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PAGE 38: Motion to develop an amendment to move forward with the framework presented by staff to evaluate and revise the FMUs. [The motion carried on page 40.](#)

PAGE 104: Motion to develop an amendment to the U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico FMPs to address the SEDAR 91 stock assessments and modify Puerto Rico’s accountability measures for spiny lobster. [The motion carried on page 105.](#)

PAGE 127: Motion for staff to create an Interdisciplinary Planning Team to develop recommendations on corrective actions for accountability measures to pelagic in the Island-Based Fisheries Management Plans. [The motion carried on page 128.](#)

PAGE 156: Motion to add text to the SEDAR 103 Terms of Reference #3: “For the species listed in the island-based FMPs, provide recommendations of specific analytical procedures for developing management advice that can be used and implemented by the Council and effectively monitored to best meet legal mandates when using tools that are alternative or complementary to conventional stock assessments.” [The motion carried on page 156.](#)

PAGE 157: Motion to approve the SEDAR 103 Terms of Reference as amended. [The motion carried on page 157.](#)

1                                   **CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
2                                   **187<sup>th</sup> REGULAR Council MEETING**  
3                                   **HYBRID MEETING**  
4                                   **EMBASSY SUITE**  
5                                   **SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

6  
7                                   AUGUST 12-13, 2025  
8

9   The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened at The Embassy  
10 Suite in San Juan, Puerto Rico on Tuesday morning, August 12, 2025,  
11 and was called to order at 9:04 A.M. by the Council Chair, Carlos  
12 Farchette.  
13

14                                   **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Good morning, everyone. We're going to get  
17 started here shortly.  
18

19 So, good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 187<sup>th</sup> Caribbean  
20 Fisheries Management Council meeting held today, October-- I mean,  
21 sorry, October, huh. August 12, 2025, at the Embassy Suite, San  
22 Juan, Puerto Rico. We're calling this meeting to order. It's at  
23 09:04AM. Let's make the roll call. We're going to start on my right  
24 with the Coast Guard.  
25

26 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Good morning. My name is Ensign James Butler.  
27 I am stationed at Coast Guard Sector San Juan in San Juan, Puerto  
28 Rico down the road. I am a member of the law enforcement division,  
29 and I'll be speaking today on the Coast Guard's use of our five  
30 cutters located here in San Juan to patrol mostly the Mona Passage  
31 but also in the Greater Antilles over by Saint Thomas, Saint John  
32 and Saint Croix. Thank you.  
33

34 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good morning. Sarah Stephenson, NOAA  
35 Fisheries.  
36

37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Buenos días, María López, NOAA Fisheries.  
38

39 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Anne Kersting, NOAA GC Southeast.  
40

41 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries Southeast  
42 Regional Office, Regional Administrator.  
43

44 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Diana Martino, Council Staff.  
45

46 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH III:** Sam Rauch, Deputy Director, NOAA Fisheries,  
47 Washington DC.  
48

1 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.  
2  
3 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, Puerto Rico DNR.  
4  
5 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, Virgin Islands Department of  
6 Planning Natural Resources.  
7  
8 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Council Member.  
9  
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela García-Moliner, Council Staff.  
11  
12 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Liajay Rivera García, Council Staff.  
13  
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Cristina Olán-Martínez,  
15 Council Staff.  
16  
17 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Jannette Ramos-García,  
18 Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Chair.  
19  
20 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Gerson Martínez, DAP Chair, Saint  
21 Croix.  
22  
23 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Vance Vicente, Scientific and  
24 Statistical Committee. Thank you.  
25  
26 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, DAP Chair, Saint Thomas/Saint John.  
27  
28 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair,  
29 Puerto Rico.  
30  
31 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fishery Science Center.  
32  
33 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, U.S.V.I, DAP member  
34  
35 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Good morning. Miguel Borges, NOAA Office of Law  
36 Enforcement.  
37  
38 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Buenos días. María Irizarry, Council  
39 Staff.  
40  
41 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Buenos Días. Martha Prada, IRA Coordinator.  
42  
43 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ QUIÑONES:** Buenos Días. Liandry de la Cruz,  
44 Saint Croix Fisheries Liaison.  
45  
46 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos-Caraballo,  
47 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.  
48

1 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto  
2 Rico Fisheries Liaison.

3  
4 **MAUREEN C. TRNKA:** Good morning. Maureen Trnka, NOAA Fisheries  
5 Headquarters.

6  
7 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Good morning. Joshua Quetel, DAP member, Saint  
8 Thomas.

9  
10 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Buenos días. James Kreglo, Commercial Fisherman.

11  
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Member.

15  
16 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, Mr. Chair. We also need  
17 to read the people in Zoom.

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

20  
21 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** So, people in Zoom, we have Brendan--  
22 Let me open the list of participants. We have Maggie Ríos,  
23 Guillermo Cordero, Áurea Rodríguez-Santiago, Brendan Mackesey,  
24 Grisel Rodríguez-Ferrer, Jesús Rivera-Hernández, Kate Zamboni,  
25 Nicole Greaux, Refik Orhun, Shirley Ledee, Virginia Shervette,  
26 Yamitza Rodríguez, and a person with a phone number. Please, if  
27 that person could identify himself or herself. That's all the  
28 people that we have in Zoom.

29  
30 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Next on the agenda, the adoption  
33 of the agenda. So, we will need a motion.

34  
35 **SENNAI HABTES:** If there are no additions, I motion we accept the  
36 agenda as it stands.

37  
38 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Motion to accept, by Sennai Habtes, the  
41 agenda and seconded by Vanessa Ramírez. All in favor say, "aye."

42  
43 **GROUP:** Aye.

44  
45 **ELECTION OF OFFICIALS**

46  
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next on the agenda is election of officials.

48

1 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Good morning, from the Coast Guard. I am calling  
2 for a nomination for the Chair.  
3  
4 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, for the record. I nominate Carlos  
5 Farchette for the Chair and Vanessa Ramirez for Vice-Chair.  
6  
7 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck. I'll second Sennai's motion.  
8  
9 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Will there be any other nominations? Hearing  
10 none, all in favor say, "aye."  
11  
12 **GROUP:** Aye.  
13  
14 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** And the "ayes" have it. Congratulations.  
15 [laughter]  
16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Thank you. Okay. Next, we have Sam  
18 Rauch. Sam, would you care to say anything?  
19  
20 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH III:** Thank you, newly elected Chair. I've met many  
21 of you before. It's always a pleasure to come down here. I am Sam  
22 Rauch. I am the Deputy Director of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries  
23 Service.  
24  
25 I oversee the work of all the regions, and I bring you greetings  
26 from Eugenio Piñeiro Soler, who, I'm sure many of you know, who's  
27 my boss in DC. He oversees the entire National Marine Fisheries  
28 Service. He regrets he's unable to attend. I always enjoy coming  
29 down here to see where the real work of the fisheries is done.  
30  
31 Last time I came down here, I think, was in December. Gave I you  
32 a number of statistics nationally. I'm not going to do that again.  
33 But we operate the most transparent science-based fishery  
34 management system in the world. We, unlike most other countries,  
35 we monitor all our fisheries. We can tell you what is caught, where  
36 it's caught, who's catching it, and make legitimate scientific  
37 based predictions about how much can be caught and what the trends  
38 are.  
39  
40 We monitor all kinds of data, and then it all feeds into you all  
41 here at the Council, which does the delicate work of looking at  
42 both the science, the economic and social impacts of the science  
43 and making recommendations as to how we should manage the  
44 fisheries. We could not collectively do this without the work of  
45 the Council. This is where everything happens. This is the linchpin  
46 of everything that we do, and you all are the ones that do it.  
47  
48 You come prepared to these meetings. You make difficult decisions.

1 You debate difficult issues, and you provide extremely valuable  
2 recommendations to the Fisheries Service for how to implement the  
3 various provisions of the statute and we appreciate all of that.  
4 I'm not going to take up more time. I've seen that your agenda is  
5 quite packed. I'm happy to have any discussions or to answer any  
6 questions, but it is always a pleasure to be here.

7  
8 Thank you.

9

10 **CONSIDERATION OF 186TH CFMC MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION**

11

12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sam. Next, we have the consideration  
13 of the 186<sup>th</sup>, Council meeting verbatim transcriptions. Yeah.

14

15 So, we lost the father of Tony Blanchard not too long ago here, so  
16 we would like to have a moment of silence in his recognition.

17

18 (Whereupon, a moment of silence was held in memory of Louis "Lewie"  
19 Blanchard.)

20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Miguel?

22

23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We are lucky that his son is still a member  
24 of the Council. Due to some delays, Tony Blanchard is here with  
25 us, as a member of the public. He will have a hell of a time trying  
26 to keep his mouth shut when we discuss everything that we have to  
27 discuss. But let me assure you, we will allow you to participate  
28 one way or the other.

29

30 And then, we want to also recognize James Kreglo. James' term  
31 expired on August 10, but he'll be with us. If we follow the policy  
32 that we have so far, we will switch. James Kreglo could be a member  
33 of the DAP, that will be discussed this evening and Tony Blanchard  
34 will be a new council member.

35

36 So, by the September meeting, you're going to be sitting right  
37 here, next to Andy. Sorry. It's an inside joke that we've had since  
38 a long time ago. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

39

40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. So, consideration of the 186<sup>th</sup> Council  
41 meeting verbatim transcriptions? Any additions, corrections?  
42 Vanessa?

43

44 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the  
45 record. I already sent by email to Diana. It's a small, on page  
46 nine, mistaken name. It says "James" it is supposed to be "Carlos"  
47 as Chair, and it's already sent, just for the record. Thanks.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other corrections? Hearing none

2  
3 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, for the record. I second.

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, motion made by Vanessa with a correction and  
6 amendment to the verbatim transcriptions seconded by Ricardo  
7 López. All in favor say, "aye."

8  
9 **GROUP:** Aye.

10  
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** The motion carries. Next on the agenda is  
14 executive director's report.

15  
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to be brief  
17 because we have a lot to discuss. People were asking me about the  
18 budget situation. We've received notification that we have less  
19 than what was approved originally. We are losing 340-something  
20 thousand dollars and we lost 1.12 compared to 2024.

21  
22 That means that all the Councils-- and all the other Councils are  
23 on the same boat. So, that means that we have to be cautious as to  
24 the way that we spend the money. We will have more virtual meetings  
25 than in person meeting, as you know, to save some time, and then  
26 we will be mindful about our needs and the budget for the 2025-  
27 2026. We may receive another extra funding. We don't know yet, but  
28 it's in the works.

29  
30 For 2026, it is uncertain at this time, and the budget is also  
31 affecting National Marine Fishery Service. So, we have to also  
32 keep in mind that, in our case, Center and the Regional Office,  
33 they are doing their best with what they have, the same with the  
34 Washington office. So, we will let you know more about the budget  
35 in December. But at this time, we can rest assured that we can  
36 continue the doors open, the staff until December 31, and the  
37 meetings that we need to really undertake to move forward with the  
38 management actions that we need under the Magnuson Act.

39  
40 At the international arena, as you know, we participate in WECAFC,  
41 the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission since the  
42 beginning. However, due to budgetary constraint, we can no longer  
43 host those meetings. Probably, we will receive some extra funding  
44 for 2025. The working group on spawning aggregation could meet  
45 with our assistance. Rome also is running low on money, so WECAFC  
46 is really looking at ways to save money while at the same time  
47 fulfilling their obligation.

1 The last meeting of the sessions, WECAFC every two years was held  
2 in Jamaica. Carlos and I participated virtually, from NMFS. We had  
3 María López present in Jamaica. At that meeting, they set, for the  
4 next two years, activities and between sessions, they have the  
5 working group.

6  
7 So, if we receive some fundings, then we can assist in the working  
8 groups that we have. We have a working group for queen conch,  
9 another for spawning aggregation. The recent one was for  
10 flyingfish/dolphin. The flyingfish/dolphin was something that the  
11 U.S. was very much interested. They gave us some money through the  
12 Grants Office, and we were able to have the first meeting of the  
13 working group.

14  
15 For 2026 it is uncertain if we can continue doing that, but we're  
16 waiting to see if there is some good news in 2025. Remember that  
17 the fiscal year of the federal government runs from October 1<sup>st</sup>  
18 through September 30<sup>th</sup>. The fiscal year for the Council is the  
19 calendar year, January-December. So, we will know more about the  
20 situation of the 2026 budget and so forth that by the December  
21 meeting.

