focus on two key stakeholders, the fishers and the decision-makers. The general public is our third target audience and it's critical because they drive the demand through buying habits in the Caribbean and beyond. They can influence targeted species.

The project voice of the campaign. All of our efforts are designed to bring people into the fold to support fish spawning aggregation conservation. The voice of the campaign must strike the right tongue. It has to be inviting and positive to do so. We have identified some things that resonate with our audiences some of which you can see on the screen; as well as, persuasive

messages and trends that will guide our efforts, our communication products.

As part of the word bank of the campaign, here are the selected messages on the right side of the screen. These are the key messages that focus on both species. For Nassau grouper, no fishing or sales from December through March. From the mutton snapper the same message from April through July, the mating seasons. You can also see on the screen some of the catchphrases of the campaign that depend on the communication product, depending on the platform we combine. These are some of them and we have several more. This applies to the word bank of the campaign and any other communication product. please don't hesitate to ask if you want to see or learn more about the communication strategy, the campaign, or any of the communication products that we have used this far.

A part of these word banks are some hashtags, and you can see on the screen on the left side, you see the target audiences and the different hashtags that we have identified that resonated with our audiences.

We are working with an advertisement agency, Duncan Channon out of San Francisco, on the branding of the campaign. We are developing with them, the public-facing identity, our logo. Out of several original sketches, we are working on these three that you see on the screen which seems to be the favorite for our communication subcommittee and some informal testing that we have done.

Speaking of accomplishment, we have already completed several projects. Among them, you see the communication plan that we are presenting today with its corresponding timeline. We have already produced two short films out of the four that are sought out for this campaign. One is focused on Nassau grouper, and the other one is from fishers to fishers. It includes the description of the behavior of the species that aggregate spawn in general. We make the case of why it doesn't pay off to fish and aggregation. It's basically a call to protect the species during the breeding season.

We also produced, the outreach team at the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council led by Dr. Alida Ortiz, which has beautifully produced two species-specific posters that describe the life history and spawning behavior of these two focal species Nassau grouper and mutton snapper. They are currently being distributed for free, obviously, across the Caribbean, in the three

languages of the campaign to encourage responsible harvest and conservation during the spawning periods.

We are also producing several other products right now. One of which is really, really important for the campaign. It is a one-hour film for an international broadcast called "The Secret Crown" that features conservation needs. We are producing this film in coproduction with Nature/PBS, Red Bull, The Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and DocLighths.

Even though the film will premiere in Europe early next year, it will premiere in the U.S. in April 2023. The reason that we are living a window in between is that we are working very closely with PBS and The Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Their respective outreach campaigns' goal is not only to promote the fund but also to promote fish spawning aggregation. So we are working with them to reach- they have an amazing audience as many of you know. For example, PBS reaches more people than National Geographic and Discovering Channel altogether. And The Howard Hughes Medical Institute actually expands not only to the U.S. but expands to many countries in Latin America. They reach students in high school and the first years of college.

Also funded and in production is a third- it's still to be defined if it's going to be a poster or a booklet, but it's a product that the Caribbean Fishery Management Council is going to be producing. It focuses on the best practices for fish spawning aggregations. It will be designed as a template allowing the different countries to customize it and insert their local regulations on their text.

We are also producing two additional short films. One is focused on mutton snapper, on sama. It's for the fishing communities and decision-makers. And a fourth short film is poppier and lighter, as you can tell by the title, "Love is in the Water." It's a two-minute film, especially for social media platforms for the general public.

It's incredible, but many people, common citizens, don't know that all these species aggregate to spawn, and they have never seen or heard about this incredibly important and beautiful natural event that occurs every year in the waters of the Caribbean. We hope that with this short film, in addition to the, obviously, the international film for broadcast, people can learn about this event, understand how important it is to respect the breeding seasons of these species, and don't buy or eat mutton snapper or Nassau grouper during this time.

What we call The Citizen Science Program for fishers and enforcement officials includes the short videos and posters that we mentioned before and a very important package, we call the radio kits. These radio kits include the public service announcements, two of them, one for each flag species, and two podcasts. One is "The Secret Language of Nassau Grouper" which includes all of the underwater acoustic and vocalizations that people like Michelle Schärer and other brilliant scientists in the Caribbean, some of which are part of the working group, are working on. It's incredible how these animals communicate, and scientists already know what they mean when they make very specific sounds. It's fascinating. The podcast actually is doing really, really good. The other podcast is for fishers called "Fish Smart" it's basically a dialogue. A third proposal will be submitted to a SPAW in 2023 to fund the production of the French radio kit.

The other communication product. It's an important one that doesn't have any funds yet is the digital hub. The digital hub is bigger than a website. It's a multilingual interactive platform with freely accessible resources that anybody can download. It's to be used by partners and target audiences. It's a resource library and a collaboration hub. Along with the social media platforms, the typical, you know, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. At this point, we represent the online- it will be the online presence of the SAWG. It will serve as a distribution center for the product. So all the partners can download it and distribute it on their own, our products. Right?

The hub also creates a digital landscape that interconnects the platforms of the different partners and synchronizes the campaign. All in all, the big fish hub will provide a home for the campaign, but very important it will remain in place to track actions, efforts, and updates to accomplish the fishery management plan.

We have created a proposal along with WECAFC to obtain funding from the European Union to advance fish spawning aggregation information gathering in the wider Caribbean. This grant would partially fund the hub, but we still need some additional funds to produce this product. We would like to take advantage of this presentation to kindly request the support of NOAA and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council to complete the budget that we have to produce this important product.

And finally, you see the timeline of the campaign. We have been updating it. In the last year, because COVID has really affected

us all and this communication effort, there hasn't been an exception. So as we said, in the beginning, we started the work in 2018. The strategy was approved in 2019. From then on, we have been working non-stop and we are trying to get everything done to launch the campaign on March 15th. The one-hour film for broadcast will premiere in the U.S. on the 26th of April so we would like to take advantage of the momentum that it will create to launch the whole effort. At that point, we will also be launching the outreach programs of The Howard Hughes Medical Institute and PBS so we expect that we will have a great impact.

At the end of 2024, we will be evaluating the campaign, what worked, and what didn't work to inform the next step of the communication for the management planning implementation, which will be phased.

Thank you very, very much for your attention and interest. And you can see the contact information. Cristina Olan from the Caribbean Fishery Management Council is a very important member of our team, the production team, and the communications subcommittee as well as the leader and everybody in the Caribbean Fishery Management Council has been helpful. We are working together to make this happen and please do not hesitate to reach out to either Cristina, Miguel Rolon, or myself to watch the videos, obtain the posters, or whatever project you are interested in. We would really appreciate that you distribute freely, obviously, these products. The idea is to reach the biggest amount of people possible. Thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Ana. Like always your presentation, the content, your vision, and your strategies of communication are deeply appreciated by all. Thank you very much. We have a question, raised hand, on the chat.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA: Alida Ortiz.

ALIDA ORTIZ: Good morning. Good to see you, Anna. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for this update on the materials and everything that Big Fish contains. One of the most important initiatives is part life history because that's the content that tells the fishers, the consumers, and everyone that the fish is not only for the time plan. You have to know where it grows, where it reproduces, where it lives, and where it eats at different stages of its life cycle, and that to us it is essential. With that, I have the compromise with you, I have the compromise with the council, and I have the compromise with my people on having that information be available in ways that they

can understand. Not in a textbook, but something where we get the information, the scientific concept, but something that we can pronounce, and we can use in any kind of conversation. Thank you so much, Anna, for all this work.

ANA E. SALCEDA: Thank you for the support, Alida. I mean, yes, I totally agree. In fact, the podcast that we recorded last week "The Secret Language of Nassau Grouper" describes the whole life cycle of the species. Also, the film that we are producing about the sama that many of you have really supported, Cristina, Virginia and yourself, with some images. It was really, really, it's interesting because it was really, really difficult to get footage of the mutton snapper, impossible. Not even in stock footage or commercial stock footage. You would think that you would be able to get footage of not only the spawning, but it's tricky, right, to show the life cycle. Well, there's not much footage available not even to buy. That tells you how little we still know and how much work we need to do to bring this amazing, not only important because of conservation, the health of the ocean, and, of course, the well-being and livelihood of coastal communities, but also the beauty of this event, which is magnificent. Beauty really, as you all know, resonates with people.

We have been working with many of you in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to bring this, and the life cycle of the mutton snapper to the screen. So thank you again, and yeah. Thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank, thank you very much. Miguel is going to say something before we pass to the next presentation. Thank you.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you, Ana. I wanted to say, Ana has been the coordinator of the campaign and on the contract with us as many other hats as she wears. The Caribbean council is committed to continuing to work on these efforts. We are going to put some money into it as we have done before. The key part is that, a while ago, we were talking about how difficult it is to implement a management plan. There's a lot of money involved. There's a lot of political will involved, etcetera. But the campaign we believe is the key because if the fishers of each country are aware of the issues and are aware of the power they have to convince their peers, convince the government agencies that this is something that should be done.

It goes a long way. More than any law regulation that you can think about. We started with a Nassau grouper and with the

mutton snapper we are probably moving into other species, but this campaign will be the key for years to come as to the efforts that we have, the success of the efforts that we have to manage the species.

Thank you, Ana, again. We'll be in touch through these coming years.

ANA E. SALCEDA: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. The next presentation is- I was going to read a letter that is hot from the press. I'm going to do that after this presentation which is now. NOAA Fisheries protective resource update.

JENNIFER LEE: Good morning, everyone. Can everyone hear me all right?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. You can proceed. Thank you very much for checking. Please present yourself, the name and everything. For the record, please.

JENNIFER LEE: Excellent. Yes. So this is Jennifer Lee. I work in the SERO Protected Resources Division and serve there as a fishery biologist. But most importantly, your council liaison, I am here to try to inform you of any protected resources issues that pertain to the council and your business. You can always reach out to me anytime with any questions.

Today I'm going to just share some updates on various actions that we have going of potential interest.

Next slide.

The slides just have the topics of the various actions that I'm just going to tell you a little bit about and update you on. I do have a briefing document that I provided the council that will have the details of each item. You can get the information that way after if you need to check on something.

First up, I have the queen conch status review, and let me just- I just noticed my notes in a slightly different order. That one is missing. Hold on one second. Let's see. Let me save the best for last, I apologize. One second. Forgive me I just realized I had pulled up the south Atlantic briefing document, which is why I am very confused at this moment. I actually had it up and

ready for you. Bear with me just one minute while I pull up the correct document and my apologies.

CRISTINA OLAN: Am I showing the correct presentation?

JENNIFER LEE: Yes. Yes, you are.

CRISTINA OLAN: Okay.

JENNIFER LEE: Yeah. So sorry, just give me one minute, please. This will just take me a second to pull it up.

CRISTINA OLAN: Do you need to share your screen?

JENNIFER LEE: No, I do not. I just need- I'm so sorry it's just taking one second to pull up the document. It's just that I am the liaison for multiple councils and I'm sorry, for some reason I have the wrong update ready on my screen. Okay.

CRISTINA OLAN: I made you a cohost in case you need to share some of your documents.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Do you want to do the letter?

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, that's a good idea, María. Cristina, in the meantime, while she uploads the presentation. Can we briefly read the letter for the record that we just received from the fishermen? Actually, we already circulated the letter from those fishermen to the council members. The letter, Jannette Ramos, from Sea Grant was kind enough to share the letter with us. She was the one that conducted the letter to the council and really appreciate that. Thank you, Jannette.

Okay, Cristina, because they have it on their email, just read the letter and the information will be on record.

**Letter from The Aguadilla Fishermen's Association to HMS
Caribbean Permit Fishing Council**

CRISTINA OLAN: Cristina Olan, I will read the letter.

"To Randy Blankinship Division Chief of NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division. Delisse Ortiz Fisheries Management Specialist. July 27th, 2022.

Dear Mr. Randy Blankenship, Ms. Delisse Ortiz: Receive a cordial greeting from the members of The Aguadilla Fishermen's Association and myself.

We hereby wish to inform you that the fishermen of Association La Villa del Ojo Inc. Aguadilla, Puerto Rico and the residents of Crash Boat Beach, would like to inform the HMS Caribbean Permit Fishing Council that commercial fishermen are extremely concerned about the regulations regarding the tuna species allowed and limited to only 10 tunas per boat. Two of the species (Aleta Amarilla, Thunnus Albacares, Yellowfin tuna)(bonito, Katsuwonus pelamis, skipjack tuna) are mostly caught on the island.

The limitation of 10 Thunnus Albacares yellowfin tuna. I really do not think it would affect the fishermen on this side of the island. My main concerns are the Katsuwonus pelamis, skipjack tuna. The skipjack tuna is what mainly is used for bait for bottom fishing. The limitation of skipjack tuna would be a total disaster for the local fishermen.

The fishermen live all year-round fishing this species that are our livelihood, and also during the closed season for the queen snapper, silk snapper, grouper, lobster, and other species. And (Bonito, Katsuwonus pelamis, skipjack tuna) are also our source for bottom fishing, as we use them for bait year-round. This regulation would affect us in a catastrophic way for the commercial fishermen. We urge the relevant agencies that work with the Caribbean HMS permits to take into consideration the problems that this would bring to commercial fishermen who live from this species on a daily basis. The fishermen from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico and from our neighborly towns, such as Isabella, Rincón, Arecibo, and Aguada are extremely concerned and ask the council to work on this matter.

Sincerely, Ray Alma President Villa Pesquera, La Villa del Ojo, Inc. Enrique Hernandez Vice President Villa Pesquera, La Villa del Ojo Inc.

MARCOS HANKE: thank you very much to Ray Alma and Enrique. I want first to comment that this is the proper way that all the fishing villages and stakeholders should communicate their concerns so we can follow up on them. Thank you so much. This is an example for the rest. I am the representative on the HMS committee for the council and I will make sure I'll follow up on it. I'm very aware of this permit and we'll keep in touch with you guys in the future. Maybe you guys ask why the HMS letter is here. It's because they have implications on the other fishery. After all, this is a source of bait fish for the reef species that we fish for and have major implications. I'll make sure

that this letter gets to the right hands on HMS and we can discuss that. Miguel and then we have the chat.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, on behalf of a lady you'll call the office, she was requesting National Marine Fisheries Services of any possibility of having the application in Spanish. She was working on helping a neighbor, he's a fisherman who was interested in obtaining an HMS permit, but they couldn't because they couldn't understand the language. So, I promised to bring this to the attention of the council. I know there are some mechanisms, but I didn't want to bother, for example, María Del Mar with this. What is it that we can do to help these people, María?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: So yes. Thank you, Miguel. This is María Lopez. So in that particular case, I believe we were able to help this constituent. I was able to talk to the person and provide assistance. Obviously, you know, I don't work with permits, I don't work with HMS, however, we were able to get a person. There is a Spanish-speaking, NMFS employee, in the HMS. Her name is Delisse Ortiz and she communicated with this person and provided assistance in Spanish.

So anytime that you have a question about a permit, HMS, you can call me and I will gladly take care of that. If I don't have the information, I will communicate with the permits office to get everything clarified or you can contact directly the HMS office Delisse Ortiz, and she will attend your questions in Spanish.

I think for now we can work on that, and I believe the council was also providing some assistance with translating. This is one thing that obviously we have to work with when we pursue the federal permits for the council because, you know, our constituents also speak Spanish so that will be something that we'll need to take into consideration when these permits take place. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel?

MIGUEL ROLON: Not to create a whole discussion again, but this is one example of EEJ that we were discussing yesterday. Out of the 14 languages that were presented today. I'm happy with the Spanish.
So anyway, that's enough.

MARCOS HANKE: I have the chat and I go with you, John. Go ahead.

CRISTINA OLAN: Vanessa Ramirez on the chat, comment. Point of clarification. They have HMS charter/headboat three yellowfin per day and other no limit or small Caribbean permit that is the one with the restriction? and then she repeats the question.

Then we have John Walter with the link to the HMS regulations.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, my participation to put it into context, I was deeply involved in the creation of this permit and the HMS office has always been open to clarifying things, which is the first layer of what María just mentioned, but also to revise the regulations and properly change it, if it's possible and if the science supports it. It can be a slow process, but they have been very willing to hear and be proactive. I just wanted to say that on record, because that's my experience with this process. John Walter?

JOHN WALTERS: Yes. I just wanted to clarify. The concern in the letter is that there is a 10 fish limit. Is that something that's proposed? because the current regulations are for the general category permit posted there's no limit on skipjack or yellowfin and there are different permit categories for charter/headboat at angling and general category. So Marcos, could you clarify where the 10 fish comes from? And-

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. This is a special permit for the Caribbean for a small boat HMS permit. It was created to address the peculiarities of the Caribbean. First of all, we don't have dealers to move the fish through the chain, right? This permit allows you to sail directly to the restaurant and have all the other peculiarities that are matched with the Caribbean reality. At the time they established the 10 fish per boat as a combined aggregate of the small base but right now we are identifying that something needs to be done here because this quantity if you translate to bait fish, skipjack as bait fish, is too small, right? So, this is what the fishermen are bringing. This is part of the evolution of this permit. I have some ideas that I will share with the group when I am on HMS. I think something can be done with that and little by little, we will get there.

MIGUEL ROLON: Wilson Santiago has a little bit more information about the issues so we can respond to John.

WILSON SANTIAGO: Yes. Wilson Santiago, for the record. Yes, I with Jannette Ramos we're the ones that the fishers sent the letters to and expressed their preoccupations. Their problem is that that community, in particular, fishers in Aguadilla, have lived from tuna, specifically, those species that are listed in

the Caribbean small boat permit. When they do not fish deep-water snapper, and the closure of other species began they go catch tuna. They also use tuna to catch the deep-water snappers and other species. Their problem is that with this regulation of the Caribbean small boat permit with only 10 bag limits of tuna they cannot fish more of that so they cannot have bait, in some seasons they cannot catch a whole tuna. That is the preoccupation of this fishery community.

MARCOS HANKE: Also testifying on the evolution of this permit, just recently, they added some swordfish because it is the interest of the HMS office to develop and keep adapting this permit to be functional in the U.S. Caribbean. I think, for sure, we will be able to take this message and get some positive results. Let's see what they say.

Nelson, short comment. And we go for the next presentation.

NELSON CRESPO: Yes. Those guys, the guy from Aguadilla is one of the biggest bait producers for the whole of Puerto Rico. Maintaining this permit the way it is it's going to create a negative economic impact on their livelihood. So, I appreciate Marco what you're going to do on behalf of these people.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. Next presentation. I hope the presentation is ready to go and we understand the technical difficulties. It can happen, and we are excited to hear your presentation again.

JENNIFER LEE: Yes. Thank you very much. I am all ready and set now. Everything is resolved.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much proceed.

JENNIFER LEE: I was about to share with you some ESA actions related to listing and rulemaking. The first up was the queen conch status review. Just to review in December 2019, NOAA Fisheries initiated the status review of queen conch to determine whether the species should be listed as endangered or threatened under the ESA and opened the 60-day public comment period.

CRISTINA OLAN: Um, excuse me, Jennifer, do you need me to share the same document again?

**NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Update—NOAA Fisheries/SERO
Staff**

JENNIFER LEE: Cristina, you are welcome to share the PowerPoint. It was, it was just the topics. Thank you. There's no problem. Great. And if you can just go to the next slide that, has-

You will see the first, there is that queen conch status review, and that is what I am sharing with you now. And so, this is something you've talked about a couple of times at meetings, and I want to let you know that we do anticipate publishing our ESA listing determination in the federal register sometime very soon.

We will distribute that notice widely once the determination is published. Again, if after considering the status review and ongoing conservation efforts, NOAA Fisheries determines that the petition requests, in other words, listing queen conch on the ESA is not warranted then we will be publishing a negative 12-month finding in the federal register with an explanation. If it is warranted, we'll be publishing a 12-month finding along with a proposed rule in the federal register and we will be requesting public comments on the proposal to list the species.

One or more public hearings may be held. Then within one year of publishing a proposed rule, we either publish a notice to finalize the decision via the proposed rule.

Let me try it again. We, either, publish a notice to finalize the proposed rule, in other words, list the species. Or we withdraw the proposed rule. I'm sorry I can't share more with you at this time because it is not complete but again we keep an eye out. We'll definitely be sharing that with the council and public and are happy to discuss it at your next meeting.

Our next item is our Nassau grouper critical habitat determination. For this one, this is just an update. Also, something you've been keeping an eye on where we're looking at potential critical habitat areas, including the Southeast coast of Florida and areas around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Fishery Management Councils and the public will have an opportunity again, to provide comments if critical habitat is proposed. Then a comment period would be included with the rule of the public. So again, that's one too that is in the works, but not complete at this time.

We do have, also, a five-year status review on seven threatened coral species. Actually, for that one, I can share better

information because we just published the five-year review, yesterday. Just so you're clear on what that is. A five-year review is a periodic analysis of a species status conducted to ensure that the listing classifications of a species as threatened or endangered under the ESA are accurate. The review evaluates the information that's become available since the last status review. The last review was back in 2014.

The results of this are that we determined that the classification for staghorn coral, lobed star, mountainous star, boulder star, and rough cactus are all going to be maintained as threatened. The classification for pillar coral will be considered for uplisting from threatened to endangered.

We're recommending changes to the status of pillar coral from threatened to endangered due to the loss in the Northern portion of its range, the low and declining population and the susceptibility to stony coral tissue loss, and then the rapid spread of disease to most areas of the Caribbean. However, understand that the status view is not a proposed rule so the change in status will only be achieved through a separate rule-making process. Again, that would have a public comment period.

That's just a heads-up. I'll follow up and make sure you all have where you can look at the status review itself and see what it says. And then stay tuned. I think the tentative schedule is by maybe around next May or early summer that we would come out with a proposed rule to consider.

Then the next one here is the determination of critical habitat for the threatened Caribbean corals. Again, this is one that we have a proposed rule out on already and the public comment period was back in early January of 2021, we received over 21,108 comments. ESA requires that we publish our final determination and I believe we are targeting, let's see, I think actually sometime around next, I would say late spring, or early summer is our best guess of when we might have that.

Okay. From there next slide.

I just wanted to remind you guys that, as far as ESA consultations completed on the Caribbean FMPs, the island-based FMPs, we actually completed a biological opinion back on September 21st, 2020, on the three island-based FMPs, as far as when we were looking at the approval of the amendments. So I know you have, your proposed rule came out much later. So I just wanted to let folks know that we did complete a biological

opinion on those. We did conclude that the actions were not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any of our listed species. I don't think the council ever got a presentation on that biological opinion so I just wanted to remind you guys, one, that we did complete that opinion, and perhaps sometime in the future if you would like we could give you a summary presentation on that biological opinion in its details. And that is it.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much for your presentation. Any questions from the group? I think it's very clear this is going to be shared on our website. Your presentation will be posted. Everybody will have access to it. It is a good document of reference. I don't see any question here. Is there anybody on virtual? Seeing no hands.

Thank you so much again. We are going to put the brakes, let's make the break a little earlier because we are a little late on the schedule so that people can stretch their legs a little bit. Let's take a 10-minute break.

We'll be back in 10 minutes. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. The next presentation after the break will be Carlos Farchette and we relocate him to this position. Carlos Farchette. Please state your name and the title of your presentation.

**U.S.V.I. Fish Traps Reduction Plan and Possible Compatibility in
EEZ— Carlos Farchette**

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm Carlos Farchette. I have been trying to get this in play for quite a couple of meetings already. Let me go from here.

In or about 2015, the then regional administrator, Dr. Roy Crabtree, in an effort to stave off threats of lawsuits filed by NGOs to prohibit fish traps in the EEZ, decided that he would not prohibit trap gear without first working on managing the fish trap fishery in the U.S. Caribbean. Committees of commercial trap fishers were formed in the district of Saint Thomas and Saint Croix with funding by the council to cover the venue for the various meetings and with SERO staff, Bill Arnold, Heather Blough, and consultant Tony Iarocci to assist the committees in the development of a fish trap reduction plan.

The plans were approved and signed into law in 2017 and implemented in the 2018-2019 year for territorial waters. However, the previous administration did not formally submit the planning, writing NOAA to consider it for compatibility in the EEZ. I'm looking for guidance in completing this task. If a motion is required, I have a couple of drafts, or SERO staff can guide me in the best way to present a motion. So here is the draft motion. I want to put it up on the screen.

Are we good? Good. Okay. Request staff to develop an options paper to include the Saint Croix fish trap reduction- to include the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas's

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA: Sorry, can you go slower so I can- Thank you.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Oh, sorry, sorry. Sorry. Request staff to develop an options paper to include the St Croix and Saint Thomas fish trap reduction plan as an amendment to the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas IBFMPs for compatible regulations in the EEZ.

MARCOS HANKE: Do we have a second?

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Nicole Angeli. Second.

MARCOS HANKE: I will read the motion before we start the discussion for the record. Request the staff to develop an options paper to include the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas fish trap reduction plan as an amendment to Saint Thomas and Saint Croix island-based FMP for compatible regulation in the EEZ motion by Carlos Farchette. Second by Nicole. Julian?

JULIAN MAGRAS: Yeah, Julian Magras for the record, I think it needs to say Saint Thomas-Saint John because the plan is the Saint Thomas-Saint John plan. Otherwise, I think it's good.

MARCOS HANKE: Carlos do you accept the new language?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes. So, one district over there,

MARCOS HANKE: Jack.

JACK MCGOVERN: Yes. I'm wondering if this is pretty closely related to the federal permits that we're doing. If you'd want to, the council would want to include that in that amendment.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Right. Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: María.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: Hi, this is María Lopez. Okay. Some background information about this action. If I recall back in 2019 there was a presentation by Bill Arnold were because there was a request, you know, remember that there was a request to do a compatibility and, in that presentation, there were some items that needed to be addressed before we could move with the compatibility of the fish reduction plan among other things. So some of the things were discrepancies between the regulations that the U.S. Virgin Islands have with respect to the size of the, I believe it was the mesh size of the traps and the definitions of the fish traps versus the lobster traps, etcetera. Those things in comparison with what we had in our regulations needed to be addressed before we could move into that. Right?

I think this is an exercise of going back into the record. This was late 2019, and then we got the pandemic so everything kind of got like stuck in there. I think this will be a good opportunity to kind of like revive everything. Look in our records and see what happened. Perhaps bring a presentation for the next council meeting where we say, okay, this is what we agreed the last time, these are the things that still need to be addressed. Let's see how we can move forward and address those so we can implement the plan. Right?

And then the other thing was that statements with the permits, the trap reduction program in the U.S. Virgin Islands has some requirements that are not necessarily compatible with federal regulations. For example, the residency requirements that the fish trap has because it's tied to the commercial fishing license. So that is another thing that needs to be addressed and look for ways to fix that.

So, absolutely, we can definitely revive this topic and see if maybe bring a presentation for the next council meeting so we can talk about those topics and see how we can move forward. Does that sound good?

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yes. María, I'm glad you brought that historical data into play because I mean, we've been kind of ignoring a law here that was passed by Governor Snyder way back in 1995, whereby the year 2000 all fish traps both Saint Thomas-Saint John and Saint Croix were supposed to have a minimum mesh size of two inches. It's still both, locally and federally, the inch and a half hex or two-inch square rule are

still in play. And I think that we need to rehash all this information again to get it in line with where we want to be. Everybody right now is using two-inch mesh. Graciela

MARCOS HANKE: We have Julian and Graciela.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras for the record. Excellent for bringing it up María. If it's possible if we can get a list before the next meeting of some of the issues if you have that information where I think can start to be addressed within the two FACs, the two Fishery Advisory Committees for the territorial waters, because I think what some of the issues were, was the transferability, the mesh size, and like you said, the residency.

If we have a list of stuff I think it can be presented at the upcoming FAC, and maybe we can have some answers for the December meeting or whenever we are having the next meeting. I think that would be a great help. I don't actually sit on that committee, but I'm a supporter of the team for Saint Thomas-Saint John, and I will be willing to help in whatever area I can help with this project. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. Carlos. Carlos, I'm sorry. Graciela then Carlos. Okay. Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Yeah. And I'm kind of glad Julian brought that up when it comes to the FACs because the Saint Croix FAC has already submitted its recommendations to the Division of Fish and Wildlife director Angeli on compatible regulations. We've done the complete homework that we were assigned by commissioner Oriol. Included in those recommendations, is this mesh size for fish traps. So whenever that comes up, I'm sure director Angeli and María and everybody will get together and see what that list looks like. But María, I don't know. Do you think I should adjust this motion or is that good enough?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: María Lopez. I think at this time we're not ready for an options paper because an options paper means that we are ready to move forward with something more tangible. And there are still things that need to be addressed before that. So if you, and maybe you don't even need a motion for this, a council can just request staff to prepare a list of issues and bring a presentation to the next council meeting so we can start that discussion and we'll take it from there. But I don't really think we need a motion for that. Um, so whatever you want to do.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Sounds good. I'll resend the motion and I'll follow María's guidance. She's always helped me out quite a bit.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you. Miguel, you want to say something? Yeah. Actually, the Chair then can instruct the staff to prepare that presentation for the December meeting. Of course, the list of issues can be sent to Julian, to the whole council, anybody who is interested so you are able to discuss them at the respected FAC.

Yesterday, somebody asked me, now that we're mentioning it, "what is the difference between an options paper and a scoping meeting paper, etcetera?"

And I believe that María already said it. When the council decides to go forward with something, you need to prepare a paper, a document that addresses the issue from the biological point of view, the governance involved, and the socioeconomic involved. Then, with that paper, you do the deliberations for something that you already decided to go forward with.

The scoping paper is when somebody brings to the attention of the council, an issue with a particular fish, for example. Then, we take the idea that this particular fish requires management, to the public. And then we prepare a document where we identify the biology, the species, the landings, etcetera. Then, you go to the public and ask them what they think about the idea of managing this particular species. That's what they call it scoping. At that time there is no decision by the council. You just go out and collect that information. Once you collect the information, then you come back to the council, and you are presented with the outcome of the results of those series of meetings.