22  
23 The Councils will meet in October virtually because we don't have  
24 [inaudible] the CCC, the Coordinating Committee, and we are going  
25 to discuss issues related to the budgets and the needs under the  
26 Magnuson Act. The CCC is hoping that with the monies that we have  
27 available, we will be able to undertake some of the action across  
28 the Nation, all the Council that we have. But there's an issue  
29 that they were discussing, and I can relate that. We would like to  
30 ask for more support to the Regions and the Centers because those  
31 are the people that interact with the Council directly. When you  
32 see the presentation by Martha today regarding the area of funding,  
33 there's a component that is key to complement the monies that were  
34 given to all the Councils for this important project.

35  
36 The legislators of Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico invited me to  
37 give a presentation in November. The presentation is about the  
38 economics of the fishery in the U.S. Caribbean and how the Council  
39 relates to those components in the U.S. Virgin Islands that have  
40 a bearing on the economy of the fishers of the U.S. Virgin Islands  
41 and the industry. So, we are going to present that on behalf of  
42 the Council. I'm the one who represent the Council at these  
43 meetings, but I usually like to come to the Council so that you  
44 will know that this is happening.

45  
46 In the case of Puerto Rico, they are revising a project for the  
47 better management of the coral reef and associated species. And  
48 they cited me, but I couldn't go because the meeting was in August,

1 and the senate and the house wanted to meet in April and May. But  
2 we sent all the information that they needed, and I'm waiting to  
3 see if they are in need of more information or presentation by us.  
4 But I wanted to include that on the record, so everybody will be  
5 on the same page.

6  
7 The project in Puerto Rico is project 551 of the Senate, PS 551 of  
8 the Senate. They've had several projects in the past. One of them  
9 was kind of interesting. They wanted to amend the law and there  
10 was a paragraph that said any management measure that is adopted  
11 by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council through the Secretary  
12 of Commerce will be adopted as presented by the government of  
13 Puerto Rico for compatible regulation. That didn't fly that well.  
14 But we always look for compatible regulation for the species, and  
15 that's why the representation of Ricardo and other representatives  
16 before participated in all the discussions that we have here.

17  
18 That's what I have at this time, Mr. Chairman. I have other things,  
19 but we are going to discuss it when we get into the agenda items.  
20 Thank you.

#### 21 22 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Miguel. Questions from Miguel?  
25 Hearing none, next on the agenda is official-- I'm sorry. Sabater?

26  
27 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Are there going to be more cuts in our budget?  
28 Have you heard or anything like that?

29  
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, if I tell you, I have to kill you. But,  
31 anyway, no. The official word from the office in Washington is  
32 that the Councils got the approval at this time, so that will get  
33 us all the way until December. We don't expect any further cuts.  
34 But in reality, and this is common to everybody, we have 2.9  
35 inflation rates. The hotel now went from 147 average to 340  
36 something average. Air tickets and airfares are going higher.

37  
38 So, the executive directors, when we met, we looked at the big  
39 picture around the nation, you go from maybe 11 to 15% cuts. Just  
40 in that component. And that's why people are really scratching  
41 their heads on how we can accomplish what we need to do under the  
42 Magnuson Act with the money that we have at this time.

43  
44 At the CCC meeting, that was put forward very clear by Sam, the  
45 group, Mr. Piñeiro, Kelly, and Emily, they are the top people in  
46 Washington who manage the operations of the Councils, and the  
47 fisheries in general at a national level. So, the long answer to  
48 you is no, but that's what we thought last year and didn't happen.

1  
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. And I'll just add. Great question. So,  
3 the Fishery Service has a budget, typically, of over a billion  
4 dollars nationwide of which the fishery management Councils  
5 represent about \$45,000,000 of that budget. Right now, they're  
6 going through the FY '26 budget process in Congress, the House and  
7 Senate have both, essentially made their marks on the budget, and  
8 they are hundreds of millions of dollars apart from one another.

9  
10 So, in terms of whether we have budget reductions or not, how that  
11 affects the Councils will really depend on reconciliation of those  
12 budgets between the house and senate marks.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions from Miguel? Okay. Hearing  
15 none. Next on the agenda is Fishery Management Plans Amendments,  
16 Actions and Priorities Update for 2025. María?

17  
18 **FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS AMENDMENTS, ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES**  
19 **UPDATE FOR 2025—MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES, SERO**

20  
21 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have some slides, but  
22 I will request perhaps that the light is lowered a little bit  
23 because it's very difficult to see from over here. Okay, thank  
24 you.

25  
26 Okay. So, my name is María López with NOAA Fisheries Southeast  
27 Regional Office, and I will be presenting an update on the  
28 amendments and actions up to date for everything that the Caribbean  
29 Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries have been doing on  
30 the plan for the next months. Next slide.

31  
32 This first slide shows the amendments, the actions that the Council  
33 had been working throughout the last couple of years, and I wanted  
34 to give you an update of where we are with these amendments.  
35 Amendment 2 to all of the FMPs: trawl, net gear, and descending  
36 devices is an amendment that was approved and submitted by the  
37 Council earlier this year. Right now, the final rule, is being  
38 reviewed.

39  
40 The other amendment is Amendment 3 to all the FMPs. These are the  
41 management measures for Dolphin and Wahoo. This amendment  
42 establishes size limits for the dolphin and wahoo in all the three  
43 islands, as well as bag limits for these two species. The final  
44 rule became effective on July 25<sup>th</sup>, so that means that the  
45 regulation is currently in place. The Council continues to work  
46 with constituents in outreach and education to ensure that these  
47 regulations are out. And if there are any questions about the bag  
48 limits or the size limits that apply to federal waters that they

1 are addressed.

2

3 The next one is Framework 3 to the Puerto Rico FMP: updates based  
4 on the SEDAR 80, the Queen Triggerfish Assessment. That final rule  
5 also became effective on July 25<sup>th</sup>.

6

7 The next one is Framework 3 to the U.S. Virgin Islands fishery  
8 management plans. SEDAR 80. Also, from the results of the queen  
9 triggerfish assessment. That one we have a proposed rule that is  
10 currently under review.

11

12 Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP reclassification of the rainbow  
13 runner as a pelagic species. This is an amendment that was  
14 submitted by the Council back in May. That proposed rule is  
15 currently being under development in our office.

16

17 Okay, so those are the actions that the Council worked with, and  
18 NMFS took over for the preparation of the regulation. That's the  
19 update on those-- one, two, three, four, five, --five actions.  
20 Okay, let's go to the next slide, please.

21

22 Okay. So, if you recall, we had several actions that the Council  
23 wanted to prioritize for this 2025, and these are the actions that  
24 we discussed during April. So, the first one is actions to take  
25 when pelagic accountability measures are triggered. This is a  
26 priority for 2025. This is because the aim for pelagic fish stocks,  
27 and this is on all three islands, requires that NOAA Fisheries and  
28 the Council review the overage from the ACL to determine if any  
29 corrective action is needed. But the Council has not established  
30 a process for determining what, if any corrective actions are  
31 necessary when the ACT, the annual catch target or the ACL are  
32 exceeded.

33

34 So, there's no corrective actions at this point because there are  
35 no specific corrective actions defining the regulations. So, at  
36 this meeting, later on today, the Council will discuss actions to  
37 take when the ACT or the ACLs are exceeded. This is something that  
38 we will be discussing later in the afternoon. And the idea here is  
39 that if the Council agrees, the Council can task staff to start an  
40 amendment to start working on that.

41

42 The next action that we set as a priority for 2025 is a revision  
43 of the accountability measures for the spiny lobster in Puerto  
44 Rico. The Puerto Rico spiny lobster stock has exceeded their ACL  
45 multiple times during the last few years. As you all know, the AMs  
46 are not necessarily working for the spiny lobster in Puerto Rico,  
47 one of the reasons is because most of the harvest is from state  
48 waters and the AM based closure, which is the corrective measure

1 that is in place in our regulations when the ACL is exceeded, that  
2 AM based closure occurs only in federal water.

3  
4 So, at this meeting, the Council will discuss how to modify those  
5 accountability measures so that they more effectively constrain  
6 harvest to the ACL, allow better consideration of landing trends  
7 and environmental or economic conditions for spiny lobster, and  
8 also modify the revision of accountability measures for spiny  
9 lobster to be inclusive for ending overfishing. So, one of the  
10 things that the Council will be discussing is also taking into  
11 consideration that we have an assessment, SEDAR 91, that is ongoing  
12 right now. And one of the things that we want to bring to the  
13 Councils attention is that instead of discussing options at this  
14 time to modify the AM, perhaps it will be good to hear, from the  
15 Council, ideas on how to address this issue knowing also that the  
16 assessment is being conducted, concluded. So, this is something  
17 that we'll be discussing, I think, after the break this afternoon.

18  
19 The last two actions that are in there, revision of catch limits  
20 for species with enhanced reporting and status of species with  
21 prohibited harvest. This last two we discussed during the past  
22 Council meeting that we're going to be discussing, taking the  
23 opportunity to review the species to determine the need for  
24 conservation, but not just these ones, but all of the other species  
25 that are managed. So, not just the ones that have prohibited  
26 harvest. And then also for the revision of catch limits for species  
27 with enhanced reporting, we will also be reviewing all species to  
28 determine the need for conservation of management.

29  
30 So, bottom line is that these two actions fall within what the  
31 Council started working and it's a matrix that Sarah, my colleague  
32 Sarah Stephenson is going to be presenting after this talk. It's  
33 a comprehensive summary matrix of qualitative and quantitative  
34 information on managed stock. And the intent is that the Council  
35 is informed-- can make an informed decision regarding stock  
36 classification and the need for conservation and management under  
37 each FMP for all of the species, not just to the ones that are  
38 mentioned in this table.

39  
40 So, this also will align with the discussion that the Council had  
41 on July 25<sup>th</sup> through an Ad hoc Committee where they were discussing  
42 recommendations to address the request for E.O. 14276. So, this is  
43 something that we will be spending some time this morning. Sarah's  
44 going to be presenting that matrix with all of that information  
45 and with the idea that this is a topic that we can continue  
46 discussing through the next Council meeting. Next slide.

47  
48 Okay. So, during the last meeting, NMFS presented results for the

1 evaluation, the monitoring of the ACL for its U.S. Virgin Island  
2 stocks. At this time, we will be presenting the results of NMFS  
3 evaluation of landings from Puerto Rico to determine any needed  
4 response to ACL averages in 2025.

5  
6 At this time, NMFS is also going to discuss with the Council the  
7 determination for undergoing overfishing for the Puerto Rico spiny  
8 lobster Stock, the SEDAR 91 Stock Assessment, and also discuss  
9 what are NMFS and Council responsibilities. So, this will happen  
10 also this morning. The idea here is that the Council will have a  
11 discussion on ACL overages for spiny lobster, overfishing  
12 determination, and then we can have a really good discussion about  
13 that. So, this is something that I believe will happen in the  
14 afternoon.

15  
16 SEDAR 84, yellowtail snapper in Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint  
17 John, and stoplight parrotfish in Saint Croix in SEDAR 91, spiny  
18 lobster in all three islands. This is something that the Science  
19 Center will be discussing during their presentation tomorrow. We  
20 will touch on some of the SEDAR 91 on spiny lobster today when we  
21 discuss the ACL and the OFL overages for spiny lobster in Puerto  
22 Rico. SEDAR 91 is scheduled to be discussed by the SSC in  
23 September.

24  
25 The last topic in here is the U. S. Virgin Island compatibility of  
26 regulations with the EEZ. This is something that we have been  
27 working with the U.S. Virgin Islands on. At this time, I don't  
28 know, Sennai, if you have an update that you want to, or Carlos,  
29 an update that you want to give us. This is something that we will,  
30 NMFS would like to work with you guys, and we're just waiting to  
31 see, with that you guys were fixing some things in-house and then  
32 were going to contact us. I just wanted to mention that because I  
33 want to see if we leave it for the year 2025 or if this is something  
34 that the Council can consider for 2026.

35  
36 Sorry to put you on the spot.

37  
38 **SENNAI HABTES:** No, it's fine. You're talking about compatible regs?

39  
40 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. Compatible.