That is the main difference between the scoping meeting and the options paper. Once you come back from the public process opinions, etcetera. Then the council decides, okay, we would like to proceed with the management of this particular species. Put in the management unit or whatever. Then you ask for an options paper and that's the difference between the two.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. And I think that's super important, especially because I have a new council member that needs to be clear on how the process goes, right? So that he can have the right tools to be effective on this council. We have the instruction. We are all set, right? I will follow up with the staff and María, and just want to make one comment to Julian your leadership on this at Saint Thomas-Saint John will be

really appreciated. You can move along and get organized input from your stakeholders about those issues. Then we can have something, a better tool, to address the discussion when the council meeting comes up in December. Thank you. The next item on the agenda is the outreach and education report by Alida Ortiz.

MIGUEL ROLON: Alida. Are you ready?

Outreach and Education Report— Alida Ortiz, OEAP Chair

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Yes, I am. Can I begin? I'm still here. Good morning, everyone. I'm sorry. I cannot be with you presential, but I'm following everything, and I hope that I will see you in December. So this is my report.

Next slide, please.

Just a little moment to remind you that outreach and education are following the five-year strategic plan that was accepted by the council. The goal that has to do with communication says engage, educate, and inform a variety of audiences to improve public understanding and participation in the council process. For objectives 20, 21, and 22, we are following our strategies and our actions, very, very strictly the recommendations in the five-year strategic plan. Especially right now, we are working to keep the content and organization of the council's website to enhance its utility to a variety of users. There's a working group that we have been working on the development of radio of other- not this time. The webpage is being reviewed, remodeled, and it will be easier to work with and the information will be there. If you have any questions about that, you can ask Miguel after I finish.

Next, please.

In coordination with management partners, we are meeting with liaisons and DAP Chairs and with DAPs from each island to receive their ideas directly so that we can have better communication with the stakeholders. Remember that in our region, even though we are pretty small Caribbean islands, we have very different cultural and societal things in fishing. So we have to talk to the fishers in Saint Croix, we have to talk to the fishers in Saint Thomas and those in Puerto Rico and try that our information fills all the requests and that we can attend to all the necessities that they have. For that, we are working on developing the radio kits and the video presentations so that they can have things more related to their area.

Next.

Objective 21 is to promote the participation of a variety of a stakeholder. So we have to, besides the fishers, we need the consumers, we need the people who sell the fish, we need the chefs, we need everyone in the community to know what's going on with the fishing in the area.

Right now, we are developing the newsletter mostly highlighting the meetings of the council that they're going into the webpage. We don't have the newsletter, the large one that we had before, but we take everything that you say in these meetings, put it as a summary, and then you can go to the presentation that will be on the website.

Next, please.

Objective 22, we also continue the support of the Marine Resource's Education Program. We meet with them every time we-I'm part of the steering committee and we will have a workshop. The one that was canceled after María and the COVID, will take place in Puerto Rico on August 26 - 28 at La Parguera. We are still working on the recruitment of the people who are going to participate.

Also, we are collaborating with the Department of Education in Puerto Rico to develop a marine curriculum for a special school in Parguera. This is not a council project, but we are collaborating with them on the information and materials that the council has, that can be introduced into the curriculum.

To me, that will be a very, very important project for the rest of what we have to do in outreach and education.

Next one, please.

We are making partners with other organizations like PEPCO. With PEPCO, we always, in each of the presentations that Wilson does too, the fishers in Puerto Rico, make a presentation on what is the council's participation in the education of the fishers. Then we also try to have a PEPCO in the Virgin Island, but I don't know how is that project going on because I haven't heard much about that. We also made some placemats for Saint Croix restaurants that the people in Saint Croix asked us for. We have the underutilized species and some that are eaten in the touristy restaurants and some that are eaten in the local

restaurants. Those placemats have been produced and distributed already.

We are collaborating with UPR-Sea Grant for signs for La Parguera Marine Reserve which is a very important MPA on the Western coast but there are no signs for that.

Next one.

The specific areas for action for our outreach and education will be ecosystem-based management and the fishery ecosystem plan. We have to get that information in any way that people can understand it, the fishers and the people in general, because it is not where you fish, it is understanding what the ecosystem is. what is working there? That's what I mentioned before when I spoke in the presentation of Ana Salceda, that it is important that fishers and consumers understand that mangroves and high seas are connected. And some of the species that they take out on high seas, probably the juveniles or the reproductive areas are in the mangroves and the seagrass bed. So we have to keep that connection very, very clear.

The other part that we will be stressing from 2020 until 2025 is the Island-Based Fishery Management Plans. We have to make some kind of material, be it fact sheets, be it other products where the basics of the island-based, for each one of these islands is there. The document itself is difficult to read, is technical, and it has a lot of information. Where if we take it, and talked to María Del Mar about this, that chapter five of each one of the island-base can be the way, or it has the information that we can take and produce either fact sheets, posters, whatever the community demands on the issues that are important in the island-based.

We keep working with sustainable fish and seafood consumption. I think that's probably the best way that we can get together, that we can tie, or make connections with, from the fish to the table. What are you eating? Where does it grow? Or what kind of function does that fish has, that species have in the ecosystem? and how the fishing, taking it out, may affect the entire ecosystem.

And then we are also working a lot with the Marine protected areas in Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix.

Next, please.

Of course, we have attended many webinars and many virtual meetings, but all those meetings have to do in one way or another with those issues that I already presented. The curriculum for the marine sciences, the MREP program, the climate science, and the climate actions that NOAA is producing new materials and we have to bring that to our fishers. We have to present it in a different way than they have in the formal order.

Next.

This is all the other meetings. There were many others to discuss initiatives on forage fishes, like the one I have here today. Those are very important for the fishers, the spawning aggregations, or the life cycles of these big species. That's something that we will keep working with. As said, we will keep working with the Department of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico and the Department of Natural Resources in the U.S. Virgin Islands, so that we can make sure that the fishers have the best scientific information but in a vocabulary, or a format, that it's easier to read and to understand. They also have people that you can ask questions to.

Next.

These are the products that we are taking care of now. You saw this last time, the ecosystem-based fisheries management, these are illustrated booklets. I don't want to call it a comic book because it will never be a comic book, but it is the information on the ecosystem-based fisheries management, as it applies to the entire region, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The recipe book that I presented in the last meeting and these two items are already in the press, as well. That means that for the December meeting, we will have material for you all to see.

We are working on the first draft of the marine protected areas in the U.S. Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands and the importance of these marine protected areas for fisheries sustainability. That is something we all have to understand, not only fishers, but also the tourism sector that, you know, they go to all these places, but they don't understand what those MPA mean. So we are working on that. I think that I had Paco give Miguel that first draft. So if you can see it, you can let me know if you want any changes to it.

Next.

These are the placements that we make for Saint Croix, and they have been distributed already. There's another issue that we are working on. We are trying to do it in fact sheets, the fact that the value of diversity in the U.S. Caribbean Fisher ecosystem goes beyond the fish and seafood species. Of course, in management, we put a lot of pressure, a lot of attention, on the fish that is caught and sold. But then, what happens to the rest of the organisms that live in that ecosystem from the mangroves to the open ocean? They are part of the ecosystem where you take some species out. For example, we look at sea urchins, we are just making sure that the common species that are mentioned in the new island-based fisheries management plans are known. We provide information about where they are, and what importance they have if they're grazers. if they take out the algae? Who are the fishes that are caught? This one that you see is the first draft. The design of that first one is sea urchins we will be working on the sea cucumbers next and by December we will have both of them. Ready.

Next one, please.

We are still working on the MPA illustrated booklet, and we have started on the climate change and U.S. Caribbean fisheries booklet also illustrated and with the information they understand. The difference between weather and climate governance, ocean acidification, and how these things affect the fisheries. We will be working on the topic of chapter five. This is something that will probably make different products with that information.

The integration of the Marine fisheries of the U.S. Caribbean into the regular education curriculum. To me, this is an important project because the Department of Education is working in the group and then the Montessori schools, the specialist schools, have taken one of the schools in La Parguera and that's where at least I will see if that curriculum works. Then, the Department of Education can do anything they want with it. The Caribbean council will make available the materials that we are producing so that we can use them along with the textbooks. Not just the science, but also the sociological aspect, literature, and culture. What is the fishing village? How do the people live in the fishing village? which is not very common in our textbooks.

Next.

This is the part that we will be working on in 2023. The island-based, the MPAs, the booklets, and fisheries education in

P.R. and U.S.V.I. The important thing about this new material is that all these products will have a QR code to the CFMC webpage for documents and other items. That means that they can get more information on the webpage and that is why we are working very intensely on the remodeling of that webpage.

Next, please.

We're working on the 2023 calendar that is about fishers' families. We have five from Puerto Rico. We have five from Saint Croix. At this moment we have only one from Saint Thomas-Saint John. We have tried to get more, but if we don't have anymore, then that's all we will have.

We have to develop materials for that snapper/grouper deep-water fishing that the DAPs requested when we met with them on August 20. Deep-water snapper. Then, we are going to work also with some materials to understand the stock assessment for the fishers and the stakeholders. Adian Rios will be the person that will work with us on the content and we will have the illustrations, as we have done with ecosystem-based management. Also, on that same product, we will have very clear words, this management terminology that we constantly use in the management plans like Optimum Yield, ACL, ABC, and others. We will also be working on the calendars for 2024, and 2025.

Next.

This is what we have been doing. If you have any questions, if you have recommendations, I'm here. Thank you,

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you, Alida. For the draft of the MPAs Marcos suggested that you send detailed copies to the members of the council, so they can look at it and provide you with comments.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: I cannot understand you very well, Miguel. It is probably the sound.

MIGUEL ROLON: Anyway, can you hear me now?

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: I hear you better now.

MIGUEL ROLON: It's either I get COVID or I get understood. The staff and the council, Marcos, suggested that you send a copy to

staff members Graciela, and María the draft of the MPA documents so they can provide you with comments.

Uh, point of clarification just for the record, the meeting of the DAPs occurred on July 20th of this year.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Definitely I have a PDF, so I'm going to send it to Graciela, Liajay, Marcos, and to María Del Mar, everyone.

MIGUEL ROLON: In the case of the draft you, can send the PDF and then the people can make notations and send you the comments, identifying the page and the paragraph they want to address.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Yes.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. We have Graciela then we have the chat, Greg and James.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Alida, Thank you. We are on the verge of having the final rule for the island-based FMPs. If that happens within the next months, they would be implemented, a month later. By the end of 2022, we would be already moving into the new island-based FMPs. So products regarding the outreach for what's coming and the differences between the islands, etcetera. I'm hoping that that would be forthcoming. Specifically, we would like to have, not only the regional office, María, and Sarah, but also the Southeast Fishery Science Center, look at the outreach materials because you know, this is going to change the way that we have been doing business to date. Any materials that can be put forth fairly readily, we would appreciate them. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Graciela. Very important point. We have the chat, then James, that's the order. Then JJ., Julian. Chat.

CRISTINA OLAN: Vanessa Ramirez, comment. Thanks, Alida for your great work and all the staff. Especially, thanks for the participation in the orientation table at the fisherman festival in Cabo Rojo this July. Great information was distributed by Wilson and I hope this kind of material could continue being given to the fisherman village, around Puerto Rico to educate our sector in the north, where we can make more generations and informed fishermen.

Nicole Greaux says, thank you so much for the work you do Alida.

Ana E. Salceda said, excellent presentation, Alida. Love the emphasis that you make on connecting the dots from the ocean to the table and the holy trinity of mangrove, seagrass, and reef.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Thank you all for the comments and Vanessa, you have to make sure that we will do anything that you need in Cabo Rojo.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Thank you very much. And by the way, thank you, Vanessa, for sticking there at the virtual meeting and supporting the council as always. We have James, JJ, and Julian.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yes, James Kreglo. I had a question about the distribution of the outreach material. And I wanted to know if you coordinated all with the U.S. coast guard auxiliary or the U.S. power squadron because they have people designated just to distribute materials to the groups that are interested.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Actually the liaisons, the council has one liaison for Puerto Rico, one for Saint Thomas-Saint John, and another one for Saint Croix. All the materials that we produce, some of them are sent directly from the council to the mail, but many and much of it is taken by the liaisons when they meet with the fishers. They call us and ask us for materials and suggest new materials also. So that's our connection, the liaison.

MIGUEL ROLON: Let me follow up with that one. The liaisons that are here today, please contact the coast guard and follow up with James Kreglo's suggestion. In the past Marcos, me, and Graciela especially, have participated in the outreach and education efforts of the coast guard. Mostly, they have workshops for the coast guard members of the enforcement because they change every year. They carry a big book with all the regulations from New England all the way to Texas. They had made an effort to get the information from U.S. Caribbean to the people that work on enforcement. But that's a good suggestion. So please the liaison officers here, take note and contact your coast guard. On the council webpage, you will see the contact person for the coast guard. I guess that Lieutenant Box is the one at this time.

MARCOS HANKE: James.

JAMES R. KREGLO: I just had one other question concerning sustainable fish and seafood consumption. There's also one

organization that works a lot with that, that could use the information. It is the world's central kitchen.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. Just to highlight to the liaisons, this program that James Kreglo just alluded to is from the coast guard auxiliary. Contact the coast guard like Miguel says because they are kind of the same, but they are two programs that run parallel and complement each other. Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah. Something that someone asked me and I forgot. The coast guard auxiliary is a group of civilians that cooperate with the coast guard, they are led by the coast guard. So you have people that have been retired from the coast guard. People like me that used to work with them. This group is very active in outreach and education. After they had joint effort in the past with Sea Grant and the council. So it's a matter for the liaison officer to continue that. But in addition, the person is not here, he was on zoom, but the council has a coast guard representative, a Department of the Interior representative in the Department of State. They come when needed. But the coast guard commander always tells us that if there is anything that they can do to help with the outreach and education, please contact them. So we contact both of them and I believe that the liaison officer, they have their orders to follow.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Miguel. That's very helpful for them. We have JJ.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, Alida, great presentation. I'm really happy you are involved with the Escuelita La Parguera. What I wanted to mention is that we are working on developing this simplified product on the conceptual models, that we are hoping to give to you and work with you to produce outreach material, that hopefully will be useful. Thank you, Alida.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: That would be great.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Well, between you two, you follow up. Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, Alida. Remember we talk about the infographics. This is a good candidate so please contact JJ and Graciela so we can put this forward. This information is for everybody because every time you talk about a consistent model, each one of us has a different idea, or concept, of what it is.

Before I forgot, we need to make priorities. So Alida and I, after this meeting will sit down and prioritize the needs of the council. For example, in the case of the intervention by Graciela and María Del Mar, the top priority will be to develop the outreach and education material explaining chapter five for the island-based FMPs. I wish you had that as quickly as possible.

That doesn't mean that we are going to create a whole booklet about it. There are certain tools that we have that the outreach and education panel has identified. For example, fact sheets specific to Saint Croix, specific for Saint Thomas-Saint John that are from the island base FMP.

What the fishers are asking us and the public is, okay, you implemented that this year, what's the need for more? what I'm supposed to do? how is this going to impact me? And this is what Julian, Nelson, and Eddie have been telling the council since the get-go. So Alida and I will put together that priority list and we will consult with the Chair. Then, for the next meeting in December, you will have that information plus the material that we are going to produce.

One last thing is that all this material will be on our webpage. Anybody who wants to download any of the documents and want to reproduce them, they're free. They're paid by the taxpayer. They have the logo of NOAA and the logo of the council. So they are public documents and everybody can use them.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, Julian.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Just a quick comment. Julian Magras, for the record. Great presentation. I think we are all headed in the right direction with the outreach and education program. You're doing a great job, a leader, and continue to do that. On the calendar, you said you needed one more family from Saint Thomas. If you can reach out to me, I will be more than happy to try to get you that other fishing family for the calendar from the Saint Thomas-Saint John sector.

ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR: Okay, great. I'll do it right now. As soon as soon I get up because we need that. We need that. We want to have a family from all of the islands. It's important. We have a good one from Saint Croix that Carlos Farchette sent a long time ago because we have been working with this family on the calendar. But since we didn't have the information, it was, you know, left. So this year we decided it's going to be that. And we have been working on getting that soon.

MARCOS HANKE: Okay. Thank you, Alida. We're going to jump now into social media report from Cristina Olan.

Social Media Report—Cristina Olan, CFMC

CRISTINA OLAN: Good morning, Cristina Olan, social media manager for the council. Thank you very much for having me.

okay. You know, already that we have Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, I'm sharing some numbers with you. So you can have an idea of how many people are following us on social media. But if you need more information on the metrics and statistics, please contact me and I will give you that information.

On Facebook, we have almost 6,000 people, on Instagram, 1,381, and on Twitter already we have more than 100 followers and 340 subscribers on YouTube.

We continue sharing information regarding seasonal closures, meetings, workshops, educational materials, pictures, videos, and content produced by other organizations and agencies, local and federal, such as NOAA, NMFS, Ocean Exploration, DPNR, DNER, National Weather Service, Saint Thomas Fisherman's Association, VI-EPSCOR, among others. Also, we produce the CFMC monthly bulletin.

We receive information and requests from people that follow us through inbox and direct messages. People use it for Fish ID, documents, regulations, workshops, and information regarding fishing licenses, especially in Puerto Rico. They ask us a lot about that topic and it helps us to keep in contact with our followers and also to know which topics they like the most and their needs.

That's an example of the CFMC monthly bulletin. This is the issue of July 2022. In this case, I want to highlight and say thank you to Dr. Michelle Schärer, Dr. Hector Ruiz, Dr. Chelsea Harms-Tuohy, and biologist JP Zegarra for all the information and pictures that they provided for the article about Meros PR. You can find the link on our social media and also on our page at ISSUU. I will explain what ISSUU is.

Also, I want to thank Nelson Crespo for the information about Julio and his life as a fisherman. Julio passed away this summer. Julio was a member of the DAP Puerto Rico, but he was also family and a brother to Nelson, a very good friend. Thank

you, Nelson, for putting that together so quickly. I know that you were also processing that loss. So thank you very much.

We produce a slideshow to explain at what stage we were with the island-based FMP and to promote and encourage people to participate in the comment period. The most shared and follow topic has been the reduced fishing season for spiny lobster in federal waters of Puerto Rico for the 2022 fishing year.

We also continue producing the "Repaso de PEPCO" and it is produced in collaboration with Wilson Santiago Fishery's liaison and a PEPCO coordinator.

PEPCO is the acronym for programa educación para pescadores comerciales or in English education program for a commercial fisherman.

ISSUU, we have now an account with ISSUU. This is a platform that allows us to share documents upload our bulletin, other documents regarding the topics that the CFMC manages fisheries, and scientific information, among other topics. Also, people that are following us in ISSUU can download the documents from that platform.

Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Cristina, how is ISSUU connected to our webpage? How can a citizen reach ISSUU using our webpage?

CRISTINA OLAN: Yes. If people go to the webpage, they can go to- in there- I know that Natalie is going to add a link to ISSUU. We are sharing the link to ISSUU on our social media. If a person needs a document, I also send the link to ISSUU. So those are the ways that people can reach ISSUU for getting the documents. Also, we use the links of ISSUU to share information through the broadcast list that Wilson manages through WhatsApp.

Again, WhatsApp by Wilson Santiago. Wilson has been managing a broadcast list for many months. I also contribute with him to provide information that fishermen can be interested in, like regulations, the Repaso de PEPCO, and these meetings among other topics.

As always thanks to all our collaborators. They are a lot. Thanks to the CFMC staff for always supporting me in producing this content, scientists, fishermen, and all the people that follow us on social media.

If you have any questions, feel free to ask.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Cristina. Questions? John.

JOHN WALTERS: Yes. John Walter Southeast Fisheries Science Center. Cristina, thank you for the presentation and I admire the amount of work you put into social media it's not easy to keep up with it. What I was wondering is, one simple question, is there a way to get the bulletin or to subscribe to the bulletin to have that sent to you? do you have like a subscription list?

CRISTINA OLAN: Not now, but we can create that. Thanks.

JOHN WALTERS: Okay. Thank you.

MIGUEL ROLON: John will be our first person on that list.

MARCOS HANKE: Heather.

HEATHER BLOUGH: Cristina, thanks for the presentation. I just wanted to thank you for your readiness, willingness, and great work to get our EEJ announcement out to the stakeholders in the Caribbean. Really appreciate that.

CRISTINA OLAN: Thanks. Thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes, Cristina's work is just super important. María?

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: María Lopez and yeah, thank you for the presentation and also for monitoring the chat, the Facebook, and contacting us with questions for clarifying things for our constitutions. I think that is something very important and demonstrates the collaboration between the council and the regional office because, as she said, one of the things that were most commented on was the reduced fishing season for spiny lobster and there was a lot of confusion. We were able to tackle that pretty quickly because of Cristina's monitoring of social media. So thank you for that, Cristina.

CRISTINA OLAN: Thanks.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. I have experienced many situations in which bad information is being disseminated. And for example, the slideshow that she presented was super effective in informing people and putting everybody on the same page for a productive discussion. This has turned out to be, for me, a true engagement

with the community. Is the language that people speak now, digital language, through the apps, which is really important. Miguel, do you want to say something before I go to the other presentation?

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, just a reminder at 12, you have to cut short because we have lunch waiting for us. But the Chair of the Advisory Panel on outreach and education, Dr. Alida Ortiz, myself, and the Chair of the council, we are going to put together a small group out of the membership with the outreach and education panel to go over the webpage. We want to improve the webpage. So, Natalia, we have a contract with the provider and the idea is to make our webpage more dynamic and cost-effective.

ISSUU is the tool that we were going to use. And at the beginning, I thought it was a new Japanese car, but Cristina explained to me what it is and I believe that that's the way to go. Where people can reach our page and collect all this information because it's very difficult to collect that.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, we close the presentation, outreach and education, and the social web page.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. And I will ask the next presenter to come on board. I think we have just enough time for him to present before lunch. It's a 15-minute presentation. Welcome, Patricia.

**Gliders, Sail Drones and Autonomous Oceanographic Observations
in the U.S. Caribbean—Patricia Chardon, Caribbean Coastal Ocean
Observing System (CARICOOS)**

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Brief introduction, Patricia is with Caricoos and that's something that I noticed from our outreach and education that we need to also include Caricoos in all this outreach that we're doing because oceanography is extremely important, more than anything else to explain the variability that we see in our landings and the high biodiversity that we have in the area that we need to connect the dots.

So Patricia, thank you very much for being here. This is happening, saildrones are still in the area, right?

PATRICIA CHARDÓN: Yes. We currently have gliders and saildrones. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for the invitation. My name is Patricia Chardón from Caricoos. Although we have this network of observations, I'm going to focus on a

couple of instruments that I think provide data reliable for your efforts.

So next slide.

To have an idea, Caricoos provides high-priority information for decision making mostly for safety on our coasts and ocean, improving the efficiency of maritime operations, and supporting coastal resource management. So on your right, you will see a map with several icons. It's just pointing out different systems that we have around Puerto Rico and the Virgin Island because Caricoos covers both regions of the U.S. Caribbean.

We have several ocean oceanographic data buoys that provide information about wave conditions, winds, and currents, close to shore. We also have a number of HF Radar systems. These provide information about surface currents close to shore to almost two to three kilometers offshore. We also have several metal stations close to shore. They provide measurements of wind, speed, direction, and barometric pressure, and a couple of them also have precipitation.

One of the topics that I will focus on is underwater gliders. Currently, we deploy this type of system during the hurricane season, hopefully, in the future, we can deploy this instrumentation several times during the year.

Next.

These are the underwater gliders. They replicate quite like a dolphin. They don't have any system of propulsion. They only navigate based on current, buoyancy and a battery inside that helps with their movements.

Next slide. And the next one, please. It would show another image. Yeah. Yeah. Please. It's just an animation.

This underwater grid, as I mentioned, we deploy during the hurricane season. Although we have images from the satellite, we can understand how the water quality, if you have the intrusion of the continental river, that also brings different conditions of the water. We deploy this instrument to collect data from the surface to almost nine hundred meters. During their dive, they collect measurements of water temperatures, salinity, and other types of biochemical parameters. The data that we collect currently is sent to the national hurricane center, as soon as they finish every single dive, which takes around three to four

hours. This is including the forecast of tropical cyclones and trying to improve the hurricane intensity forecast.

Next slide.

Here, is just an image of the data. If you go, no it doesn't have a legend, but at the top, you can see some colors, blue colors and purple colors. Those purple colors indicate the intrusion of the continental river plumes of the Orinoco and Amazon, which we know only change the salinity and the temperature.

We also see a pretty red line, a couple of meters below the surface. This is a barrier layer where we have noted several changes in the condition of the water. So although this instrumentation has the capacity to measure a lot more, we only focus on the data that is important for the tropical cyclone intensity forecast. This way we can allow the instrument to be in the water for the whole hurricane season which is almost six months. If we included more instrumentation to review more capacity then we would have less battery to work with.

Next slide.

Since last year, we also have had efforts with NOAA. They're deploying these saildrones that replicate a big sailboat. We are doing collocated measurements with gliders and on the saildrones first, to validate the data that the saildrones are collecting, because they're doing a lot of new tests with instruments and other capacities. So they're trying to follow those lines that we are mentioning. And currently, those are the locations where they're working right now.

So talking a little bit more about saildrones.

Next slide

On the top, you will see an image. This was taken by a fisherman here in Puerto Rico when it was floating from U.S. Virgin Islands to the Puerto Rico line, south of Puerto Rico. And they're pretty, pretty big. They can collect data, especially with their instrument about wave conditions, air temperature, air pressure, barometric pressure, and currents. Not only closer to the system, but 20 to 30 meters below. Another type of measurement that they have are their cameras, not this one, but they also have acoustic measurements that they use for fisheries. They can understand a little bit more about what happens under the water. This is just some data that they

collected last year and you can see their track from San Croix to the north of Puerto Rico.

On the right side, you will see a figure of time series. Each panel has different measurements, but you can see that they can grab data for almost six months. This was one during the hurricane season. They only navigate based on wind. It's basically the same no mechanics as a sailboat without a motor.

I think the data is really important not only for the surface, but you can understand what is happening in the water column. The good part of this type of system, because as I mentioned they navigate with the wind, they can move farther and they can go into deep waters and it doesn't matter if the sea is rough or not.

Next slide.

Other measurements that I think are reliable to this conversation are the La Parguera ocean acidification buoy. It is located close to the Parguera Marine resource close to the Department of Marine Science. This is an effort from NOAA OAP or the Ocean Acidification Program, and Caricoos has been there for almost 15 years. This buoy collects biochemical parameters. It focuses more on salinity conditions, and how the water is changing. Right now, we are trying to correlate this data with how the ecosystems are behaving, especially now that we have the sargassum. No issues that we have seen. No, unfortunately, a couple of weeks ago we have a major issue on the Virgin Island.

Next slide.

One interesting idea that we get from this buoy is the measurements of CO₂ in the seawater and the atmosphere, in the middle is the measurement of the monthly mean collected from the buoy. But then on the right side, there's the comparison between two buoys, one in the Caribbean Sea and another in the Pacific, the blue line going up, you can see the slope, the positive slope, the blue one are the measurements here in Puerto Rico and the black one is in the Pacific in Hawaii.

So you can see that now it's getting positive so it's getting concerning. It's growing off this type of atmospheric concentration, CO₂ concentration that we are grabbing to our oceans.

Next slide.

As I mentioned, the sargassum is one of the problems that we are having right now, not only in Puerto Rico but also in the Virgin Islands. It is affecting not only the ecosystem but also the daily life of our citizens. And right now, we have satellite images that provide us with information. If there's an amount of sargassum that is entering, but this is only on a time stamp, an image, only once per day. So we are trying to develop something using these images. And also, the network that I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation.

Next slide.

So we are working on the Sargasso inundation forecast. What we are using are those images that I showed you in the previous slide, putting them in a model using the hydrodynamic and ocean circulation model that Caricoos has developed and it tries to give the user or the manager, an idea of where the Sargassum might end up. We are trying to, it's only a beta version so this will be out soon for comments and suggestions. But right now, we are just divided into three different levels, low, medium, and high concentration of Sargassum. And then the black lines just show the track. So we take the capture of that single day and put it in the model and try to see what will happen on that day and three days in the future.

Next slide.

Okay. So as I mentioned, these are the models that we use for Caricoos. We have winds, waves, forecast models, and currents. All of these, we use together and try to do that model that I presented in the previous slide. We are working right now in single domains, close to shore, but we plan to have the whole island, the whole U.S. Caribbean covered, and trying to have that information given to everyone.

Next slide.

How do we know that we are tracking the correct Sargassum, or if the images are showing the correct information? We deploy this like Sargassum drifters that we deploy in Sargassum mats. This is just an image. We deploy the first round of drifters in mid-June and the right image is the tracks of these Sargassum maps.

So the idea was to be sure that the images that we were putting in the models were really Sargassum and that they are tracking the correct thing. Also, the drifter allows us to understand the currents around our islands. So we deploy, the East one to the

south of Vieques, I think the farther one. And then the first one was deployed south of Parguera. You can see how they move north, depending on the tidal currents, and then a couple of them landed in the Dominican Republic.

Next slide.

The local effort is more to understand the impact of this sargassum on the ecosystem and other types of coastal barriers. We are collecting this type of sargassum in this type of trap. This is an effort from a master's student that is from the Department of Marine Science and is working with Caricoos.

The map, it's just the different locations that are collecting this type of information. What they do is, they collect the sargassum, they wait, and then they also have instrumentation around this area to see how they're affecting, depending on how much concentration or how much biomass of sargassum you have in that location and how it changed through time.

Next slide.

So an idea, they took dissolved oxygen pH total alkalinity. I don't want to go into the details because this is only six months of data and I think maybe you have seen this figure before and Julio present them. The idea is we go to, black is the percentage saturated dissolved oxygen. This was collected with instrumentation. The bars are the biodiversity, which is another effort that we're doing with other colleagues from the same department. The triangle, which is tiny but red in color is the abundance. And the orange ones, the circles, are the biomass of sargassum, which is measured from those traps that I just show you.