41  
42 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sure. We've passed one commissioner declaration so  
43 far to address making compatibility. We're working through the  
44 list of the ones that were approved by our FACs and moving forward.  
45 So, our goal was to find what are the easiest actions to take to  
46 reach compatibility. From our standpoint, that's through  
47 commissioner declarations. I think as we run through those and  
48 have completed those and gotten approval through the FACs we'll

1 move on to the more difficult ones which would require changes to  
2 either promulgation of new rules and regulations through the  
3 governor's office or trying to move towards changes to regulations  
4 in the V.I. code.

5  
6 I think if you guys wanted to discuss the ones that would require  
7 changes to federal code, we can do that with you at any time, but  
8 we were just moving forward on the ones that are in our direction.  
9 So, I think we have five planned for 2025. Those are the ones that  
10 can be done through commissioner declaration.

11  
12 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Thank you for the update. We will be  
13 happy to discuss with you whenever you think you're ready. Go  
14 ahead, Andy.

15  
16 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Sennai. So, yeah. I'd be very  
17 interested in getting a list of things that would need to be  
18 changed from federal regulations if it would be extended to be  
19 compatible with the state regulations, and then we could start  
20 figuring out, you know, what to bring before the Council for  
21 discussion and whether we want to make those changes or not.

22  
23 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sure. I think, María, I've shared with you the  
24 spreadsheet that had the summary. So, those have the ones in it  
25 that would require federal changes. And, if you need help, I can  
26 go through that and highlight those specific ones for you, and  
27 then I can send it to the two of you.

28  
29 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. Carlos? You had a comment? No? Okay.  
30  
31 Okay. So, moving on. This is the last slide. Just want to-- if you  
32 can move to the next slide.

33  
34 This is a reminder. Just the two items that we discussed in the  
35 past meeting that the Council decided to table for now. One is the  
36 federal permits, the development of a federal permit. As you  
37 recall, NMFS staff presented, during previous meetings, explaining  
38 what a federal permit would include, different ways of how a  
39 federal permit could work for management of species in federal  
40 waters. However, there's other priorities at this time that the  
41 Council will want to work with. So, for right now that was set  
42 aside, maybe it will be taken back in the future.

43  
44 The other one that was discussed was the response to STFA questions  
45 regarding Grammanik Bank management. There was a discussion back  
46 then and that's something that the Council also decided to work on  
47 other priorities at this time, so it will be set aside until the  
48 Council would want to bring it back.

1  
2 So, that's all I have. This is what we're going to be discussing  
3 today pertaining to the amendments and actions. Similarly to April  
4 and December, the Council may want to come back at the end of the  
5 meeting tomorrow and go back to this list and just see if there's  
6 any changes and see how we're going to be moving forward in some  
7 of the actions so can update this.

8  
9 Okay. So, I'm done. I'm going to pass the microphone to my  
10 colleague, Sarah Stephenson, for the next presentation about the  
11 matrix for species that I was just discussing. Thank you.

12  
13 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**  
14

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Before Sarah, I think we have a question  
16 for María from Tony Blanchard. Tony?

17  
18 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, for the record. Just to  
19 make sure I'm on the same page, what is the matrix?

20  
21 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Sarah's going to explain that right now. Okay?  
22 In the next presentation, she has way much more details than I  
23 had. Nelson, go ahead.

24  
25 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you. Just a quick comment. During the last  
26 descending devices workshop that we are developing around the  
27 island we learnt that there is general support from fishers about  
28 Amendment 3 for wahoo and mahi, but there is a concern between the  
29 fishers that it is necessary to implement compatible regulations  
30 with the local government because if that does not occur, it's  
31 going to be hard to do enforcement when the fishers land on shore.  
32 Because you're not going to have proof of where those fish were  
33 caught. So, I recommend, you know, to Ricardo. I know that Wilson  
34 talked to you about that already. So, I really appreciate, you  
35 know, the attention that you give on this matter.

36  
37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Nelson. Yeah, we're aware of it.  
38 During the discussions that were conducted when this amendment was  
39 developed, that was one of the things that the Council discussed.  
40 After discussing, they still went with the decision-- they made a  
41 decision to implement a different bag limit for these two species  
42 based on other considerations.

43  
44 But yeah, that's something the Council did discuss when they were  
45 developing the amendment.

46  
47 Okay, so thank you for that. Okay, so I'm going to leave it with  
48 Sarah Stephenson. She's going to explain what the matrix, what we

1 call the matrix. It's not really matrix, that's what we call it.

2  
3 **MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERIES CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT**  
4 **REQUIREMENTS FOR STOCKS IN NEED OF CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT,**  
5 **AND DISCUSSION OF MODIFICATIONS TO THE REEF FISH FISHERY**  
6 **MANAGEMENT UNITS (FMUS)—SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA FISHERIES, SERO**  
7

8 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, before we jump into Sarah's  
9 presentation, I wanted to just say a few things to set this up.  
10 So, a few years back, we implemented the island-based FMPs. At  
11 that time, you reevaluated species in need of conservation and  
12 management. We updated the list of species.

13  
14 Obviously, it hasn't been that long since we did that. So, we're  
15 coming back to the table to have that discussion again. We felt it  
16 was really important to, both, get input like Miguel was seeking  
17 through this ad hoc committee, as well as a more kind of  
18 quantitative approach with regard to how we evaluate species in  
19 need of conservation and management. And so, Sarah has done an  
20 outstanding job of starting to put together some data and  
21 information to evaluate all the species we manage and determine  
22 what metrics we want to use to determine are we managing these  
23 species or are we essentially just including them in our management  
24 plan but don't really have an ability to adequately affect their  
25 management, right?

26  
27 And so, today's presentation is really to give a high-level  
28 overview of the process, see what questions you have, get input  
29 from you on ideas, and with the goal of starting an options paper  
30 going forward. And I'll caveat this that Sarah's going to provide  
31 an example in the presentation, and I just ask people not to react  
32 to that example because it's going to show species that could be  
33 removed from the management plan, but it's based on just some  
34 example metrics that we're considering, you know, as part of  
35 showing this example today. Right?

36  
37 This is the start of a longer process, and so, we will really want  
38 to take our time to really evaluate all the species and determine  
39 which species are adequately managed already. They don't need  
40 federal management. What are, you know, species that are in need  
41 of conservation manager that fall under our purview. But the reason  
42 we're doing this is what we talked about earlier with Roberto's  
43 comments. We've had major budget reductions. We've had reductions  
44 in the science. We don't know where the Council's heading. We don't  
45 know with regard to how much we're going to have in terms of  
46 resources. And so, we can't manage this laundry list of extensive  
47 species adequately, and we really need to pair that back and  
48 dedicate our resources to a targeted set of species that are most

1 valued, most important, most at risk within the region.

2  
3 And so, we're doing this not only in the Caribbean, but throughout  
4 the country. And today is just the start of a broader conversation  
5 that Sarah will share the input on.

6  
7 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. Thank you. That was a very nice  
8 introduction. My name is Sarah Stephenson. So, next slide.

9  
10 Just as a background, at the December 2024 meeting we discussed  
11 some issues that María mentioned in her slide, like, for instance,  
12 some of the species not having reference points set. So, at the  
13 April meeting, we discussed the SERO staff preparing, for each  
14 species that we manage on their FMPs, a summary matrix. And so,  
15 what that means is just a spreadsheet of all the information we  
16 know for each species. So, like, the list is like 100 and so long.  
17 Just everything that we know about that species kind of condensed  
18 into a quick and easy cell.

19  
20 So, some of it was qualitative, like, is it on the form? Yes, or  
21 no? Some of it was quantitative, like, what's the average landing  
22 of a period? So, we just have this major spreadsheet, which I'm  
23 not going to show today because it's boring, but I'm going to show  
24 you how that Excel spreadsheet, that matrix could be used to maybe  
25 revise the selection criteria for including species or, in this  
26 instance, retaining, removing, or moving to ecosystem.

27  
28 So, that's kind of what the matrix is. It's just this giant  
29 spreadsheet that's a tool that we can use to revise criteria  
30 matrix. So, hopefully, that answers your questions about what it  
31 is.

32  
33 So, we said we would prepare this matrix and then bring it to the  
34 Council in order to help determine which stocks should remain  
35 managed, which stocks could maybe be moved to ecosystem component,  
36 which we discussed at our December meeting in detail kind of what  
37 that meant, and I have a refresher slide. And then which stocks  
38 could maybe be removed. This discussion today does align with that  
39 ad hoc committee meeting. A lot of discussion from those fits  
40 nicely into this discussion today. And so, I think Graciela is  
41 going to present on those recommendations a little bit later, so  
42 you'll kind of hopefully see the parallels here. Next slide,  
43 please.

44  
45 Just as a high-level, NMFS in 2016 revised National Standard  
46 Guidelines, which kind of help clarify what does it mean for stocks  
47 that need conservation and management. I included the FR number  
48 there in case anybody wants to go look it up. But basically, NMFS

1 acknowledges that not every fishery requires conservation and  
2 management. However, stocks that are predominantly caught in  
3 federal waters or overfished or subject to overfishing or are  
4 likely to become either of those statuses need to be included in  
5 the FMP. And then, next slide.

6  
7 They also provided a list of factors that the Council could  
8 consider when determining which stocks need to go into the FMP.  
9 So, these are not new. they were in there before, but I just want  
10 to run through them. So, number one, it's an important component  
11 of the marine environment. Number two, it's caught by the fishery.  
12 Number three, whether a fishery management plan can improve or  
13 maintain the condition of the stock. Number four, the stock is a  
14 target of the fishery. Number five, the stock is important to  
15 commercial, recreational, or subsistence users. Number six, the  
16 fishery is important to the nation or to the regional economy.

17  
18 Number seven, the need to resolve competing interests and conflicts  
19 between user groups and whether or not an FMP can actually further  
20 that resolution that can help with that conflict. Number eight,  
21 the economic condition of the fishery and whether an FMP can  
22 produce more efficient use. Number nine, the needs of a developing  
23 fishery and whether a fishery management plan can help with growth  
24 of that fishery. And then lastly, the extent to which the fishery  
25 is already adequately managed by the states or state federal  
26 agency.

27  
28 So, those are the factors. I know it's a lot, and they're going to  
29 keep popping back up through this thing. So, I've printed out some  
30 a list here that María will pass around so you guys can have them  
31 right at your hands as I refer back to these. Next slide, please.

32  
33 So, the Island-Based Fishery Management Plans were finalized in  
34 2019, and the regulations for those were implemented in 2022. An  
35 objective of each of the FMPs was to update federal management to  
36 better represent the individual island areas, including the  
37 economically and ecologically important species that incur in  
38 federal waters around those areas. During development of the FMPs,  
39 the Council and NMFS considered those 10 factors, those 10 National  
40 Standard factors to determine which species should be included.  
41 Next slide, please.

42  
43 They also came up with a list of criteria, selection criterion,  
44 which we'll read through. This is also in the handout that I  
45 provided. So, the first one, and they kind of go in order.  
46 Criterion A, you're going to include species that are classified  
47 as overfished in federal waters, or for which harvest is prohibited  
48 already because of their ecological importance as habitat, so that

1 was the corals, or as habitat engineers, which were your three  
2 large-bodied parrotfish, or those species that already had  
3 seasonal closures or size limits in place. So, those all came in  
4 with Criterion A.

5  
6 Then the next step was to exclude the remaining species that  
7 infrequently occur in federal waters, and that was based on expert  
8 analysis and available data. So, that was the second step. The  
9 third step, Criterion C, was from your remaining list include  
10 species that are biologically vulnerable, constrained to a habitat  
11 that makes them vulnerable, or they have an essential ecological  
12 value. And, again, based on expert analysis. Criterion D from  
13 what's remaining again, so the list is getting shorter and shorter,  
14 include species that are important to the national or regional  
15 economy for any of the sectors, including aquarium trade as  
16 appropriate. And those species that are an important component of  
17 bycatch. Again, based on expert analysis. And then lastly, are  
18 there any other species that the Council wanted to include?

19  
20 So, the next slide shows you from these five criteria and those  
21 factors, those NS 10 factors, how the species for each FMP fell  
22 under which criterion. So, you can see that the majority of species  
23 were included either under criterion A or C, fewer for D and then  
24 only two species for each FMP under Criterion E.

25  
26 But this is how they all shook out. So, if you add up the numbers,  
27 you'll get how many species we're managing under each FMP. And as  
28 Andy mentioned, it's a lot, and maybe now is a good time to kind  
29 of take a step back and review those again. I believe you also  
30 have this sheet in your handout, just because it's a lot. Next  
31 slide.