The idea of the figure, started from March to July, based on the X axis and how, when the biomass increases at the beginning of March, although there was a high, it took time to see the biodiversity going down the same as the abundance. Then another peak came in early May, but already the system was decaying so it almost went to zero, the biodiversity and abundance. This is showing that if we have a lot of biomass, which we can track with the model, hopefully, that's our idea of the probe that we're developing. We can understand that the biodiversity, our ecosystem, and our coastal barriers are going to be affected significantly.

Next slide.

For other efforts, especially for coral and also the coastal barrier battery. We already have this product. We are just developing the data portal. This is our satellite-derived water quality data. So what we selected in the map, it's tiny so you can't see it, but right now, we have 20 locations where we can extract different variables, including sea surface temperature, PAR, aCDOM, turbidity, Kd488. And what we are going to present is, based on the location, you will see the data by time series or compared to climatology. This is just an example. The images here on the figure to your right show the sea surface temperatures in the Canal Luis Peña in Culebra.

Next slide.

I just wanted to show you other types of data, turbidity, light penetration, and chlorophyll-a concentration. Right now, we started with 20 locations, but we are planning to expand depending on necessity. As soon as we have, you can comment if you need data from certain locations so that we can try to provide that information to you.

Next slide.

Great info by NOAA, the Department of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico, and students from the Department of Marine Science. We were able to include our data collected with the Puerto Rico Coral Reef Monitoring Program, the U.S.V.I. Territorial Coral Reef Monitoring Program, and the Fish Assemblages of Artificial Reef in the national base in Marine Biodiversity Observation Network. So if you type in any type of browser, MBON Puerto Rico or Caribbean, you will see, you will see all the data that was collected and the different information. So I just wanted to point out the different tools that you can access, and maybe they have information reliable for your effort.

Next slide.

Using also all the efforts from many scientists, and many volunteers collecting data around Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, we are trying to develop a tool that provides information to support decision-making in management activities. So the plan is to provide access to environmental and biodiversity products in the U.S. Caribbean regions. This is a way to assess the status and trends of the natural coastal barriers.

The data was extracted from NOAA habitat maps, environmental stressors, remote sensing images or data products, and

biological indicators. Also, as I mentioned, in-situ coral reef monitoring stations. So the maps on the left side just mark the areas where we have data and we are sharing that information. On the right side, is just the way we are thinking of providing that information, by comparing data with maybe the days that the heat index was above some levels or how the coverage was affected by another type of stressors.

The data is from the beginning of the collection, depending on the monitoring effort. Hopefully, this will be out soon; it's just hard, as you mentioned, trying to make tools that are easy for the user to understand. It all takes quite a bit of time trying to go back and forth with the user and trying to do some service for them to explain to us how easy or how they want us to present the data.

Next slide.

Lastly, I just wanted to show this image that I got from a really nice fact sheet. I think it gathers how we have these autonomous sensors right now that allows us to understand the open ocean and deep-water ocean without having a lot of work. We can track the-even though the technology has limitations with currently the batteries and having more sensors, but if we focus on a question, then we can go out and collect the data when needed.

So Caricoos collect high-quality standard observation of essential climate ocean variables. All of our data is available on our webpage, Caricoos.org. It is completely free and it covers more than 15 years of data. From the oceanographic data buoys to the currents, to the wind measurements. We are trying to increase our observation depending on the needs of our user and stakeholders. So please let us know if we can offer any type of information that will be helpful for your efforts.

So thank you again for the invitation. The next slide is just the closing one. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Patricia. Caricoos presentation is always of great interest to the council. I already know that you just expressed to Miguel that you're going to stay around. We are going to have you around for questions and maybe on the end of the trip, we can reopen a section for questions about your presentation.

PATRICIA CHARDÓN: Great. Thank you.

MIGUEL ROLON: Mr. Chairman we invite you for lunch. We will have a presentation at 1:15 on aquaculture and then after that presentation, we will open for question-and-answer to Caricoos and aquaculture.

Cristina, make a note just to make sure that we have a link to Caricoos and all these products in our web page so we can discuss it later. Thank you very much.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, guys. We'll be back. We're going to go for a break for lunch now and we'll be back at 1:15. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 12, 2022.)

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AUGUST 12, 2022

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

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MARCOS HANKE: Good afternoon. We are recording. Cristina, are we recording? Okay. It's 1:19 PM. We're going to restart the meeting. Thank you, everyone. Please take your seats. The next presentation will be the liaison officers San Croix. My mistake. I jumped a line it will be Jose Rivera's presentation then it will be the liaison officers.

MIGUEL ROLON: Mr. Chairman, Jose Rivera, works for the National Marine Fisheries Service. He's stationed in Puerto Rico actually at this time he is in Cabo Rojo and his presentation is something that he and I discussed the "Historic Summary of Aquaculture Experience in Puerto Rico." Remember that at the national level, there's a new impetus for aquaculture. Therefore, he gracefully accepted to give the presentation to us. When he finishes, we will retake the questions and answer with the Caricoos presentation this morning so you will have the chance to do some question-and-answer sessions for the two of them. The aquaculture and Caricoos

MARCOS HANKE: Go ahead, Jose.

**Historic Summary of Aquaculture Experience in Puerto Rico- NMFS
Habitat Conservation Division- Jose Rivera**

JOSE A. RIVERA: Good afternoon, everybody. This is Jose Rivera from the Habitat conservation division, South Atlantic Branch. I'm based in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Although the Southeast Regional Office aquaculture coordinator is Andrew Richards. I'll be talking about the history, basically, a summary of the aquaculture experience in Puerto Rico, just as a quick short presentation. It's a pleasure for me to do this for the council.

Next slide, please.

Basically, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, about half of the world's seafood production comes from aquaculture. Asia is the leading continent for aquaculture production. It produces about 91% of the global aquaculture production, which totals about 116 million metric tons.

The top five producing countries are in Asia, also. China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. FAO has reported that the United States is ranked 18th in aquaculture production worldwide.

CRISTINA OLAN: I'm sorry, your presentation started moving alone place. Please, let me fix it.

JOSE A. RIVERA: Okay, next slide, please.

This is a short summary in terms of freshwater aquaculture in the United States and Marine aquaculture. As you can see, catfish is the main species produced in fresh water in the United States and oysters are the species mostly produced in the Marine environment of the United States.

The total value of aquaculture production in the United States in 2018 was around 1.5 billion dollars. You can see what percentage of aquaculture is produced in which region of the United States. 38% for the Pacific, 42% for the Gulf of Mexico, and 40% for the Atlantic.

Next slide, please.

I'll give you a quick freshwater aquaculture historical account in Puerto Rico. The fish culture starts in 1936 with the establishment of the Maricao fish hatchery, which is a freshwater hatchery on the west coast of Puerto Rico. The hatchery is a collaboration between the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, which is the parent agency of what we have now as a National Marine Fisheries Service. The impetus was the creation of dams

for rural electrification. In Puerto Rico, in 1963 Iñigo, who was with the Department of Agriculture, reports the introduction of 15 species from the USA for stocking in dams.

The Institute of Marine biology, through the University of Puerto Rico, is established in 1954, which becomes the Department of Marine Sciences in 1968. Dr. Francisco Pagan begins a freshwater aquaculture program within the Department in 1970. Dr. Pagan moves to the United Nations/FAO in Rome in 1978 and Mr. Ricardo Cortes takes over as program director at the Department of Marine Science.

In 1994 CIDACPR is established at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez to foster freshwater aquaculture throughout Puerto Rico. That's basically a freshwater aquaculture center for developing aquaculture in Puerto Rico. In 2002 CIDAC seizes operations. There's an estimate of around 8 million dollars in research and development funds and 10 million dollars in private funds for commercial ventures, up to that time. I would say around the 2000s in Puerto Rico.

Next slide, please.

Here's just a quick illustration of Mr. Ricardo Cortes in the foreground. Mr. Jose Rivera, another Jose Rivera (Cuco Rivera), is in the background with Maria Beatriz collecting tilapia at a pond in Puerto Rico. I believe this was in Jayuya, but I'm not certain of the exact location of this pond, but it was somewhere in the mountains of Puerto Rico.

On the bottom, right you can see one of the largest operations in the seventies, in Puerto Rico, which was a shrimp farm, a freshwater shrimp farm, and this was located in Cabo Rojo. It was called Caribe Shrimp Farm. At that time, it was the largest freshwater shrimp enterprise in Puerto Rico in the early 1970s.

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There's been a number of workshops convene in the seventies, eighties, and up to the two thousand that have dealt with aquaculture potential in Puerto Rico. One of the first ones was organized by the Sea Grant Aquaculture Extension program through Dr. Edgardo Ojeda. This one was a three-day event held at UPRM on Mayagüez in 2004, February 20th-22nd, 2004 where all the people that were involved at that time in the island aquaculture got together to present what they were doing.

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Another such forum took place at the InterAmerican University in San German, which dealt with the pathogens of Mollusca, clams, and oysters. It also took three days, this was in 2002, and was organized by Dr. Graciela Ramirez at the biology department of InterAmerican University.

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Dr. Ernest H. Williams, Jr. and Dr. Lucy Bunkley Williams had funding through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, called the Cooperative Fish Disease Project and they had funding for a number of years. They convened a workshop, one of their many workshops, but this one specifically for mutton snapper and cobia, which were being raised in Culebra at that time by snapper farms. This happened in 2005.

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There was a workshop organized at- it coincided also with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute meetings in San Juan at the San Juan Hotel in November of 2010. Jessica Beck at the time was the Southeast Regional Office Aquaculture Coordinator. She organized it with other NOAA employees in collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico and the Sea Grant program at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez and basically, convened a workshop to come up with sustainable practices for marine cage culture in the U.S. Caribbean. That was about the time that the Culebra snapper farm project was going pretty strong.

Next slide, please.

As a consequence of that workshop, there was a "best management practices for marine cage culture operations in the U.S. Caribbean" booklet that came out. That provided around 10 to 12 chapters of information for companies that were interested in starting offshore marine cage aquaculture in Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands where it was specifically oriented for the Puerto Rican environment, but it was applicable also for the Gulf of Mexico and Florida specifically

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In addition, there was another forum through the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography that took place in the San Juan convention center in February of 2011. There was a town hall meeting organized by ASLO on the current state of

aquaculture in Puerto Rico in the Caribbean and the rest of the world where Snapperfarm and some of the other companies at that time, that were interested in setting up offshore farms presented.

Next slide, please.

Here's a list that I have compiled for land-based aquaculture ventures in Puerto Rico in the first year, starting around the 1970s and finishing around 2010/2011. Most of these farms were freshwater although some of them were saltwater because they were involved in raising *penaeus vannamei* the saltwater shrimp species.

A lot of these companies are not with us to date, but in the early seventies, through the early nineties, a lot of them were in the process of trying to make it in the aquaculture world.

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Once you look past the 2010s/2011s to the present we've seen that the number of companies has basically halved. A lot of the companies that are into aquaculture now in Puerto Rico, well, the most successful ones are doing freshwater aquaculture, like Caribe Fisheries in Lajas, which raises crayfish and also raises *Macrobrachium* and, Basa. The Maricao Fish Hatchery, which since it got established in the late thirties has still been operating you know, with the raising of recreational species like sea bass and things like that, excuse me, bass and some other species that are in the likes of Puerto Rico.

There are some companies that are now raising mostly shrimp or *cherax* the Australian, the Australian shrimp. There's also now a fishing association in Naguabo which is starting to grow queen conch for stock enhancement.

There's another project that the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez, at Magueyes Island in collaboration with the Florida Institute of technology and the Puerto Rico Sea Grant, which is starting to experiment with Intel technology.

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One of the earlier Programs that started looking to the ocean for growing species was the Puerto Rico nuclear center, marina college division, which started experimenting with oysters, primarily the mangrove oyster, although they did experiment with the Japanese oyster and with the oyster from the Chesapeake Bay,

the *crassostrea virginica*. They had experimental barges in Rincon Lagoon in Boqueron Bay and Dr. Ken Waters was the one who was directing that enterprise. It was primarily experimental. They never went to the commercial phase. We have on the lower photos we have on the right Eureka Marine Farms or Eureka Shrimp Farms, which is in Toa Baja. They were raising *penaeus vannamei* in saltwater in ponds very close to the ocean.

There was another activity, I believe, it was in Juana Diaz that was also trying to do the same thing. And we're talking in the seventies and eighties, primarily

Next slide, please.

Also, three companies got permitted by the U.S. Army Corps engineers and the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources to culture fish in territorial seas. These three companies were Snapperfarms, Inc. in Culebra. They were growing mutton snapper and cobia. Ocean Harvest, Inc. in Humacao wanted to grow cobia. And Borinquen Aquaculture, Inc. in Rincón. Out of the three companies, two decided not to go forward with their commercial business plan and Snapperfarm was the only one who was able to raise primarily cobia. They attempted to raise snapper in the first year, but after the first year, they started to just grow cobia only.

That operation in Culebra started in the 1998/1999 timeframes with permitting. And it lasted until about 2008 when they transferred to Panama.

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This is a visualization of the site where Snapperfarm was located, basically, two miles from the ferry terminal in Culebra, and right next to a Marine reserve Cayo Luis Peña. It was located in 28 meters of water, and they used sea stations, which are the top right photo, are the sea stations that were used. They had two of those and then they expressed it with the Aquapod, which is on photos, which was at that time a prototype cage that was just being evaluated.

Next slide, please.

This activity was in collaboration with the Culebra fishing association. They were partners in that adventure. One of the objectives of that whole enterprise was to provide the fishing associations with a source of employment and product. This is a

strategy that has been used in Puerto Rico with all these ventures.

Next slide, please.

Snapperfarm moved to Panama in 2007, and it established a hatchery to raise cobia from eggs, in Viento Frio, Panama, on the Caribbean side. At present, they have 21 C stations, demersal cages, which are twice the volume of what they had in Culebra. They employ 283 persons in their facilities between producing the fish and processing the fish for selling.

As of last week when I spoke to their general manager they were online to produce this year, an estimated 3,500 metric tons of cobia. This is a project that was started with federal and local funds in Culebra and migrated- well, it also had private funding and then it migrated to Panama where more private funding over there. It has now grown to a fully commercial operation. So this is one of the products that came from 20 years ago from efforts in Puerto Rico.

Um, next slide,

Another extension project that was started in the 2010s-2013 was Ojeda, Alston and others had an extension program in collaboration with the Corozo fishing association in Cabo Rojo. Their goal was to try to grow yellow tail snapper in a recirculating Aquaculture system.

Next slide.

They had basically around 22 tanks that they would circulate the water among them, and they would attempt to grow cachicata, which is a local species, and also Yellowtail snapper as a way of teaching the fishermen, how to raise these so that they could sell them locally.

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The project basically as long as the funding from the Sea Grant program, aquaculture program there, kept coming the program was viable, but once the funding ended there was not enough capital to keep the fishermen interested in producing the fish.

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Here are some of the areas that have been evaluated through the spatial analysis program and NOAA and with the Department of

Natural Resources in the 2010s-2020 era. Basically, the ovals that you see, which are green, on the west coast, and those arrows that point to preferred areas for algae growth and mollusks, are some of the best areas in Puerto Rico that have the potential for aquaculture or mariculture.

Then on the north coast and the south coast, you see some red ovals, which are areas available on the submarine platform, on the continental shelf, but they're not as guarded against the Marine weather as the ones on the west coast. And then the ones on the east coast here, the yellow and orange ones, have some protection, but not as good a protection as on the west coast.

Then the stars are just the different major airports that are close to these areas of production. The hatch areas are just the marina-managed areas in Puerto Rico, primarily

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Although the tuna industry in Puerto Rico is not a mariculture activity, it is primarily a wild-caught tuna. I wanted to mention, as one of the take-home messages from this talk that the tuna industry in Puerto Rico, which started in the late fifties or early sixties, and lasted until about the 2010/2012 era was a major processor of fish in Puerto Rico and the United States. Basically, Puerto Rico hosted the largest tuna cannery in the world at one time in 1984. This all happened between Mayagüez and Ponce and it can host a world-class mariculture industry if it decides to, because it used to have a lot of manpower. The tuna industry at its height would hire close to 6,000 employees on the west coast of Puerto Rico.

And so they were processing a thousand tons of tuna per day, which is roughly 2 million pounds of fish. Which is about two times what the fishermen, the local fishermen were catching in one year. This is something that a lot of people don't realize, especially politicians and some of the local natural resources managers that Puerto Rico did have an offshore fishery. But it was primarily managed through, you know, it was private, but it had a world impact.

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Right now, with the aquaculture opportunity areas initiative that was started under President Trump, NOAA National Marine Fisheries is considering inclusion areas in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Island as areas of opportunity. That's something that's ongoing as we speak and hopefully, it will bring interest in

starting aquaculture or mariculture industry in Puerto Rico, you know, mostly in saltwater.

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The main reasons for the demise of the aquaculture industry in Puerto Rico are, there's a list there compiled of seven main reasons. Primarily seafood is consumed. Then, the seafood consumed by Puerto Ricans is primarily imported and the cost of imported seafood is mostly cheaper than local production costs.

Fish food needs to be imported, which costs more. There's no incentive to try to start an industry double regulatory system, the territorial and federal system creates quite a high wall for any private industry that wants to get permitted to do this in Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.

There are no incentives to produce when we have a welfare system that lets you get by with little effort. I was talking to Andrew Richard this morning and I was telling him that for me the main variable that affects aquaculture in Puerto Rico is the lack of adequate amount of capital. Most of these projects that I've seen or been involved with, rely only on government subsidies to get started or to pay for operating expenses. They have no reserve capital to basically confront the problems that you run into when you're trying to grow a live life animal. The hurricane infrastructure damage affects your activity as well.

Companies that have survived the longest, Eureka Shrimp Farms, had quite a- I believe it had operated for close to 15 years before it ceased operations. C-Quest in Santa Isabella which was a clownfish hatchery. They decided to move to Montana, and they are operating in Montana at a very reduced volume compared to what they had in Puerto Rico. They also lasted about 15/18 years. Caribe Fisheries, which is located in Lajas and is freshwater is still in operation. And I've seen them in operations for the last 25 years. So they've probably been the most successful in terms of keeping operating continuously with their pond operation.

Then, of course, Snapperfarms, which was started in Culebra and evolved to Open Blue Sea Farms in Panama and is now producing 3,500 metric tons of cobia per year. This is roughly 7 million pounds of fish a year, which when compared to our annual total catch of approximately 2 million pounds is about three and a half times that amount. Puerto Rico has a thousand commercial fishermen that produced approximately 2 million pounds of

landings compared to Open Blue Sea Farms, which has 283 employees.

Although we, presently, don't have a large aquaculture or mariculture industry in Puerto Rico, we have been instrumental in making these ventures in other countries successful.

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If there are any questions, I'll be glad to answer them, or you can email me or call me on my telephone or you can contact the Southeast Regional Office Regional aquaculture coordinator, Mr. Andrew Richard, by his email or on his mobile phone. Thank you very much for the opportunity to give you a snapshot of what's going on with aquaculture in Puerto Rico.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Jose. We have very little time dedicated to questions for your presentation and Patricia from Caricoos. Questions for any of the presenters? Carlos.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Carlos Farchette, here. Yeah. Jose, what is the freshwater farm Caribe Fisheries producing?

JOSE A. RIVERA: Carlos, good afternoon. This is a farm that produces aquarium fish, freshwater aquarium fish. They have a number of species I would suspect they have at least 1520 species that they produce in ponds in Lajas. They also produce Macrobrachium for sale. They used to have basa. I don't think they're producing basa out at this moment right now, but they have the capability of raising basa fish also. Thank.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: I have a question for both Jose and Patricia. One of the main issues that it's being discussed nationwide is the use of offshore wind energy. And Jose showed a picture of places in Puerto Rico for aquaculture. Usually, these two are associated somehow, or it could be. So my question is for both. Jose, do the areas that have been selected or are thought viable for aquaculture also viable for offshore wind production? And in the case of Patricia, has Caricoos been involved at all with offshore wind energy production? because usually, it's at depth or 60 meters or so, so it really impacts most of our ecosystems.

JOSE A. RIVERA: Good afternoon, Graciela. I had some information concerning the Pacific National Laboratory, which is looking into that same question. They're currently in the process of studying the interaction of when energy and wave

formation and the co-location of mariculture activities. In fact, they're holding a workshop, a virtual workshop, I think, at the end of August on that same subject. When we did the evaluation, we weren't really thinking about co-locating wind farms or any other energy-producing technologies. We were just primarily selecting the areas based on conditions to put offshore cages and growing fish.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Patricia.

PATRICIA CHARDÓN: Yes, on our side, we have been helping, assisting with some data for companies that are coming and I'm doing an assessment. We have two products that are available online developed by Dr. Miguel F. Canals. He did an Atlas of weight energy around Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. So that's something that can help aquaculture and wind energy. We also have the maps of wind climate around Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, which also helps, but we had a conversation with a couple of companies and the issue is the design, especially considering our bathymetry that is complex and how we are going to grab. And we are not affecting the ecosystem or marine life or any other maritime operation also. But yeah, we have the data and it's available for them to do any type of analysis around Puerto Rico.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, thank you, both. The reason why we have this conversation about aquaculture and another Graciela mentioned is that I've been receiving calls from different people interested in knowing whether the council will oppose or be in favor of windmills for producing energy and mariculture.

As you know, you already received some information about areas of opportunity for aquaculture. That's something that has been developed at the national level. In our case, it might not affect that much the EEZ of Puerto Rico, because you have 10.35 terrestrial miles, 9 nautical miles. So most of the action occurs within the area of jurisdictions of Puerto Rico, but there are some interests from people, at least that have asked me, how about the Virgin Islands? the Northern part of the Virgin Islands is part of the EEZ, would you opposed to that? I said, "well, we don't work that way." When we have a, let's say a permit petition from a couple of engineers, the council may get involved.

Regarding aquaculture, there are also legal issues involved. If we go by the experience of the Gulf council, they're kind of complex because when you prepare a management plan for that is being challenged, etcetera. So at this time we just wanted to

let you know what is going on with aquaculture. At least we have two people that have called me.

By the way, when we talk about windmills, there are two of them. The one that floats and the one that anchors. In some cases of Puerto Rico, they're talking about only using the one that floats because the anchoring ones, if you go around Saint Croix, you need to have a very long post to anchor anything there.

So this fellow told me that they are not going to move here, but they're considering possibilities. He wanted to know- I don't know whether he was a lawyer or not, but he knew a lot about governance. He wanted to know what will be the position of the council and as I said, that would all depend. I also told him that we only can provide input through the engineers if they ask us. Most of the time it goes through the action, in this case, NOAA Fisheries.

I would like to thank Jose Rivera for taking the time of doing this at this time and Patricia. One question for Patricia, I will ask Cristina to touch base with you to see which of the products that you mentioned today can be linked to the council so that we can be able to spread the word and that's for a later conversation. I actually wanted to hear your reaction to that to know whether it's a good idea or not.

PATRICIA CHARDÓN: Yes, of course. I will share the information with Cristina, and if you need any other time to meet with each other and explain the details and try to do some tutorial, we are more than available for that. So thank you for the invitation.

MARCOS HANKE: Andy.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah, just a comment to what Miguel said, and I appreciate your comments, Miguel. With wind energy or aquaculture, we have had an extremely successful model in the Gulf of Mexico with the marine spatial planning efforts and working with The National Ocean Service to do that marine spatial planning.

With aquaculture opportunity areas I think we've expanded now into Alaska for this year's efforts, but there are certainly efforts by NOAA Fisheries service over time that we will be looking to other regions, including potentially the Caribbean to expand into aquaculture.

With wind energy. That's a bone decision in terms of where they locate their wind energy facilities. But once again, we see this as a collaborative effort, working with the industry, working with the council, we're not going to be predicational in terms of supporting or opposing it, but we want to look at it from the standpoint of the conservation and management of the resources in our mission and ensure that we deconflict as much as we can in terms of the multiple uses of the ocean.

I certainly hope that as this progresses in the Caribbean, or if it progresses in the Caribbean, it'll have the same successes we've had in the Gulf of Mexico.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much just to wrap it up and one comment I want- you want to make a jump.

JOHN WALTER: On this note and where the council can be proactive. If you are getting inquiries about offshore wind farm developers or interested parties, and I believe the industry is quite interested in offshore wind and the administration is very much a proponent of it, as recent executive orders and administrative actions have been. It's going to probably come to many of our regions and it's going to come rather quickly, is what we found in the Gulf, faster than people had expected in terms of the lease sales, which are slated for early 2023.

The key in the Gulf of Mexico as Andy pointed out, was marine spatial planning at the upfront, early on, to identify the best areas. I think what the council could be very proactive about is recommending that comprehensive marine spatial planning, inclusive of all the trust resources, as well as the economic, social, oceanographic, and other factors that need to be considered, be done as what the NOS planning process to best inform and use the best spatial intelligence to find the right places for wind. That really was the key in the Gulf. And I think that's the key to using the best information to find places for offshore wind. Thanks.

MIGUEL ROLON: What would be the first step to do something like that? From the point of view of the council. We worked before marine special planning, it was kind of abandoned, but what could be the first step, if anything, that the council could do to move forward, the way that you mentioned? what could be the first step?

JOHN WALTER: I don't have a great answer for what the first step would be. I think the aquaculture area of opportunity, which really was the start of that comprehensive planning

process in the Gulf and extending that processes, as Andy said, and maybe requesting that be considered- because it seems like there's a lot of opportunity areas in Puerto Rico and it's got high growth potential. But that process of accumulating the data and building the spatial model is essentially the same process for wind as it would be for aquaculture. As with any blue economy thing, I think, that that could be done and probably would be something to be- I don't know where the request would be made and how that would be done, but I think it's probably quite valuable to begin that process for anything that would be done in the blue economy of the territories.

MARCOS HANKE: Andy and Graciela. I need to wrap up with a comment at the end to connect all those dots.

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah. I mean, I'll keep it short. In terms of coordination, Miguel. I mean, if you wanted to write a letter or something to me, or even just an email to kind of pass along the interest of pursuing something like this, we could certainly put you in touch with key context, both on the aquaculture side, as well as the Marine spatial planning side.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: So, because I asked Patricia to tell us a little bit about the gliders and the use of this technology for mapping and fisheries. One of the main things that we need to do is to actually update the maps, the Benthic habitat maps, because those are, you know, fairly old, they need to be updated. Especially in the EEZ, those areas could be used for either offshore aquaculture or for wind or wave energy, which is the other issue that Caricoos had been dealing with, that the glider, that new technology, could be used for mapping. We would need to identify funding opportunities through the science center and the regional office, etcetera, to see where we can all collaborate in that kind of endeavor.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much, Graciela. I just want to mention that I represent the council at the National Recreational Summit. My presentation was about the perspective of the industry on aquaculture and the opportunities in the Caribbean. I want to state that the record of that meeting addressed everything you guys are already saying. Carlos was with me. Please access those records, and talk to Russell Dunn about the results and the discussion on that. There are big similarities between how Hawaii and Puerto Rico as expected. 50% of this discussion is already on that meeting being discussed and there is a lot of experience on it. I wanted you guys to be aware of it. Thank you very much and I think in the future we have to keep discussing and engaging the council as a tool to

keep the voice of the industry, supporting the efforts, but in a balanced way. Thank you very much. Next item on the agenda.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I spoke to the liaison officers and remember you ask them to only provide new information. So from April to now, there is only one of them, the other two will be present in December. Nicole and Mavel just told me that they don't have anything new for this meeting. We have Wilson Santiago with us today and he would like to have a chance to give his presentation.

Liaison Officers Reports – Puerto Rico – Wilson Santiago

WILSON SANTIAGO: Good afternoon, everyone. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico fisheries liaison for the record. As Miguel said, all my updates, I reported in the last OEAP meeting. After that, I gave a PEPCO, PEPCO educational program for commercial fishers. The next day of the meeting, in Mayagüez, in the municipality of Mayagüez there was a total of 25 or 30, I don't remember the exact number, participants 75% of them were commercial fishers. After that, this past Monday, I gave a workshop on fisheries management and licensed procedures to the Colegio of Agronomists of Puerto Rico. In the state, agronomist work is important for the fishers, commercial fishers specifically. There's a lot of financial aid for commercial fishers. The Department of Agriculture and the agronomists are the ones that are in charge of giving them those financial aid. So those two are the updates of my report as a liaison. As always, if anyone has a question or something to ask me. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Wilson. Any questions? One question for Wilson? Hearing we keep in touch; I know you're in the room. Any other questions people can contact you. Thank you very much.

The next presentation will be enforcement reports for Puerto Rico DNR.

Enforcement Reports Puerto Rico-DNER

DAMARIS DELGADO: Thank you, Marcos. I shared the report from the Rangers with Cristina. Yeah. They provided us a report on their actions during this year 2022. It's difficult for me to read it from here but let me find it here on my cell phone.

Okay. So the DNER ranger corps continues to provide security protection and surveillance to Puerto Rico's natural resources in the coastal zone and open seas.

Preventive maritime and land patrols are carried out in areas of landfills, sand extraction, and damaged coastal mangroves in coastal areas of the island.

They guide the public and inspect recreational and commercial vessels that disembark on our shores. Recreational fishing tournaments that comply with nautical safety regulations are visited, assistance and cooperation are also provided to other state and federal agencies with the arrest of illegals on the coast.

Okay. Then we have some of the cases that they have been dealing with and processing. For example, law number 21 deals with the deposits of debris in the coastal area. They presented or managed 17 cases in the coastal zone. This law applies to all the islands, but in these cases, they were in the coastal area. So with regards to law number 147, the law for coral reefs, they submitted 10 cases to our legal division for coral breakage.

Then we have law number 278, the fisheries law, which handled nine cases with different affairs. Some examples were violations of HMS permits, the common lobster, and the queen conch. There were several cases of lobster, out of measure, for example. And there were two cases referred to Miguel Borges from NOAA.

Then we have many cases, 303 cases, for violating safety issues in the sea. There was a case where there was a tie of a boat to a mangrove.

We also have many cases related to regulation, 4860. That's a maritime zone regulation. We had 64 there. We also have, with regards to regulation 6979, the regulation for registration navigation and aquatic safety in Puerto Rico. That's "El Reglamento de Navegación" they had 143 cases and they mentioned that there was an anchor in a natural reserve.