32  
33 This brings us to where we are today and some current issues that  
34 we've already discussed already and maybe someone's to revisit.

35  
36 So, the overfishing limit, that sustainable yield level, which is  
37 a proxy for our Tier 4 species, which most of the species in our  
38 FMPs, it wasn't set for select species. And we talked about this  
39 in December. We have an ABC and an ACL value set, but we didn't  
40 have the SYL, that sustainable yield level set. So, we would need  
41 to develop an amendment to fix that. So, this is a good time to  
42 maybe take a look and maybe decide, could those species be removed  
43 or moved to ecosystem?

44  
45 The next issue is some of the species that we currently manage  
46 aren't present on the current commercial catch report form, which  
47 just means that those species would need to be written in in order  
48 for the landings to be accounted for. The next one is some species

1 were not on those commercial catch forms during the reference  
2 period that was used to set the ACLs, but they now are on the  
3 forms, which kind of gets us into that scenario where if landings  
4 exceed the ACL, then an accountability measure might not be applied  
5 because it's due to enhanced reporting. But that might mask issues  
6 arising with the fishery that we might not notice. We might not  
7 bring that information to the Council. So, that could be an issue.

8  
9 Next is for the species that are on the catch report forms and for  
10 which we have information on where that was caught. For example,  
11 was it caught in territorial or federal waters? Sometimes the  
12 majority of the catch occurs in territorial waters, and that's  
13 especially true for Puerto Rico where it's a larger, it's that  
14 zero to nine nautical miles. So, there's more potential for the  
15 species to be caught in territorial waters. So, in those instances,  
16 if we had to apply an accountability measure, compatible closures  
17 with the state agencies might be required in order to address the  
18 issue.

19  
20 And then lastly, data availability challenges continue, most  
21 notably that we don't have recreational landings anymore being  
22 collected. And so, that's more of an issue for Puerto Rico because  
23 we did establish recreational ACLs in addition to commercial ACLs,  
24 and the accountability measures were set up in a way that they  
25 kind of were tied together. So, without that data, the commercial  
26 ACL becomes the ACL for the entire stock. And for some species,  
27 those are very low numbers. And so, it's just something that we  
28 would want to address.

29  
30 So those are kind of current issues that hopefully maybe revisiting  
31 the criteria and maybe rethinking about what we're managing and  
32 how we're managing. Some of these might be addressed. Next slide,  
33 please.

34  
35 The National Standard Guidelines did recommend that Councils  
36 periodically review their FMPs and the best scientific information  
37 available and determine if the stocks that are managed are  
38 appropriately identified. So, they could be reclassified or  
39 removed through an amendment, really documenting the rationale of  
40 why you're doing that.

41  
42 Councils should prepare an analysis of those 10 factors, the 10  
43 factors that are on your sheet, and any other considerations that  
44 were relevant to the stock. And so, those guidelines recommend  
45 kind of looking at the 10 factors weighted. So, factors one through  
46 three on your sheet should maybe be considered first for including  
47 stocks because they address maintaining a fishery resource and the  
48 marine environment. The next is you could look at factors four

1 through nine, again, for including stocks because they set forth  
2 the economic, social, and other reasons under the MSA that you  
3 might want to include a stock for conservation and management. And  
4 then finally, you could consider factor 10 for maybe not including  
5 a stock if there's adequate management of that stock, by the states  
6 or another program, or even another federal FMP. Next slide.

7  
8 This is just a quick review of the ecosystem component species.  
9 You, the Council can obviously choose to do that. We didn't during  
10 the last FMP because we were trying to finish up that process, and  
11 this discussion is very important, and it could have slowed down  
12 the process. So, we discussed it at that time, but we didn't  
13 actually implement it.

14  
15 So, EC species, ecosystem component species do not require  
16 conservation and management, but are included in an FMP to achieve  
17 certain ecosystem objectives. And we talked about those before in  
18 December. The species do not require ACLs or other reference points  
19 or accountability measures. So, you could keep an eye on them, but  
20 not be required to, for instance, monitor to ACL or OFLs or report  
21 their stock status every year. So, that's one of the benefits of  
22 ecosystem component species.

23  
24 They can be identified at the stock level and may be grouped into  
25 complexes. So, you can do lots of different things with them. And  
26 then lastly, consistent with National Standard 9, which is to  
27 minimize bycatch. Management measures can be adopted for the  
28 ecosystem component species that we want to have. For instance, if  
29 we wanted to collect data on them or to minimize bycatch of that  
30 species or to protect the associated role of the species in the  
31 ecosystem. This would be a good example of maybe moving corals to  
32 an ecosystem component because they do play an essential ecological  
33 role, but nobody's harvesting them. So that would be a good example  
34 of that.

35  
36 Next slide. And now we'll just get to the matrix. So, next slide  
37 again.

38  
39 So, what was our objective. It was just to summarize all the  
40 information that we have, both qualitative and quantitative for  
41 each managed species that we have or managed stock, to present to  
42 the Council to help you determine if they still require  
43 conservation and management.

44  
45 We wanted to focus on those that are targeted by the fisheries in  
46 federal waters. We wanted to consider those for which resources or  
47 data are available to help us manage effectively. And then also,  
48 it can be used to help maybe determine which species could be

1 classified as ecosystem component species.

2  
3 This matrix provides a framework for the Council to modify and  
4 improve upon the criteria that were used, those A through E, for  
5 determining which species are in need of conservation and  
6 management. Next slide.

7  
8 And I believe you have this. This is the last one, I think, on  
9 your handout. It's just a summary of all of the variables that  
10 we've included in the matrix so far, and I'll just run through  
11 them really quick.

12  
13 So, on the qualitative side, what was the selection criteria used  
14 in the FMPs, those A through E? B is not here because B was species  
15 that were excluded. So just was it A, C, D, or E? Is it an indicator  
16 stock for the complex if it's managed in a complex? What control  
17 rule Tier is it under? Currently, we have three options there.  
18 Most of ours are 4a, we have a couple with accepted stock  
19 assessments, so those are going to be 3. And then, a few that are  
20 data limited and vulnerable species. Those are 4b. Was the species  
21 listed on the current commercial catch report form? Yes or no. Is  
22 it an endangered species act listed species for our area? Yeah.  
23 And if so, does it have a 4(d) rule in place? What are the lists of  
24 federal and territorial regulations applicable to the species,  
25 such as size limits? What's the stock status if there is one? For  
26 instance, overfished or overfishing.

27  
28 Has there already been identified in the FMP critical role in  
29 either the ecosystem, like a grazer species, or in the fishery?  
30 For example, is it used as bait? Any years that annual catch limits  
31 or overfishing limits or their proxies were exceeded? And then, is  
32 the species on the SEDAR assessment schedule?

33  
34 For quantitative, we looked at or we compiled the number of years  
35 that the species was reported in commercial landings during a  
36 historical, which we're defining as 2012 through 2023, and a  
37 recent, which is the last five years period. And I'll point out  
38 that we at SERO don't have the 2024 or 2025 data yet. They're still  
39 preliminary. So, we wanted to use complete available data, so  
40 that's why it stops at 2023.

41  
42 We also looked at average commercial landings during those same  
43 two periods, the percent of those landings reported in federal  
44 waters for those same two periods, and then the rank of the species  
45 in the commercial landings during those same two species. And  
46 that's the rank against everything that was caught, not just what's  
47 managed.

48

1 We also, for Puerto Rico, did the same analysis using the  
2 recreational landings, which those years are a little bit  
3 different. What we have available is 2000 to 2016. We also included  
4 the productivity and susceptibility scores that were assigned by  
5 the SSC and are included in our FMPs. And then we're waiting on  
6 some additional information such as length data, biomass or  
7 abundance trend data, and then hopefully price per pound. So, those  
8 will eventually go into the matrix, too and could be used for  
9 upgrading your criterion your selection criteria. Next.

10  
11 So as Andy mentioned, this is just an example. It does kind of  
12 walk through a few steps and end up with a result of species, but  
13 it's just an example. It can be modified pretty much at every step.  
14 So, next slide.

15  
16 First off, though, any stocks that are overfished or undergoing  
17 overfishing are going to be retained in the FMP. And then next, we  
18 wanted to look at using those landings to kind of try to get at  
19 the NS's. It should actually be maybe two, three, and four. Is it  
20 caught by the fishery? Can an FMP maintain or improve condition?  
21 And then is it a target of the fishery?

22  
23 So, we looked at the commercial landings, the longer period of  
24 landings, and recreational for Puerto Rico, and we just asked the  
25 matrix, to retain the species that occur in federal waters, 25% or  
26 more of the time. Also, is the species present in the landings,  
27 the annual landings data 75% or more of the year? So, for the  
28 commercial dataset, that means does the species show up in the  
29 commercial landings nine or more years? And then for the  
30 recreational, does it show up in thirteen or more of the years?

31  
32 And then lastly, are the average landings above a certain limit?  
33 So, for commercial, we just picked 7,500 pounds on for an annual  
34 average. And then for recreational, we just picked 10,000 pounds.  
35 So, all the numbers in green here are just examples, and they could  
36 be changed based on Council input today or advisory input later or  
37 developed as options by the interdisciplinary planning team, that  
38 IPT that we form to kind of prepare options. So, anything in green  
39 can be updated. Next slide.

40  
41 One other thing that we looked at for this example today, which  
42 aligns with that National Standard factor five, which is it's  
43 important to the fishers, both commercials, recreational and  
44 subsistence, is we looked at the rank of the species. So, we used  
45 commercial landings again from that longer period of time, and we  
46 looked at the rank. So, the threshold kind of example that we used  
47 was if that rank is .5% or higher of the commercial catch, which  
48 for Puerto Rico--

1  
2 Oh, sorry. You're back. Sorry. Slide 16. Sorry. I was yeah. What  
3 back one more. Yes. This guy. Thank you.  
4  
5 So, we wanted to look at the rank. So, the threshold that we pick  
6 kind of aligns with for commercial landings for Puerto Rico, it's  
7 the top 29 species. For Saint Croix, it would be in the top 34  
8 species. And then for Saint Thomas and Saint John, the top 31. So,  
9 during that year period, each one of those FMPs, like, there were  
10 hundreds of species. So, this kind of tells you that it's pretty  
11 much the top 30 for each FMP.  
12  
13 And then, of course, a further step that we haven't done which  
14 would align with that factor number six, which is the importance  
15 to the economy, is we are hoping to use the average price data  
16 over some time limit to help with that one. But we don't have it  
17 yet, so that would be to be determined.  
18  
19 Again, anything in green here could be changed, either today or  
20 through the IPT process. Next slide.  
21  
22 So, in using this matrix for this example today, here's kind of  
23 how the species fell out. So, the first step, the first row are  
24 your list of species that are either listed as overfished or  
25 undergoing overfishing for each FMP. So, they automatically get  
26 included.  
27  
28 The second row are the ones that are kind of the target of the  
29 federal fishery. So, that's, again, based mostly on landings over  
30 time. And then the third row is the ones that were important to  
31 fishers. So, that's your rank. And so, anywhere where a species is  
32 listed in bold means it occurred in both row two and row three.  
33 So, you can kind of see there's a lot of overlap between what's  
34 caught and what's important to the fishers.  
35  
36 In row two under Puerto Rico, you have three species that are also  
37 in italics, and those were results from the recreational landings.  
38 So, they obviously aren't quite the same all the time. They don't,  
39 line up with what was caught by the commercial or important to the  
40 commercial, but we wanted to include those here just for inclusion.  
41 So, here's how that all broke out.  
42  
43 So, next slide will kind of focus on putting that, synthesizing  
44 all of that together.  
45  
46 So, using this example that we did for Puerto Rico, if you updated  
47 your criteria or using a similar type of selection, what you might  
48 end up with. So, species that you could retain and then compared

1 to the remaining list of species managed under the Puerto Rico FMP  
2 that you could either consider removing or moving to ecosystem  
3 component. And if we wanted to do that, we should think of maybe  
4 other criterion that we could come up with to help us assist with  
5 those two steps.

6  
7 So, I'm not going to go through it, but you can see how you could  
8 end up updating your criteria. You really could, depending on the  
9 criteria that you use, you could kind of streamline the species  
10 that you manage.

11  
12 Next slide is a summary for Saint Croix. So, again, I'm not going  
13 to walk through them all. We can leave them back up if people want  
14 to come back and look at them. But it is the same kind of setup.  
15 What you could retain if you updated your criteria using these  
16 types of selection thresholds or, what you could maybe consider  
17 removing. And then the next slide is same information for Saint  
18 Thomas/Saint John.

19  
20 And then next slide brings us to kind of the discussion to have  
21 today. So, first off is do we want to update the selection criteria  
22 that were used? And then if yes, why do we want to do that?

23  
24 I've provided some examples on some issues that we're running into  
25 where maybe updating the criterion could assist with those, but  
26 you don't have to. And then next, based on this matrix, this  
27 collection of information, are there any other criteria, either  
28 qualitative or quantitative, that wasn't in that list that you  
29 would like to be considered? And then if you had an idea of the  
30 thresholds, meaning the numbers that were used in this example  
31 that you know you would rather recommend for the IPT to consider  
32 when preparing options, you could that too.

33  
34 And then for species that don't meet the criteria for retention,  
35 are there any other criteria that you could think of for removing  
36 them or moving them to EC species? And then after we've had that  
37 kind of discussion, if you would like, you could task us to develop  
38 an options paper to modify the criterion, which would in turn  
39 modify the list of managed stocks. And it would probably require  
40 that we update annual catch limits, and we could review that in  
41 December. And then, we could also review that options paper with  
42 the advisory groups after the December meeting.

43  
44 So, this is my last slide. I'll open it up for discussion and take  
45 any questions because I know that was a lot.

46

47 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sarah. Any question for Sarah? Tony.  
2  
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, for the record. I was  
4 looking at, I believe it was slide 16, you had where there was  
5 overfished, and you had the goliath, the queen conch, and I believe  
6 it was a nassau. That information was supposed to be just as an  
7 example or to be accurate.  
8  
9 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** This is Sarah. I believe it's slide 17. So,  
10 that one is accurate. That is what's currently on the book as  
11 either overfished or undergoing overfishing.  
12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Follow-up, Tony.  
14  
15 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I can't debate the point.  
16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I got a question. I noticed that you had the  
18 midnight blue and rainbow under EC. Those species would not be  
19 managed. Is that the recommendation?  
20  
21 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** This is Sarah. So, there's no recommendation  
22 from this presentation. There's a question of do you want to  
23 revisit the selection criteria? And if you did, then that might  
24 result in an update. So, I'm trying to think where you saw those.  
25 The very next slide? This was it, like, this slide?  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** For Saint Croix.  
28  
29 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** For Saint Croix? Yeah. So, right. So, those  
30 four parrotfish, could stripe this if you use a criterion that was  
31 like the example that we presented, then those were not a target  
32 or important to the fishers based on the thresholds that we chose  
33 today, which are in no way set in stone. Those can be changed and  
34 probably would be through the IPT amendment development process.  
35  
36 But based on just what we did for today to show you how you could  
37 use it; they would fall into that category. So, you could decide,  
38 do you want to move them to ecosystem component, or do you want to  
39 remove it? And if you wanted to move them, actually, either way,  
40 you would just provide rationale for why you wanted to do either  
41 decision.  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Andy?  
44  
45 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Can you go back to slide 15? Yeah. And  
46 so, just to further emphasize, this is an example. And what you  
47 were mentioning, Carlos, I think is an important point. Right?  
48

1 So, if you use quantitative criteria. Right? So, on this slide,  
2 we're using certain thresholds, either percentages or landings.  
3 You potentially remove species from the fishery management plan  
4 because it's not meeting those thresholds. Right?

5  
6 If Sarah, for example, said rather than 7,500 pounds commercials  
7 landed, but it's 5,000 or it's 2,500, it's going to kick in more  
8 species that would be in the fishery management plan to be managed.  
9 Right? And so, I think, you know, from our vantage point, we're  
10 not coming in here today to say, this is the absolute list. Right?  
11 This is just one way we can use this tool, and we think that we  
12 will want to explore options.

13  
14 I think there's also going to be a situation or two or many that  
15 we might ultimately use criteria, and there's still going to be  
16 species on that right side of the slide that are being kicked out  
17 of the management plan, but that you deem is important to continue  
18 to manage. Right? And so, we'll have to have those conversations.

19  
20 So, really today is, one, are you in agreement with at least the  
21 matrix approach? And then two, what are some of the criteria that  
22 we want to be looking at knowing that these are just examples and  
23 not an absolute range and that we can look at more alternatives?

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Perhaps we should hear what Graciela's  
28 presentation has. The annual committee met to discuss what we call  
29 the Kelly's Cross. But remember that we were instructed to go over  
30 the species that we have in the management unit to look at those  
31 who were high risk/high value, low risk/low value. And we need to,  
32 by September, provide the response to Mr. Piñeiro's memorandum as  
33 to what species we recommend being kept in the management unit and  
34 what other species we are going to recommend being classified as  
35 ecosystem based or ecosystem species.

36  
37 However, the mechanisms for doing that is amendment of the  
38 management plans. And what you have here is the tool that you can  
39 use to work on those amendments, to work on those management plans,  
40 because you cannot tell the secretary, "I want to drop the species.  
41 I want to keep this other one" with a rationale. You have to have  
42 a rationale that could be or a rationale that will meet the  
43 criteria under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. So, this matrix that Sarah  
44 is presenting today will give you that tool.

45  
46 So, at this time, we don't want to have specific recommendation  
47 from you because we have a long way to doing that. But I tell you,  
48 Mr. Chairman, that perhaps we can hear Dr. Graciela García-

1 Moliner's presentation, look at the species at least. So, we have  
2 a common ground to disclose those species. And remember, in the ad  
3 hoc committee we discussed issues. But if we keep concentrated, at  
4 this time, on the list of species and then compare those species  
5 with the tool that we have here, that would be a good thing.

6  
7 But at this time, probably you can-- Sarah, can we go to the last  
8 slide where you have the next steps?

9  
10 Okay. Do the species selection criteria in the FMP need to be  
11 updated? That's a question that you can answer today. Yes or no.  
12 Based on the matrix, are these criteria (quantitative), etcetera,  
13 etcetera.

14  
15 So, those things there, you can answer today because that's a  
16 general approach. That's what will give the IPT the direction that  
17 you want them to go. And remember, we need to prepare sort of a  
18 white paper that will discuss all these options.

19  
20 So, at this time, what we need from the Council is to tell us  
21 whether you think this approach, this tool, is the way to go and  
22 how you would like to modify. The example tends to confuse people,  
23 because if I'm a fisher, I'd want to know what species I can catch  
24 next year or this year, and what species I should drop because of  
25 whatever reason. So, that's our suggestion. So, if you can go and  
26 see the list, then we can come back and discuss it.

27  
28 And I see the yellow hand.

29  
30 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Kate Zamboni.

31  
32 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Thank you. Kate Zamboni, for the record. I  
33 just want to note, like, whatever you decide to do today, you know,  
34 changing the criteria and the species that are managed would  
35 require an FMP amendment. So, it's not as though taking some sort  
36 of vote today is going to result in suddenly not managing the  
37 species. There would be a process with it.

38  
39 But I think that the thing that the Council needs to respond to  
40 the assistant administrator by September, it's really that they've  
41 got to respond to the letter and look at the letter that the  
42 Council prepared in 2020 and see if that needs to be updated. And  
43 if that includes maybe revisiting what species are managed, I think  
44 that would be appropriate. But I don't think you have to present  
45 a list by September with what species are in or out. And I think  
46 what Sarah is suggesting is that staff can come back with an  
47 options paper to look at how this criterion plays out, or what is  
48 the feedback today on the criteria that she's presented? Is this

1 the direction you want to go, or do you want to modify some of  
2 those criteria?

3

4 Thanks.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I got Sarah.

7

8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Have a question for Andy and Kate. That's  
9 a little bit different from what they told us at the meeting at  
10 the CCC. So, if everybody happy with not having the list, that's  
11 okay. And, also, we all met, and we decided, you know, this process  
12 can take all the way to 2028. Because the amendment of the plan,  
13 if you go very quick, it's one year. So, it's one year to three  
14 years before you amend a plan. You have to go to public hearing,  
15 etcetera, etcetera.

16

17 But if we don't need to submit the list, which I need to check  
18 with Kelly, then that's better. But what Mr. Eugenio Piñeiro sent  
19 to us was a template with the action that the Council proposed to  
20 take on the E.O. 14276.

21

22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I got Andy, Sarah, and then Julian.

23

24 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I'll look to my boss, Sam, if he wants to  
25 weigh in further. But in terms of the requests, I think it would  
26 be great for the Council in your letter to the Fishery Service to  
27 acknowledge that you are working on changes to the fishery  
28 management unit. As Kate noted, think the most important part here  
29 it's going be a process. As Sam mentioned in his comments, we have  
30 this public input. We really need to be kind of thoughtful and  
31 careful with regard to how we're deciding what species are in need  
32 of conservation and management, which ones are being removed from  
33 the management plan.

34

35 And then with the seafood competitiveness Executive Order, it's  
36 also broader than just the species we're managing. So, to the  
37 extent that the Council's going to have input or the stakeholders  
38 on deregulatory actions, things that are on the books currently  
39 that we, you want us to consider removing from regulations or the  
40 Council could potentially consider removing from regulations in  
41 the future for justified reasons, then we would want to get that  
42 input.

43

44 So, I'd I want to just emphasize, I don't think there's a sense of  
45 urgency to provide a comprehensive list of species to remove, but  
46 I think it'll be beneficial to, one, know that the Council's  
47 working on this, assuming you're in agreement with that. And then,  
48 two, we would continue to work with you to kind of prioritize

1 resources based on the species we manage.  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I'm glad that you said that and not me because  
6 what I propose, Mr. Chairman, is to start with preparing the  
7 response to not just National Marine Fisheries Services, but I'd  
8 like to also see if we can get the help of the Regional Office so  
9 they can look at the draft and make sure that we comply with  
10 whatever is needed, and then follow this. The importance of--  
11  
12 Anyway, the Executive Order that we have from the President, 14276,  
13 remember, Make the Fishery Great Again, now has an implementation  
14 phase, and this is the beginning of it. But we all, all the  
15 Councils, we already told them, you know, this is not overnight.  
16  
17 So, the first step is this one. Do you want to-- and this is part  
18 of it. Do you want then to adopt the matrix as the tool that you  
19 want to use for examining the species? To give you an idea, some  
20 of the Council have discussed sending x many species to be managed  
21 by the states for whatever reason. Some people believe that that's  
22 not a good idea. Others are looking at the possibility of reducing  
23 the number of species that you manage to see if you save any money.  
24 Well, in some cases, you don't save a penny.  
25  
26 So whatever criteria we use has to be sustained under the Magnuson-  
27 Stevens Act, has to follow the regulations that we have here. So,  
28 I don't know what you would like to do, Mr. Chairman. Do you want  
29 to get this to get more information? But I would like to hear from  
30 the council members.  
31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Sarah?  
33  
34 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** My comment was just that I saw that Julian  
35 had a question.  
36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?  
38  
39 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Can we go back to slide 17, please? So just a  
40 question for clarification. When did queen conch and goliath  
41 grouper became overfished in the Saint Thomas/Saint John District?  
42  
43 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** So that was part of the 2005 Sustainable  
44 Fisheries Act amendment. It got listed around that time. So, since  
45 then, and it had a rebuilding plan, and so, the status of the stock  
46 hasn't changed since that time. So, it's a determination of  
47 overfished. It doesn't necessarily mean, I think, what you think  
48 is overfished. So, it's a status.