We also had cases related to regulation, 7949. This is the fisheries regulation. We had 83 cases for different situations, including possession of queen conch, not complying with the size limit, fishing in an area not allowed illegal possession of species on a closure date, lobster not measuring the size, excess queen Kong possession on recreational and commercial fisher.

This is the report, Mr. President.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. Everything is stated and very clear. James Kreglo.

JAMES R. KREGLO: Yes. James Kreglo. I have a question about the 10 cases of coral breakage. Is that coral harvesting or a vessel striking a coral reef?

DAMARIS DELGADO: I don't have the detail, but I can ask and let you know. I imagine that we have both situations we may have, we may have both of them. But I'll have to check.

JAMES R. KREGLO: I just have followed up question, do you have many cases of coral harvesting in Puerto Rico?

DAMARIS DELGADO: I don't have the statistics about that. So it would be not responsible for me to answer with more details. Let me check with the Rangers and I'll try to answer that.

MIGUEL ROLON: James taking corals is prohibited in Puerto Rico and is an offense. If you remove the coral, even from the beach. Most of these cases are because people anchor in the wrong places. We also have divers who take it as a souvenir. They just grab the coral and take it. Most of the time, according to meetings with the Rangers, with the vigilantes, the people who enforce the law in Puerto Rico. Those are the two most common cases. Where sometimes people do not know, but as you know, ignorance doesn't excuse you from violating the law. Those are the usual cases for these people, but I'm sure that Damaris come and take that information. But the important part is that they're doing their work, enforcing these regulations, and is a nightmare because most of the violators are recreational fishers who come for the first time, tourists, and people who don't know better. This is something that probably we can include using liaison funds to have outreach and education, maybe a flyer or something like that, that the department can put together and send it out. That's a good question.

MARCOS HANKE: I just want to mention that most likely recreational people, not necessarily fishers because there is a lot of snorkeling and other people that do activities on the water. I wouldn't want to label my constituents as too problematic. We need to educate them and follow the rules, like always, but we have to include everybody that participates in the ocean. That's why my comment and- Miguel just nodded his head he totally agrees with me. The next one on the line is U.S.V.I DPNR

USVI-DPNR

HOWARD FORBES: Good afternoon. Howard Forbes, for the record. The Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Environmental Enforcement Federal Fisheries summaries for the second quarter of 2022 is as followed.

The Division of Environmental Enforcement is currently in the process of re-engaging with our federal partners at NOAA, with the joint enforcement agreement, the JEA program, for 2022. It has been over five years since the division opt out of a signed agreement due to the lack of manpower after the devastating hurricanes of 2017. We are now happy to announce that we will have a working agreement from October 2022.

I would like to make it perfectly clear that although the division was not having an assigned contract agreement. The officers of the division will still be obligated to conduct an inspection for fisheries and dockside enforcement. In an effort to re-engage with the JEA the division has hired additional officers to meet the required mandates of the grant.

DPNR has completed the bidding process for a contract to construct four patrol vessels for each district. The contract was awarded to MetalCraft Marine in the amount of 1.5 million dollars. The acquisition of these assets will enhance our patrol capabilities and add to our existing fleet. Once the contract starts, it will take 12 months for completion and delivery to the Virgin Islands.

DPNR has also invested in four Yamaha cruiser jet skis with trailer and police package to boost the enforcement capabilities for near shoreline patrols for incoming vessels.

In late July DPNR officers assisted the local VIPD with a traffic stop that led to a discovery of a hawksbill sea turtle possession. Officially, the case has been turned over to the National Marine Fishery Agent Miguel Borges to assist with the federal prosecution. That's all I'm going to say about that.

On August 2nd, 2022, the La Reine Fish Market in Saint Croix Sustained damage from a vehicle accident to the wall adjacent to the female's restroom, putting the restroom out of commission until repairs can be finalized. We are still working to finalize the fish cleaning station for the fish market and enhancing the lift station pumps with grinders to resolve the issue related to clogging.

Our dockside inspections are 360 hours. Our fish market inspection was 480 hours. Our sea patrol hours are 85 hours. Our contacts were 137. Our renewal for commercial licenses for the territory was 246. And our commercial helpers were 61.

After waiting six months for new outboard engines for our Marine patrol vessel in the Saint Thomas district, I am happy to say that we are able to outfit the asset with new outboards, making it operational once again.

This has concluded my VI report and I'm open to questions.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much for your report. We're going to hold on to questions until the end. Please make a note. If you have any questions. I'm looking around and I don't see too many questions. Is there any question? No. Thank you very much for your report, Howard. Next, U.S. Coast Guard. In the meantime, let's go with the NMFS report NOAA.

CRISTINA OLAN: Manny Antonaras has co-host permission, so he's sharing his screen. Okay. Thank you, Cristina.

NMFS/NOAA

MANNY ANTONARAS: Good afternoon. Could you hear me? All right. Thank you. This is Manny Antonaras with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Southeast Division. Sorry, I couldn't participate in person for this meeting and I'm hoping I will be there in person for the December meeting. We have a few updates to report to the council on some activity out of our Puerto Rico and U.S.V.I field offices.

For those of you that haven't met Miguel Borges, he's present in person at today's meeting. So if you have any questions on some of the incidents that I'm going to cover please feel free to reach out directly to Miguel during one of the breaks. We also have an enforcement officer Alex Terrero, who's assigned to the St Thomas field office. He is not participating today but will likely participate in some of the future meetings. Hopefully, once some of them are held in U.S.V.I. he'll also be participating locally there.

All right. The first incident we have here was a case out of Saint Thomas. It was an import of seafood that was improperly manifested, and it was found to contain illegal egg-bearing and short Caribbean spiny lobsters that were imported from BVI. The

lobsters were seized and released alive. That case is still ongoing. So I won't get into any more detail on that one.

We also had a boarding of a recreational fishing vessel out of Crum Bay Marina. Upon inspection, our officer discovered three undersized, yellowtail snappers, and later determined that those fish were also harvested in federal waters. That case was documented, and the subject was issued compliance assistance.

We had a written warning that was issued to a fisherman who was in possession of like one yellowfin tuna during a ramp check conducted by DNER. I believe that's one of the cases that Mr. Morris referenced in the Puerto Rico brief that was forwarded to special agent Borges.

We also had a couple of cases that were referred to us by the tuna tracking verification program. In those two incidents, there was required documentation that was missing from the import paperwork in reference to six different imports of tuna. A special agent followed up. The importers have since provided the required paperwork.

We had several cases that were worked on in conjunction with some of our partners which you can see here. The first one that I've included on this slide, involved a complaint of illegal possession of Staghorn coral. It was a small quantity. My understanding is that it was found at a residential complex, the officer out of Saint Thomas's followed up with that one. Issued compliance assistance to the complex manager, and then also took the opportunity to provide some outreach and education on the regulations with regard to possessing coral.

We had an officer respond also to a report from CBP of an illegal shipment of west Indian Whelks that had arrived at the Saint Thomas airport. The Whelks were shipped from the British Virgin Islands of Tortola. At the time of that report, those were closed for harvest in conjunction with CBP. Those were denied entry into U.S.V.I.

We had an IUU patrol operation conducted. It was a multi-day operation with CBP, Air Marine the FDA and we also had one of our officers out of our Miami field office who's actually an IUU officer that participated in that operation as well. There were no violations detected during that operation.

We had a patrol as well with CBP at the French Town waterfront seaport. The officer that reported on that one was alerted of an illegal shipment of conch that was brought into the U.S.V.I.

without CITES documentation. That particular case was referred to U.S. Fish and Wildlife for follow-up.

We also had a couple of cases involving MMPA harassment. One particular case, you can see pictures from that case here, was investigated by special agent Borges and was issued a summary settlement and the subjects involved in that case accepted the summary settlement and paid the penalty for harassing dolphins under the MMPA.

Then we also- I can't get into details. We have several ongoing investigations in the Caribbean area. One of which involves a case that director Forbes said had been briefed. It's an ESA Take that was referred to our office for further investigation. I hope to provide some more detail on that case during the next meeting.

Just a quick recap. During the last meeting, I talked about the five-year priority setting that our office is currently involved with. It's something we do every five years. Part of the process involves soliciting input from our joint enforcement agreement partners Coast Guard partners, the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, the Caribbean, and other NOAA line offices. Apologize for the typo on this one.

We also held a separate meeting with the Caribbean Council Chair and also DAP representatives. We had a very good discussion with those folks. This led to some follow-up discussions, one of which involved seafood mislabeling. As of today, our draft is now with our headquarters office in Silver Spring under review. Once those priorities are finalized, we'll get them published and I'll provide a brief during the next Caribbean council meeting in December.

As director Forbes mentioned the JEA agreements, we do have pending agreements that are being finalized for submission for the next agreement cycle. For the JEA's, for Puerto Rico and U.S.VI.

That concludes the brief. I'll leave you with this final slide that has the contact information for special agent Miguel Borges and Alex Torrero enforcement officer in U.S.V.I and the 800 toll-free number that we have for reporting a violation. Could certainly use that to provide any information on a complaint or contact one of these folks directly.

And that concludes my brief. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Any questions? Thank you, Manny. I don't see any questions at this moment. Thank you very much as usual. Very good report. Cristina the coast guard is not available? They don't have a report at this moment.

MIGUEL ROLON: Just for the record while he wrote.

CRISTINA OLAN: He wrote. Negative, I'm just listening. At the next meeting, our representative from sector San Juan will be attending and I will mention preparing a presentation. I actually was unaware that we presented at the meeting.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. We appreciate always the collaboration with the Coast Guard, and we'll be expecting your presentation, which is very important for this council. Thank you.

The next topic is CFMC advisory body membership, followed by a code of conduct and conflict of interest.

CFMC Advisory Bodies Membership Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest

MIGUEL ROLON: Okay. We will have a standard topic. The same way we do with the enforcement. So from now on, you will see on the agenda, the Advisory Bodies. In this case, I'm happy to report that all of the members of all the Bodies were reappointed on April 22 this year. So all the positions are filled. Between here and December, we have a vacancy of some sort, the Chair will contact the chairs of the corresponding body. Then we will report back to you in December, whether we have a vacancy or not. For James Kreglo, the way that we operate is that whenever we have a vacancy in any of the bodies, DAP, SSC OEAP, and TAP, we have a lot of Ps. We receive from anybody, members of the public, council members, members of the DAPs, the Chairs especially, candidates to fill that position. Then we have a closed session, at every meeting, there, we discuss the merits that we have done before. Then the following day, it is announced to the public, an item on the agenda, the persons that the council would like to consider for membership. It is done by, for example, "I would like to consider Miguel Rolon for a DAP in Saint Thomas." That's the motion and then you have to vote on it. There, the council decides whether that person is accepted or not for the DAP.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you for that, Miguel. Now we are going to follow the code of conduct and conflict of interest. Jocelyn.

JOCELYN D'AMBROSIO: Sure, thank you. This is I'm Jocelyn D'Ambrosio and the council asked me to speak about conduct issues and conflict of interest. Conflict of interest, in particular, has arisen in the context of the council's scientific and statistical committee and some of their discussions. So I just wanted to provide a brief overview of these topics and some of the work that the council is doing on these matters.

Starting with conduct. Recently we've been focused on one particular aspect of conduct, which is decorum and responses to persons that have raised potential questions about issues of decorum. In particular, around how persons conduct themselves at meetings and around meetings of the council. The council in particular is responsible for maintaining high standards of ethical conduct among themselves and their staff and advisory groups. As part of that, you know, we want to make sure that the persons affiliated with the council, the council members, the advisory panel members, the council staff, and the persons attending meetings act with professionalism and show respect for others. And that's really paramount under the conduct policies that exist.

We have a number of standards here that apply. The Department of Commerce, their Office of General Counsel the Ethics and Law Division, or the Programs Office has prepared two standards that apply here.

There are rules of conduct for employees and advisors of Regional Fishery Management Councils. And then there are also rules of conduct for members of Regional Fishery Management Councils. These documents are available online, and I can make sure that they're circulated again to everyone so we have them. But these really govern the conduct standards, and the council has incorporated them into its statement of organization, practices, and procedures. Those are what we call the SOPPs. We have SOPPs from 2015. Those were sent up for approval and are still awaiting approval, but we're operating under those because the council itself approved those standards. But I also check the earlier versions of the SOPPs, as potentially informative. So we have an earlier version from 2004. Both of those contain some standards. The most recent one specifically references those rules of conduct that the Department of Commerce has put together. Then the 2004 SOPPs has some standards in there for conduct that raise similar topics, making sure that persons are, in particular, conducting themselves professionally, not misabusing their role. We'll make sure that everyone has a copy of those.

Recently, again, the focus has just been on maintaining professionalism and I think that's just very important so we have a safe place for persons to participate and to make good decisions and collaborative work.

On the conflict front, I'm really just going to touch on how that's arisen with some of the discussions at the SSC meetings. There are different standards for conflicts of interest that would apply to the council as the decision-making body, but here sort of been asked to talk about recent questions associated with the SSC meetings.

There have been some concerns with the affiliations of persons, that are members of the SSC. In some of the research that they're doing, there have been concerns that that might present the potential for bias or the potential for some sort of financial benefit. I just want to start for a minute and say that the persons that the council has appointed to its SSC have expertise in the region. So they're doing expertise in the region. They have expertise that the council wants to rely on. So we can come up with really good conservation and management measures that reflect the best scientific information available. So a lot of these, these research initiatives that they're talking about are really why they were selected to be on the SSC because we want to be able to use their expertise.

It's not a bad thing that they're able to speak about work in the region that could inform fishery management. We want- going back to the sort of decorum questions. We want to have a collaborative environment where people feel comfortable discussing their affiliations and discussing their expertise. To support that we have disclosure requirements, these are under the regulations that NMFS has prepared. There's a financial form that SSC members fill out. Council members fill it out as well. Then when we have discussions, persons should disclose any of their affiliations with the research.

These discussions and these forms can help make sure that we're all aware of where folks are coming from. With the SSC in particular, there are three types of work, that I kind of think about, that would inform how we want to think about the conflict question.

The SSC can conduct peer reviews. The SSC makes recommendations for what information is the best scientific information available to inform fishery management decisions. And then the SSC also makes various recommendations to the council. So

recently they've recommended research priorities as we heard, or they might recommend how the council might respond to particular research. Whatever questions the council has for the SSC, the SSC will evaluate pertinent research and recommend action for the council to consider.

So in the peer review context, there are some standards that apply for conflict of interest. These come from the national standard guidelines. Particularly, national standard two. That requires that conservation and management measures be based on the best scientific information available. Those talk about when persons are conducting peer review, we want to make sure that they're independent. That would mean that the peer reviewers haven't contributed or participated in the work that's under review and that there are no conflicts.

For persons that are not members of the fishery service, like peer reviewers, they will need to make sure that they don't have conflicts with the scientific information that's under review. Then, they define that under this NOAA policy on conflicts of interest, as not having a financial or other interest that would conflict with their service on the review. Meaning, that it could significantly impair their objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. That's in that peer review context, you know, we want to make sure that there's that independence and that there's not something that's going to make it difficult for them to be objective in the review.