1  
2 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Well, I asked that question because we don't have  
3 a queen fish. I mean, queen conch fishery in the Saint Thomas/Saint  
4 John district. So, what that falls under from what I can see is  
5 when the whole U.S.V.I. was a whole before we went to the island-  
6 based fishery management plans. So, in that case, that should be  
7 addressed, and we never had a goliath fishery. So, Sennai?  
8  
9 **SENNAI HABTES:** I may. Essentially, if you look at it from the  
10 standpoint of how things have to be listed, these are all three  
11 species that are now under ESA. Right? Like two of them. Not queen  
12 conch, it's only threatened. Correct? It's Goliath and Nassau?  
13  
14 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Goliath is not.  
15  
16 **SENNAI HABTES:** But under the sustainable fisheries, that was when  
17 Goliath was added?  
18  
19 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Those three were added, and they were-- you're  
20 right. They were added at the U.S. Caribbean level.  
21  
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah.  
23  
24 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** And so, that's where they're still at that  
25 level.  
26  
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** If I may, this is María López. I just want to  
28 make a clarification. So, back in, 2005 with the SFA amendment,  
29 there was a determination at the time that queen conch, nassau  
30 grouper, goliath, the other four groupers were overfished, right?  
31 So, that means that they were put in a rebuilding plan.  
32  
33 The management measures that came out of that rebuilding plan is  
34 what we see today, right? So, we have the goliath grouper. That  
35 there is no harvest of goliath grouper, no harvest or possession.  
36 The U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico did compatible regulations.  
37 The queen conch, part of the rebuilding plan is what we currently  
38 have in place right now. There's no fishing in Federal Waters of  
39 Saint Thomas and Puerto Rico. There's fishing in Saint Croix in  
40 the area of Lang Bank. The U.S. Virgin Islands have compatible  
41 regulations or have their own regulations for the queen conch.  
42  
43 Nassau grouper has prohibited harvest. That provision on the nassau  
44 grouper did not come from the ESA, it came from the MSA, from that  
45 rebuilding plant. Same as the Goliath, etcetera. The species are  
46 considered to be under that status until it is reevaluated. The  
47 rebuilding of the species reevaluated is determined that the species  
48 has been rebuilt. So, it has to be that we have been, the Council

1 has made adequate, NMFS has made adequate progress on the  
2 rebuilding of the species.

3  
4 For example, the queen conch, we talk about projects that are  
5 ongoing that will allow the Council and NMFS to evaluate the status  
6 of the queen conch, etcetera.

7  
8 So, until that evaluation is done, the status continues. Nothing  
9 has been done yet to remove the species from that. So, that is  
10 what that means. It should say step one overfished or undergoing  
11 overfishing, and that's why it ended up in that category. I hope  
12 that helps to clarify.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I have got to follow-up with Julian, and  
15 then we're going to take a ten-minute break and come back to this.

16  
17 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. Back at María. So,  
18 it's been twenty years since the SFA has been put into effect. How  
19 long more is it going to take for us to do an assessment to see  
20 what the stock is doing? This is the problem that the fishers have  
21 all the time. We put management on a species or species, and we  
22 are not doing no assessments.

23  
24 A perfect example is all the seasonal closures that are in effect  
25 and have been in effect. And it clearly states in the SFA documents  
26 that seasonal closures or closures sometimes do more harm to the  
27 stock than actually having it fished. So, here it is. We continue  
28 to ask, but we continue to suffer where we can harvest these  
29 species because the powers that be haven't been doing their job to  
30 do the assessments and see what the stock is actually doing.

31  
32 So, you know, I don't mean to throw the ball at you guys, but, you  
33 know, this needs to stop at some point, and something needs to  
34 happen to ease the pain on the fishermen. Because we seem to be  
35 the ones that are always taking the hit. And, you know, it can't  
36 continue because just like everyone pockets get hurts when rules  
37 or Executive Orders get put in place. I'm going to use that as an  
38 example. The same way we are, our pockets are hurt every day. So,  
39 can I get some kind of clarification on what direction we plan to  
40 move with these issues? Thank you.

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to take a quick ten-minute  
43 break. We'll come back to this topic.

44  
45 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

46  
47 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. We are going to do some  
48 arrangements with Internet connection at the room. So, people in

1 Zoom will loss connection for a few minutes, but you can rejoin  
2 the meeting as soon as we finish to do the reconnection in the  
3 room. Thank you.

4  
5 Estamos haciendo una reconexión de Internet en el salón. El  
6 internet se va a caer por unos momentos. Tan pronto nosotros  
7 terminemos de hacer esta reconexión, ya ustedes pueden reunirse  
8 nuevamente en la reunión, en el Zoom. Gracias.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. After a little glitch on the Internet, I  
11 think we're back. Oh, I guess not. ¿Si? Okay. Andy?

12  
13 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Carlos. So, I wanted to suggest  
14 maybe a path forward here coming out of the break. But first, I  
15 felt Julian's comments were worth responding to.

16  
17 So, thank you, Julian, for your comments. You know, I think a few  
18 thoughts I have is, one, you know, when we have species that are  
19 status listed, you know, over extended period of time, I don't  
20 disagree with you that maybe that should be revisited. And even if  
21 we don't know the status, the list that is unknown. That's  
22 something that obviously can be reviewed and considered.

23  
24 You also mentioned the adequacy of the science. And we're often  
25 challenged by the adequacy of the science, either because the data  
26 isn't collected or isn't available, or even for species that are  
27 much more prevalent than some of those on the list. And so, we are  
28 doing quite a bit of work right now on queen conch, on data  
29 collection in the U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico. I know, my ESA team  
30 has been looking at a lot of data collection information on nassau  
31 and grouper. So, that's something that, obviously, we can be  
32 committed to bringing back more information to this Council with  
33 regard to those species as well.

34  
35 In terms of the matrix, my suggestion is, one, it would be good to  
36 hear from the council members. Are we all in agreement that it  
37 will be good to revisit the list of species in need of conservation  
38 and management? I haven't heard anyone say "no," but it would be  
39 good to confirm that. And then it would be worthwhile to at least  
40 hear some general input on some of the factors, things that if you  
41 want us to move forward in narrowing the scope of species for  
42 management, what factors we should be looking at and not  
43 necessarily be prescriptive with regard to landing's amounts or  
44 percentages, but, you know, do you agree that it's worthwhile  
45 looking at, you know, the value to the fishery based on, you know,  
46 landing's thresholds or the fact that it's recorded or not recorded  
47 on the landing sheets as part of our, you know, measures that we  
48 could look at determining whether a species should be included or

1 not.

2

3 So, I just offer that as a suggestion and would love to get, you  
4 know, input from the Council on path forward.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai.

7

8 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I would say overall I think  
9 there's no problem in revisiting our Fishery Management Plans. I  
10 do think that we have a lot of ongoing efforts that are currently  
11 trying to develop systems that will allow us to better understand  
12 how we manage our fisheries. There's the Ecosystems-Based  
13 Fisheries Management Technical Advisory Panel.

14

15 There are several independent projects that are being done to look  
16 at, you know, CVAs and like climate vulnerability analysis for  
17 certain species that are in the management plan. I think we did a  
18 lot of work to create these Island-Based Fisheries Management  
19 Plans, and they currently have a mechanism in place, unless I'm  
20 incorrect on that, for evaluating how we include species in  
21 management.

22

23 My concern is that we are constantly coming up or reinventing the  
24 wheel with new processes that are only developed at the Council  
25 level, not going through the processes that we've already created  
26 like the SSC to evaluate the process by which we're doing things  
27 that we've all agreed on through development of the Island-Based  
28 Fisheries Management Plans. So, I think I just need to have a  
29 better understanding of why, like, we are looking at narrowing the  
30 scope of the fish stocks that are included in the Fisheries  
31 Management Plans. And two, I would say I am-- this to me seems  
32 like, you know, in all benefit to Sarah's use of the term matrix,  
33 seems more like a framework to me. So, I just wanted to put that  
34 on the record.

35

36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

37

38 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks for that, Sennai. And whether we  
39 would call it a matrix or a framework, right, I think it provides  
40 a structure for us to make informed decision making. And you asked  
41 in terms of I think you said you were okay with revisiting the  
42 fishery management unit. I see this as a stepwise process that's  
43 going to involve the Council developing an amendment to the  
44 management plan that's then going to be inclusive of our District  
45 Advisory Panels providing input, as well as the SSC, right?

46

47 And so, I think there's a sequential order that we would want to  
48 go through, and that the SSC should be, you know, providing

1 sufficient and helpful input as we refine this framework and make  
2 decisions about what species should or shouldn't be managed.  
3  
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson? Tony?  
5  
6 **NELSON CRESPO:** Just a quick comment. I think that the DAPs need to  
7 review this presentation and discuss the next steps. It's very  
8 important, you know, to have everything clear.  
9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
11  
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. To Nelson. The next meeting of the DAPs  
13 will be the three DAPs together, and, exactly, that will be our  
14 first topic of the agenda. The matrix so that we can get the input  
15 from the DAPs at the meeting. And it's supposed to be between here  
16 and before November.  
17  
18 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you.  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony?  
21  
22 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard. I just have a point of  
23 clarification that I need made. Does the Endangered Species Act?  
24 The Highly Migratory Species Department, do they supersede the  
25 FMPs that was put in place by the territories?  
26  
27 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, with the highly migratory species, that's  
28 separate authority and management than falls to the Council. So,  
29 that's done through the National Marine Fishery Service. In terms  
30 of the ESA, there's listing decisions. There's also what are called  
31 4(d) regulations that can be imposed on species. So, those, I don't  
32 know if I'd say supersede, but at least can, obviously, be  
33 compatible with, you know, some of the regulations at the Council  
34 level.  
35  
36 But we do have listed species that are also allowed for harvest  
37 that are regulated by this body such as queen conch. Right? So,  
38 there is that compatible, you know, regulatory framework between  
39 the ESA and Council management.  
40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony?  
42  
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I still a little confused as to who trumps  
44 who.  
45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.  
47  
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. That's a little bit beyond what we're

1 supposed to be doing here. But in the case of the MSC, every time  
2 that you prepare a management plan, you have to comply with  
3 ancillary laws and regulations and one of them is ESA. I'm not  
4 sure what you're referring to.

5  
6 But ESA, let's say that you could declare this species in danger  
7 or threatened, that's above the management plans. However, you  
8 have to, in order for that to happen, there's a mechanism for you  
9 to prepare for the recovery of the species under the Magnuson Act  
10 and under the ESA, those two.

11  
12 So, let's say that a species is considered under the ESA, it  
13 doesn't mean that it's going to be treated like a rhino or an  
14 elephant. So, well, elephants are not included there. But the point  
15 is, regarding your questions, we have to be mindful of all the  
16 regulations that we need to be aware of. They are also addressed  
17 at each management plan, at each amendment that we have. We have  
18 to comply with those rules and regulations.

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions? Sennai?

21  
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I just want to make clear that I think I'm fine  
23 with us moving forward and reevaluating the FMUs, but I think what  
24 would be beneficial is a discussion on the process by which we're  
25 going to do that. And having the Council make a decision and then  
26 stick to that process by which we're evaluating and redeveloping  
27 the FMUs. Because, you know, that was the process we went through  
28 for developing the IBFMPs, and I'm a little worried that, you know,  
29 in five years, we're just going to reevaluate and do the same thing  
30 over again. And we have a lot of management needs, I think, and it  
31 requires focus and sticking to priorities in order to get all of  
32 these things done. And I don't want to see us spinning our wheels  
33 and just redeveloping the same thing over and over again every  
34 five years.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

37  
38 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. That's a valid point, Sennai. Here's, I  
39 guess, what I was going to suggest and see if the Council's in  
40 agreement. First of all, the why. We're narrowing the scope of  
41 species we manage. One, so that hopefully we can dedicate more  
42 resources and better resources toward managing those species and  
43 have more of an impact on those. And to the extent that there's  
44 other regulatory mechanisms in place that it falls within the  
45 regulatory jurisdiction. So, for example, if it's a dominant state  
46 waters harvested species, right, and there's adequate regulations  
47 in place for the state or territory, then we could turn that back  
48 to the state to manage.

1  
2 With Sarah's presentation, to me, the most important factors, and  
3 this has to be considered within the National Standards, is one,  
4 its predominance in federal waters, right? We're a federal  
5 management body. Two, the state management regulatory framework  
6 and what supports management already at the state level. Three  
7 would be health status of the population, both from an ESA and MSA  
8 standpoint. Four, as Sarah's laid out, the target or importance of  
9 the fishery for management. Then five, which is where Kevin and  
10 team come in, our ability to monitor and assess the population.  
11 That's to me a key component to all of this, both now as well into  
12 the future.

13  
14 Those are at least to me the main takeaways that I feel like would  
15 really be well informed by the matrix, the framework, whatever we  
16 want to call it, and then we can start looking at the various  
17 criteria that could whittle down or add to the list of species  
18 that we're managing.

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think-- Graciela?

21  
22 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** If I may, a point of clarification. So,  
23 meaning the predominance in the EEZ would mean the fishery itself  
24 or the adults? Do we deal with the life history and that dependence  
25 on habitat and distance from shore, etcetera? Is that all included  
26 in that?

27  
28 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** That's a great point. I think it'll be all  
29 inclusive. Right? We'd want to look at not only where the fishery  
30 is, the fisherman, but also the species.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I think what we need from the Council or  
33 from the members is a motion to move forward with this matrix. Is  
34 everybody agreeing with that? Sennai?

35  
36 **SENNAI HABTES:** *I'm motion that we move forward with using the*  
37 *framework, that Sarah developed to evaluate revising the FMUs for*  
38 *the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council.*

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Can we get that up on the screen, that motion?

41  
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, while we wait for it, do we need a  
43 second? Do we have a second?

44  
45 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.

46  
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mira a ver si lo puedes poner más grande.  
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?  
2  
3 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** And just to be clear, this would be to develop  
4 an amendment to move forward with the framework.  
5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do you have correction to the language?  
7  
8 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, Sennai and Vanessa are okay with my  
9 seriousness to add to develop an amendment to move forward.  
10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Is that correct, Andy? Mr. Chairman, can you read  
12 that for the recommendation, Mr. Chairman?  
13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion is "to develop an amendment to  
15 move forward with the framework presented by Sarah Stephenson to  
16 evaluate and revise the FMU." Andy?  
17  
18 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Just one other suggestion. Could we remove  
19 Sarah's name and just say presented by staff? Yeah.  
20  
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We wanted to blame it on her.  
22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, it's been amended to say, "to develop an  
24 amendment to move forward with the framework presented by staff to  
25 evaluate and revise the FMUs." Are Sennai and Vanessa good with  
26 that language?  
27  
28 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes.  
29  
30 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yes.  
31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We need a roll call.  
33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Roll call vote. I'll start on my left with  
35 Sabater.  
36  
37 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.  
38  
39 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, aye.  
40  
41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, agree.  
42  
43 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, aye.  
44  
45 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, yes.  
46  
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.  
48

1 Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, *motion carries.* Sarah?

2  
3 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi. This is Sarah. Can we just put on the  
4 record that we are down a voting member because Mr. Blanchard isn't  
5 actually on the Council yet and voting?

6  
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We don't need that, but we can do it for  
8 clarification. So, Mr. Chairman, can you say that?

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** About the missing members?

11  
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Six voting members, one-- six voting member,  
13 period.

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Voting member. Okay. Right. Six voting members.  
16 Okay.

17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Sarah.

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we got through that. Next on the agenda  
21 is the E.O. 14276 Restore America Seafood Competitiveness  
22 Recommendation from the Ad Hoc Committee.

23  
24 **E.O. 14276 RESTORING AMERICA'S SEAFOOD COMPETITIVENESS--**  
25 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AD HOC COMMITTEE**

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, while is putting together her  
28 presentation? This was an ad hoc committee. Somebody asked me what  
29 an ad hoc committee is versus a standing committee. A standing  
30 committee is a committee that the Council put together and will  
31 address certain issues until the Council decides it is no longer  
32 needed. The ad hoc committee is for a particular topic, and then  
33 once the ad hoc committee is met, that's it, unless the Council  
34 wants to continue it.

35  
36 But the the three bodies that you have to address this issue from  
37 the point of view of the industry are the DAPs. The presentation  
38 that you'll receive from Graciela, the suggestions or  
39 recommendation from this group, by no means we are saying that the  
40 ad hoc committee is a committee of the whole that makes decision  
41 on behalf of the Council.

42  
43 What you're going to see here is a result of the discussion of the  
44 members present at that meeting, and then the Council has to decide  
45 about the next steps. The reason for the ad hoc committee is that  
46 in order to comply with Executive Order 14276, there's a lot of  
47 complex issues involved all at the same time; it is difficult to  
48 grab them at one time. So, we have 14276 plus some other business

1 that were addressed by the group that Graciela is going to present  
2 today for Council consideration.

3

4 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, Miguel. Can I just have the  
5 next slide, please?

6

7 So, the ad hoc was called to look at the E.O. 14276, and  
8 specifically in the email that was sent to all of the ad hoc  
9 members and those were María López, Sarah Stephenson from the  
10 Regional Office, Kevin McCarthy from the Southeast Fishery Science  
11 Center, Carlos Farchette and Vanessa Ramírez, the three DAP Chairs,  
12 Julian Magras, Nelson Crespo and Gerson Martínez. And I think that  
13 was the ad hoc group participating. From staff, it was Miguel  
14 Liajay and myself participating in the group.

15

16 So, in the email, we had identified quite a number of tables and  
17 sections in the island-based FMPs, one each, for Puerto Rico, Saint  
18 Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix, that had the information that  
19 Sarah has turned wonderfully into that Excel matrix that we've  
20 known exist and she presented today. But the main topic really was  
21 to prioritize in terms of science and management regarding those  
22 species that are currently under management that could be kept or  
23 removed from the FMPs.

24

25 As one of the main complaints that have resulted from the  
26 discussion of this Executive Order is that there are way too many  
27 species and stocks under management in the nation and it's  
28 impossible to pursue science for all of those species and stocks  
29 throughout the nation. So, this is where the beginning of this  
30 priority list comes in. And because we really would like to reduce  
31 the burden on the domestic fishing fleets and increase productivity  
32 if we could.

33

34 The main topic was to actually look at everything that we had in  
35 place. That included the criteria that was used to develop the  
36 much-reduced management lists that we have in the island-based  
37 FMPs from all of the other four FMPs that we had in place before  
38 2022. So, that was greatly reduced due to the use of the criterion  
39 that Sarah talked about. Can I have the next one? Thank you.

40

41 And the development of the annual catch limits for that reduced  
42 number of species. In the-- that's completely out of focus. If I  
43 may. No one can see it. So, I'll tell you what it is.

44

45 It's just an example of the ACLs that are in place. The reason for  
46 this is because the SSC with the collaboration of the DAPs went  
47 through the process of creating a productivity susceptibility  
48 analysis that gave us information on the life history of the

1 species. Okay.

2  
3 Based on all that information that now has been turned into that  
4 Excel file, we were going to go through the list of species that  
5 we have in the island-based FMPs, and we had very specific  
6 questions. That's where the idea of prioritizing those species  
7 that really need to be managed or conserved within the EEZ. Can I  
8 have the next one please?

9  
10 Okay. So, this was the basis of the Ad Hoc Committee. That's what  
11 we wanted to get at. And by no means, the group that was represented  
12 there, is the only people that would be bringing information to  
13 the Council. As Miguel said, we're going to have the DAPs also  
14 meet and go over this information. But really the people who were  
15 represented the ad hoc have quite a bit of information that could  
16 be brought to the table and could be discussed based on the  
17 information that we were given at the CCC to look at how valuable  
18 is that fishery, both for the commercial or the recreational, for  
19 the social aspect of the fisheries in the islands, and what risks  
20 categories could be used?

21  
22 One of the things that you know that has been used is the ratio of  
23 the catch to the ACL. When that's overrun, then you're getting to  
24 the accountability measures. The biomass and rebuilding status,  
25 that's something that the EBFM Technical Advisory Panel has been  
26 working on, for example. The ecosystem role, which is basically  
27 one of the criteria that we have used before. And then the current  
28 and forecasted ecosystem and social and economic conditions, which  
29 we already know that a lot of the data it's not available and has  
30 not been collected, although there are ongoing efforts to collect  
31 information on prices and on the social aspect.

32  
33 The idea was to look at what species or stocks had a high risk and  
34 a high value. Which ones of those had low risk and high value? Low  
35 risk and low value? And high risk and low value? Those were the  
36 categories that we were using for the ad hoc committee. Can I have  
37 the next one please?

38  
39 So based on that, the discussion took most of the day, but I'm  
40 going to summarize for you what we had talked about. So, in terms  
41 of the U.S. Caribbean, I think that all the groups kind of agreed  
42 that the ones that were already with an ACL equals to zero, those  
43 that had a prohibition on the take, really should remain in the  
44 status quo. Now, there is something very interesting about this  
45 and that it's a nassau grouper, for example. It's one that there  
46 was a comment that there might be a potential for the redevelopment  
47 of that fishery if the numbers keep coming up, if the protection  
48 is still in place. So, that's one aspect to consider, but that's

1 also under ESA. So, it has to obey two masters, a rebuilding and  
2 a recovery plan.

3  
4 Other than that, the parrotfish are significant for the ecosystem,  
5 cucumbers, urchins and corals. and then for Puerto Rico  
6 specifically, to keep the manta rays in that category. And that is  
7 because most the rays are used for filling turnovers and things  
8 like that, so they are harvested.

9  
10 Now, it was also brought to the attention of the group that for  
11 some of these species, there is no data collection efforts ongoing  
12 right now. So, they are not in the catch reports. There is no  
13 specific effort to collect any information on those. So, we  
14 acknowledge as a group that that's a problem. Can I have the next  
15 one, please?

16  
17 So, I'm going to present to you, basically it mirrors what Sarah  
18 had presented earlier using the matrix, under which category the  
19 species fell when the group discussed their status. You see, I'm  
20 going to start with queen conch. Queen conch is in red because  
21 there is, we received from the Saint Thomas Fisherman Association  
22 and from the Puerto Rico Department of National Environmental  
23 Resources information on a number of species and the reasons why  
24 they should be in any one of these categories.

25  
26 So, there is a bit of a difference between what the state agency  
27 sees as high risk/high value, and what the participants saw as low  
28 risk/high value. One of the main concerns is that there are too  
29 many regulations that try to achieve the same result. So, for  
30 example, there was great discussion about the fact that there are  
31 seasonal closures in place. There are area seasonal closures in  
32 place and there are annual catch limits in place, which seem to be  
33 a little bit redundant and overburdening to the fishers. That was  
34 one of the things that came out. It came out in the queen conch,  
35 it came out for some of the deep-water snappers, for the groupers.

36  
37 I'm not going to read everything that is on the screen, but you  
38 can see that the group looked at telling the Council that under  
39 low risk and high value, high value in most cases for the  
40 commercial harvest or for the combined commercial and recreational  
41 harvest includes things like the queen snapper and cardinal  
42 snapper, the mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, etcetera. So, for  
43 Puerto Rico specifically, some of the issues that came up had to  
44 do with the potential, since most of these species have been under  
45 management for so long, of exporting yellowtail snapper, for  
46 example, to other jurisdictions.

47  
48 So, that is a concern because that would make, in terms of the

1 economy of the commercial fishery, it would be an increase into  
2 their pocket and showing that the species has been well managed.  
3 So, they do have a 12 inches minimum size and apparently that is  
4 paying off. So, these are the things that need to be evaluated in  
5 order to go ahead and think in terms of exporting any of these  
6 species to other jurisdictions.

7  
8 The other thing is the group discussed if these fisheries were  
9 really part of the EEZ or were really state fisheries. So, I'm  
10 going to show you one list that shows everything that they wanted  
11 to remove to the state. This is one other column that could be  
12 added to the framework to look at that consideration between what  
13 we consider low risk and high value and that kind of thing, I think  
14 that would fit in very nicely with what we saw earlier. Let's see.  
15 Can I have the next one, please?

16  
17 One of the things, and there is more information that came out of  
18 that meeting, but I'm going to give you a summary only, is that it  
19 was suggested that the species that you see on the screen now,  
20 cardinal, dog, schoolmaster snapper, the coney, graysby, rockhind,  
21 the grunt, the surgeonfish, the hogfish, and that unit, the  
22 angelfish, barracuda, tripletail, crevalle jack, and african  
23 pompano be removed from federal management. And that basically is  
24 a mirror image of what Sarah presented to you today.

25  
26 The reasons for wanting that kind of change are that they are state  
27 waters fisheries in most cases. They might not be harvested in the  
28 EEZ and that's part of the issue that we had been discussing. That  
29 there is no actual fishery for some of these species in Puerto  
30 Rico, and I'm speaking specifically of Puerto Rico, such as the  
31 angelfish and there is a prohibition on the take of great  
32 barracuda. So, really, I mean, it is no, actually, on the sale of  
33 barracuda.

34  
35 So, these are fisheries that are not really providing anything  
36 really positive to the EEZ management of our fisheries. Can I have  
37 the next one, please?