That being said, the guidelines recognize highly specialized peer reviews. It might not be possible to find someone that has not participated in the research or that might have a conflict because there might be just a limited pool of persons that could be eligible for that review. And so in that instance, the person would disclose their affiliation and then the review could move forward. It's not an absolute bar, but it's something that we want to try to avoid so we can maintain that independence and objectivity.

In the best scientific information available realm, the SSC as the council's scientific advisory body will make recommendations on the best scientific information available. I say recommendations because it's actually NMFS' role to certify that the management measures are based on the best scientific information available, but NMFS can take into account views from the SSC. So here too, I think, there aren't standards directly on point like for the peer review, but those standards for peer review, I think, could influence how the council wants to recommend its SSC, make those best science recommendations.

So again, making sure that if you're trying to say a particular study is the best science, the persons that conducted the study should likely recuse themselves. But, as I said at the outset, we want to leverage a person's expertise so if folks have questions about the study, they should be able to speak about the study, and answer any questions SSC might have but just within the context of knowing they participated in that research information disclosing the affiliation.

Finally just on management recommendations and advice. Sort of similar to that best science, I think the disclosure of any affiliation being available to talk about any of the research, but not maybe ultimately voting on a recommendation based on that research. Let's say someone had done some research on a spawning period and you wanted to recommend the council respond to that research. Well, perhaps persons that participated in the research could recuse themselves from that discussion, but could say, you know, this is the research, this is the methods I use, this is why I would recommend this, but I'm going to recuse myself from that final vote. Then when the SSC report set out, they could note the researcher's affiliation and the presumption that they would be in support of the matter.

I've been working on a document that kind of lays out the role of the SSC and the way these different standards could apply to conduct and hope to have that available for the council review and input, because on some of these topics, how you want the SSC to handle the potential appearance of conflicts, it'd be great to have counsel advice. Um, so that should be available. And that concludes my presentation. If anyone has any questions, please let me know

MARCOS HANKE: Any questions? I don't see any question, actually. It was super clear, super important what Jocelyn just presented. I just want to state that the council, since two or three meetings ago, was already working in order to produce guidance and materials to enhance the way the meetings work between the members and the rules, to disseminate the rules. We are going to keep doing that because the decorum, the respect, and the flow of information in a professional matter are super important for me and the council members. I just want to highlight that. Any questions? Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Well, not a question, but one of the things that we were discussing is how to handle complaints. The council, from the get-go, has what they call the grievance committee. The grievance committee was supposed to address the issue with the

staff, we have done it before, council members and members of the advisory body, as well as sometimes members of the public at the public hearing. So we have that available and that grievance committee is a committee of the WHOLE. That committee is the voting members of the council, except for the regional administrator who reserves the right to say no, or yes, to any of the- Yeah. That's a lobby people. I hope is not a bomb and those are the last digits [laughter]

I just wanted to, for the record, state that that committee is available at any time. And the idea is to channel through that grievance committee, any complaint, any grievance that we need to address at any time. That committee meets before the council meetings. They don't make decisions for the council. They just look at the information and then filter that information to the council with some recommendations. Then, the recommendations are discussed in the open. The final decision is by the council. This decision is submitted to the regional administrator and the regional administrator then considers, yes it goes or not.

So that's that. We have that available. Then I believe for the December meeting, we will have more information. The idea is to avoid, including anything that is of the characteristics of a grievance in reports to the council. It goes then, you know, for example, the SCC, the other day, they have the last slide. That last slide you have is going through the grievance committee. But most people don't know that. So I'm refreshing the memory of everybody, we have that and the council is responsible for attending to any matter that is related to decorum, conflict of interest, etcetera. But we have that commitment to deal with this. And of course, in this committee, you have the advice of the non-legal counsel and even the Department of Commerce legal counsel. We have done that before. In my case, one time, we had to recruit the advice of the NOAA personal experts. We had a conversation on the phone, and they advise me on how to proceed. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you very much. The next item on the agenda, having no question is other business. Do we have anybody from other business?

Other Business

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Yeah. Thanks, Marcos. Two things. One, I'd like to request some additional time at the December council meeting to discuss amendments and actions. I think we don't spend enough time talking through some of the issues and talking with my staff in terms of priorities, we likely will have the

pelagics document that we can bring back to you as well as the gear amendment, with actions and alternatives. And so it'd be good to walk through those in a little bit more depth and really get input from the council. Just a request of time for some additional time on the agenda for that.

And then the second item is just from a priority standpoint. We have a lot of actions right now in the Caribbean which is a good thing. Um, we are working obviously on the rule-making for island-based FMPs. We have the spiny lobster action. We have the buoy gear action. Those are with NOAA Fisheries, right? So we are viewing the pelagics amendment and the gear amendment, the trawl gear amendment is kind of the next priority with permitting and some of the other actions beyond that.

But if the council sees it differently, then we'd like to talk about that. There's only so much staff capacity and resources to be able to get things done between meetings. So we want to make sure we're bringing back to the Caribbean council, which you feel are the highest priorities.

MARCOS HANKE: Miguel.

MIGUEL ROLON: Andy, do you think that half a morning or the whole morning will be enough time to discuss the issues that you're talking about?

ANDREW STRELCHECK: Go ahead, María.

MARÍA DEL MAR LOPEZ: I think perhaps if we separate the whole morning and if we don't need all that time, that will be the time that it could be used to accommodate something else that would you know, that extends. But I agree, I think the whole morning will be good for us to discuss. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Yes. I want to state that also the flexibility of you and the people that work with you, María, and so on, to accommodate the priorities, the discounts have been showing up in terms of actions and things to do show the way you guys are connected to our needs. We really appreciate that.

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, the staff mostly Graciela and myself. We are going to contact María Del Mar between here and December so then we can put together that section of the agenda. Make sure that we covered what just Andy just mentioned. I took notes here. That way we'll be able to organize that part of the agenda. We can have, for example, on the morning of the second day, discussing that or the afternoon, or the first day, it will be something. The first day, okay. So we will do that.

Then we can have the morning or the afternoon, but that will be the first thing that we are going to discuss on December 6th. And then, we don't have to decide now, but I will like for the council to allow María Del Mar and the staff of the SERO and Southeast Fisheries Science Center to work with Graciela so we can come up with the right topics and the time we need to discuss those.

MARCOS HANKE: I totally agree with Miguel. The way I see this because of the lines that I just mentioned before, and the workload that you guys have, we are pretty much setting up a working space to move this forward. This doesn't prevent that if there is more time needed, you guys are going to- because different situations going to happen during the sequence of events from now on, and we are going to keep close communications with you. As Miguel said, the staff with you guys and me, thank you.

Other business, anybody else? John.

JOHN WALTERS: Yes, Mr. Chair. I wanted to also bring up the request that we had for the additional SSC meeting and have a brief discussion on that so that it can get noticed on the register and people can plan for that. Perhaps, Graciela, do you want to?

MIGUEL ROLON: ¿Los días de la reunión del SSC, los tienes?

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Liajay will put up the slide and we can guide them through the request.

JOHN WALTERS: Okay. I guess I can read this. We worked, Graciela Kevin and me, tried to work on what would be a good strategy for getting a number of stock assessments through the process so that the council can then potentially have ABC advice at the December meeting for both the SEDAR 57 update and the triggerfish assessment.

So it's a tall order, but if we have the additional meeting, we would like an additional one from October 4th to 5th. This would be a two-day hybrid or virtual meeting. Some people could be in the office and that would define the path forward for developing ABC advice from SEDAR 80 clean triggerfish, for the three islands.

At that meeting, we would need to present the assessments for Saint Thomas-Saint John and Saint Croix, as well as outline how

we would develop the ABC advice and any additional runs that would be needed, as well as projection settings. This would define the task that we would need to do in advance of the November meeting so that we would have that material ready for the SSC. In the November 29th to December 1st meeting.

Then in that meeting, we will focus on reviewing the SEDAR 57 update and this is a strict update adding additional years of data. So the review should not be too extreme because strict updates are assuming that the model is not really what gets reviewed it's just, is the update correct? Is the new information, good information? And then that meeting would also review the ABC advice coming from SEDAR 80 for the three islands. That would potentially have six allowable biological catch recommendations that could be put forth for the December council meeting if all goes according to this plan.

The other additional task would be reviewing the SEDAR 84 yellowtail snapper and stoplight parrotfish terms of reference. Thank you.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, John. I want to say that this paragraph, is a great sigh of relief. I see the light at the end of the tunnel for things that are super meaningful for this council.

Thank you very much for the work that you, Kevin, Graciela, and whoever worked with this plan came up with. Thank you very much. Does anybody else want to comment on other businesses? No?

I want to say something. I want to follow something because this is specific to your participation on the council, John. The fishermen and the fishing community have been sharing with you during the meeting and outside, all the knowledge that you share with them, the way you transmit your knowledge, and the accessibility of yourself is super appreciated by all of us. They asked me to transmit those thoughts to you, that this council appreciates a lot, your presence here. We really hope that it's not the last time because you are more than welcome to the team. After all, we are all looking for the same result, right? Good management, good environment, healthy discussions, and you, for sure, can support us on that. Thank you very much.

JOHN WALTER: Thank you Chair. I think on behalf of us both, Clay Porch, the science center director, and I are glad to be able to attend in person and both of us, or one, will try to attend more often in these meetings. We think that it is really valuable to be there in person, you gain so much of the

intangibles that you don't get from the remote environment. So, thank you.

MIGUEL ROLON: And you are going to keep bringing Kevin with you.

JOHN WALTER: I think Kevin is stuck going to the meetings.
[laughter]

ANDREW STRELCHECK: I think it's the other way around. I think Kevin brought John. [laughter]

JOHN WALTER: No, we are thrilled to have a branch chief as capable as Kevin. I think we're seeing the signs of that in his team and what they're providing. The fact that they've been able to commit to that schedule, is a lot of work on their part, but they think they can do it.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, Kevin.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: So, two things. First of all, I'm glad you all heard that and it's on the record because we're up for annual reviews right now and my boss is listening in, Shannon. [laughter] The other is I was just, I was just chatting back and forth with Shannon, and I said, "if we get six stock assessments through in one meeting, is that going to be some kind of record?" And she said, as far as she knows, it will be at least in the Southeast. So it's ambitious but I think I think we've got a good plan and I'm looking forward to moving forward with these.

MIGUEL ROLON: For James, for the newcomer. This seems to be like an everyday kind of thing, but it took a lot of time, with a lot of good people to come to the point that we are now, that we have a branch for each one of the three councils. We have the Gulf councils, and South Atlantic, and for this council to receive the brain power that they have in Southeast Fishery Science Center, dedicated to what we have here is a very high achievement. That's why we want to thank, like the Chairman said, Southeast Fisher Science Center, for the commitment they have here. I just wanted to tell you that. This is a story where you come in and see a snapshot of a success story, but there's a long way that we travel together with the group. And the same goals for the Regional Office. The Regional office, they have a branch in the Caribbean. It used to be led by Bill Arnold and now is led by Jack and the two ladies who work with us all the time, María Del Mar and Sarah Stephenson that heard her and on the "buho" through the internet. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you. I have JJ.

JUAN J. CRUZ MOTTA: Thank you. Just to clarify, the 84 is only the terms of reference, right? It's not the full stock assessment.

KEVIN MCCARTHY: This is Kevin. So 84, we're starting with the terms of reference so that the process can begin. We're not going for nine, just six. Let's keep it at six.

MARCOS HANKE: Yeah. And it was clear in the paragraph that you stated that is on the record already, which is pretty good.

I want to wrap up this on a very good note. I try to be very positive even though I'm receiving the pressure of a lot of things here. James Kreglo I'm super impressed with your participation, as this is your first meeting. Your ability to communicate to everybody, your interest. I again, welcome you to make any questions and to engage all the people here. I'm trying to do my best for everybody to understand that if you work together, we're going to have six great jobs, as Kevin mentioned. They're going to be a possible record. I invite you guys to keep pulling in the same direction and let's move forward. Nothing else to say. Thank you to all, especially thank you to Cristina and thank you to Liajay high for an excellent super job.

Yes. before I end the meeting, we have the public comment period.

Miguel's next meeting dates.

MIGUEL ROLON: Before that, anybody who has a car parked, check with that lady, because we have a special rate of \$12 per day. So just be sure that you get the sticker.

Then the next meeting of the council will be here in San Juan, at the Embassy Suites, on December 6th and 7th. It will be hybrid, as I mentioned, all our meetings will be hybrid. Some people ask me, can we travel somewhere else besides this hotel? Unfortunately, after the pandemic, the hotels are really trying to catch up and we cannot compete with weddings, anniversaries, and all those kinds of things but we will try to see if we can move.

In the case of the Virgin Islands. I believe that the French Country Hotel is still closed. We hope that whenever they open

the hotel, the French Horn Reef is the one that can accommodate the council and the needs that we have for the council.

There's another issue. Probably we'll have to wait for 2023 to go there because in that case there are only two flights. The rest is the key fear one and that's the little airplane that people don't like. But that's what we have here. We have been advised, actually, when I talked to Carlos, that they still have those two flights. In the case of Saint Thomas-San John, they have a hotel, the Windward Passage, we have been able to have meetings there, but we are waiting for those. Hopefully, once we have those hotels, the first thing that we are going to have are the DAP meetings. Once the island-based FMPs are approved or implemented because they were approved in 2020, I will call Nelson, Julian, and Eddie to start to coordinate the first in-person meeting in each one of the areas where we are going to discuss the implementation of those plans.

In the case of Saint Croix, they already have some amendments in the work. Saint Thomas-Saint Jones they also, yeah, Mr. Amendment is working on it. In the case of Saint John, I've been talking to Julian about some possible actions that he would like to discuss. I'm sure that Nelson and Eddie have all of these ideas that we want to discuss.

We will try to move out of this area whenever we can, but unfortunately, it's very difficult. That's that Mr. Chairman unless you have any questions regarding the next meeting.

MARCOS HANKE: I don't see any questions. Kreglo, do you want to mention something? You raise your hand.

JAMES KREGLO: Yes, James Kreglo. I was going to suggest Margaritaville is running strong in Saint Thomas. [laughter]

MIGUEL ROLON: Yeah, but they told us that they don't want us there. We went to visit, Diana and I visited. We have visited every place and Margaritaville is a beautiful place. However, you have to be a member to be able to have a conference room there. If you have any connection there, please let me know so we can go there.

JULIAN MAGRAS: Julian Magras, for the record. Yeah, Frenchman's Reef is slated to open up on December 1st. So hopefully once they get up and running, I've reached out to a few people there, but they haven't agreed to open up any of the banquet rooms yet. That's where we normally have the meetings. They are opening up the main hotel first and that's going to be

on December 1st if everything goes well. As soon I get some more information, I'll contact Diana. I told her I'll work on that for her and then we'll see what happens from there.

MIGUEL ROLON: Thank you, Julian is our spy. He's the one who tells us. Yeah, really, because we need to have a contact person there to plan ahead. But thank you, Julian. I'm sure that we can meet in 2023, sometime in Saint Thomas, hopefully. Unless we have another virus with another Greek letter that will attack us again.

MARCOS HANKE: Thank you, everybody. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as a Chair and to facilitate your good thinking and good intentions moving forward.

The meeting is adjourned. It's 3:06 PM. Thank you.