38  
39 These are some of the ones that actually surprised me, but they  
40 were specifically requested by all three islands, and that has to  
41 do with the groupers that are mostly from deeper areas. And the  
42 reason for that is that it's considered that most of these species  
43 would be within the state waters. They're mostly territorial in  
44 the case of Saint Thomas and Saint John, the same thing for Saint  
45 Croix. Now, it was acknowledged that they do aggregate for  
46 spawning, so that's when they become vulnerable. And that they  
47 would, most rather not have them in the management unit, especially  
48 because there might be a lot of misidentifications. And when the

1 fisheries are very targeted for some of the groupers that are under  
2 federal management, then it detracts from getting the actual  
3 information that you need to manage that one grouper that is the  
4 important species in the EEZ.

5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, can you clarify, for the purpose here  
7 for the discussion, remove it from federal management with the  
8 recommendation to do what with that? Disappear, send it to the  
9 local states or what?

10  
11 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, in most cases, yes, that they would  
12 be part of the local government handling of those species. There  
13 was a lot of discussion about how many of these species are really  
14 in the catch reports and how many reports are really coming in  
15 with any of these. So, that was part of the discussion. Andy?

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

18  
19 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah, just maybe a specific question for  
20 U.S.V.I. Yellowedged grouper surprises me in terms of listed as  
21 state waters. I mean, that's a fairly deep-water species, so I'm  
22 surprised it'll be caught in state waters.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

25  
26 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Well, in our presentation that we gave here for the  
27 meeting from the Fisherman's Association, which consisted of five  
28 DAP members, we asked for the catch report form to be revisited.  
29 And because the trap industry is about 90% of the fishery, we asked  
30 for it to be revised. And there was a certain list of species that  
31 we asked to be removed from the catch report form because we rarely  
32 catch them. So, we don't see an importance with them right now, so  
33 it would make it easier for us in the reporting process.

34  
35 Also, with that said, we had asked for the seasonal closures to be  
36 removed because they are already managed by an annual catch limit.  
37 So, we are managing species in more than one different way. So, if  
38 we have a seasonal closure, why do we have an ACL? If we have an  
39 ACL, we shouldn't need a seasonal closure.

40  
41 And in most cases, like the groupers, the yellowfin grouper, the  
42 nassau grouper, the yellowedge grouper, I don't consider it to be  
43 an inshore fish, but they are all protected in the area of the  
44 Grammanik Bank closure. So, you know, there's no bottom gear,  
45 unique fish in there with line, etcetera. So, it's close to that  
46 period of time during the spawning aggregation time. So, that was  
47 the reason that we asked for it to be removed.

48

1 So, you know, there are several other species that we see on the  
2 list, you know, that we find it that shouldn't be on the list. And  
3 it's in the presentation that we gave. I can sit down with anyone,  
4 and we can go over it if we need to go into more depth to have a  
5 clearer picture of what's going on.

6  
7 But we sat down, you know, two of the heaviest hitting fishermen  
8 in that fishery was in attendance and, you know, they feel it would  
9 make it a lot easier and you'll be able to get more accurate  
10 information. And then some of the species, if you as a fisher don't  
11 know the difference between the groupers, the tendency of you  
12 reporting is not going to be correct. Most of those groupers might  
13 be reported under the yellowfin grouper. So, when you have, you  
14 know, the tiger grouper, the rockhind, yellowfin, yellowmouth,  
15 yellowedge. Those are all on our catch report form. So, the fishers  
16 don't know. It's hard to identify them. When come to reporting,  
17 they're just going to jot down anything. And 90% of the time, it's  
18 going to fall under the Grammanik, the yellowfin grouper, which is  
19 your-- what do you call it? The indicator species of that group.

20  
21 So, it's just like the red hind in the coney. The red hind is your  
22 indicator species. So, you know, those are our reasons.

23  
24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, I mean, there is that concern  
25 of the vulnerability of these species when they aggregate. So, be  
26 it in the state or be it in the EEZ, it comes back to maintaining  
27 a fishery in place or not. But again, there has been little  
28 monitoring of any of these other species in the area.

29  
30 The fisheries, however-- let me finish this one thing --have  
31 provided information. I think that Sarah mentioned that they  
32 actually provided information on whether these species are caught  
33 in the state or in the EEZ. So, that information should really be  
34 part of this discussion. And also, if we have any information on  
35 the life history of these species, that should also be part of  
36 this discussion. María?

37  
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. This is María López. Can you go  
39 back one slide, please? So, I just want to remind the Council that  
40 many of the species that are in this list were included in the  
41 Island-Based Fishery Management Plans either in The U.S. Virgin  
42 Island once or Puerto Rico because of the importance that they had  
43 to the ecosystem.

44  
45 There is rationale included in the fishery management plans when  
46 in the action we were discussing under which criteria they were  
47 going to be included. Some of the species it even says, this  
48 species is not directly targeted by commercial or recreational

1 fishers, however, it is important to the ecosystem. So, this is  
2 one good example of species that, yes, recognizing the importance  
3 to the whole ecosystem for the fishery, that could be something  
4 that the Council could consider then reclassifying it as an  
5 ecosystem component species in recognition of that importance to  
6 the actual ecosystem rather than being a species that is directly  
7 and actively managed.

8  
9 Just wanted to bring that to the Council's attention so they remind  
10 them why some of them were included and it's showing over here,  
11 right? Some of those species, for example, depending on the island,  
12 right? For example, the angelfish. And again, said depending on  
13 the islands because in some islands, the species will be part of  
14 the catch, but in some other islands, it's more included as the  
15 role that they had in the ecosystem. Thank you.

16  
17 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you for that.

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

20  
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** For María and for the record. Just so you can say  
22 it again for the record. Once, let's say that the Council decide  
23 these species are no longer well, or that we recommend that they  
24 will not be part of the management unit. We have two options.  
25 Ecosystem component, put them there or send them to the local  
26 states, local jurisdiction for managing.

27  
28 What is the-- for the record, what is the mechanism that we have?  
29 Amendments to FMPs, how long will it take? Can you just say that  
30 again, because they asked me that during the coffee break.

31  
32 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Thank you, Miguel. I don't know how long  
33 it will take. However, I want to everybody to understand that this  
34 is a process. Right?

35  
36 This is something that Sarah discussed earlier today as part of  
37 that framework that she presented. Nothing is set in stone, right?  
38 So, we'll bring to the Council different options. If the Council  
39 is interested in changing the criteria that they used before, if  
40 they want to keep using the criteria and changing some things, for  
41 example, the thresholds that were used to make the cut, if they  
42 want to include something that we didn't have before, which is  
43 classification to ecosystem component species, if they want to use  
44 some of the criteria that were developed in the matrix that Sarah  
45 developed in here. So, this is a process, right?

46  
47 And what this is doing is giving us an idea of what to be looking  
48 at, right? This is based on the input that was provided by council

1 members, DAP members, other staff that was participating in here.  
2 The information that Sarah presented is the quantitative and the  
3 qualitative information that is available for all of the species  
4 that are managed, including what was included in the FMP.

5  
6 So, I don't know how long it will take, but I will tell you that  
7 it's a regular Council process, that we are expecting and  
8 encouraging a lot of discussion and a lot of participation because  
9 this is going to set the future of what the resources that are  
10 available are going to be used for managing the species, right?  
11 So, I don't know if that answers your question, Miguel, but the  
12 next option, like what we said in the previous motion is the first  
13 step.

14  
15 The first step is to prepare an amendment and for creating an  
16 amendment, the staff will have to, well, the Council is basically  
17 saying let's put together an interdisciplinary planning team and  
18 start working on a document and options and refining. And then,  
19 hopefully we can bring something to the Council meeting in December  
20 with some options, more refined options so that the Council can  
21 take a look at that. I hope that answers the question. Thank you.

22  
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's it. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman?

24  
25 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** I just wanted to add the FMP amendment  
26 process. We have to follow that. The Executive Order does not  
27 exempt us from that process.

28  
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. The next slide that was up for--

32  
33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Can I have the next one, please? So, this  
34 one's specifically for the groupers.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. So, I know a question was asked about  
37 those groupers. I know for Saint Croix, and Sennai can probably  
38 correct me if I'm wrong, because I don't see catch reports, but  
39 I'm always at the different selling sites on Saint Croix where the  
40 fishermen sell their catch. I've never seen red, black, tiger,  
41 yellowedge, yellowmouth, yellowfin groupers. Never seen them at  
42 all for over thirty years.

43  
44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, that was part of the discussion that  
45 the group had and the fact that the distribution might be  
46 different. Also, it might be different in terms of the depth that  
47 they are found at the different islands and there might not be a  
48 fisher for it. In addition to that, I discussed the issue of

1 ciguatera. So, some of these larger groupers could be ciguatoxic.  
2  
3 I think that Nelson also brought up the fact that these deeper  
4 water groupers are not really economically viable in terms of what  
5 they get paid when they bring them back. So, if you're targeting  
6 the deep-water snappers, you might not really want to be in places  
7 where there are groupers because it just doesn't pay to bring back  
8 so much grouper that you're not going to get the price that you  
9 wanted for the snappers, for example.  
10  
11 So, the one main concern throughout all of these is the economy of  
12 the fisheries. What's the best price that you can get for the  
13 species that you're targeting? The other issue with that is that  
14 they do deserve management and conservation, but then they are in  
15 very much deeper waters than scuba divers and regular surveys go  
16 to. So, there is that gap in the data collection efforts. So, they  
17 might not be hitting the actual aggregation of those groupers at  
18 depth because they're not really interested in bringing them back.  
19 Or they might not really be using any of this area for spawning.  
20 So, these are concerns.  
21  
22 And one additional issue has to do with inter jurisdictions with  
23 the Department of Interior, for example, where most of the red  
24 grouper would be found South of Saint John rather than any other  
25 place. And they do have fishing regulation South of Saint John.  
26 So, these are all the issues that were discussed at the meeting.  
27  
28 Can I have the next one, please?  
29  
30 For Saint Thomas, basically, I mean, this is a well reduced, how  
31 do you call it, list of species. It's missing all of the rockhind  
32 and the coney and the graysby that the Saint Thomas Fisherman  
33 Association had requested. And so, this would be the kind of  
34 information that they would like to see in their catch reports.  
35 So, targeting the species that they are targeting, having the  
36 information for the gears that they are using, and then that  
37 reduces all those other species that might not be part of the  
38 fishery that they are prosecuting.  
39  
40 Is that correct, Julian? So, we do have it in writing for all the  
41 other species that they are concerned with regarding that they  
42 were either part of the state waters or that they are not really  
43 part of the everyday fishing.  
44  
45 Now for the queen conch, which includes the closure in the EEZ of  
46 Saint Thomas. Saint Thomas does have a queen conch population that  
47 appears to be viable, etcetera. So, that should be a continued  
48 conversation to establish whether that population, although it's

1 not fished because Saint Thomas doesn't have really a dive fishery  
2 as they do in Saint Croix and Puerto Rico, but it might be a  
3 potential fishery to develop in the islands. But then again, we're  
4 back to being under a recovery and a rebuilding plan. So, these  
5 are issues that we need to discuss. Can I have the next one,  
6 please?

7  
8 So, this would be the list for Saint Croix. Saint Croix does have  
9 a different list of species under low risk and low value, but that  
10 are part of their fishery in terms of the local markets, etcetera.  
11 This one doesn't quite fit with what Sarah had presented earlier.  
12 It leaves many of the species to be part of the federal management.  
13 And that's something, you know, that the combination of the two  
14 efforts would be very handy to determine what in fact needs to be  
15 under federal management or not. And can I have the next one,  
16 please? Sorry. Mr. Chair?

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** If I may. Gerson.

19  
20 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. Why the previous  
21 slide, why do I not see the queen conch there. I don't know if I  
22 misread, but I don't see the queen conch anywhere there. And that's  
23 a very important fishery over there, and we discussed queen conch  
24 that day.

25  
26 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, it should be there because it's  
27 definitely one of the main species in Saint Croix. So, I apologize  
28 for that. I think that it was left from my copy and paste here.  
29 So, queen conch in Saint Croix, it's open in the EEZ. It has an  
30 animal catch limit. It has a size limit. It has a no females with  
31 eggs can be landed. So, there are quite a number of regulations  
32 that are already in place for the EEZ and that are actually  
33 compatible with the state waters.

34  
35 So again, it brings us to that impasse of considering it low or  
36 medium risk, I think might be in the next slide. So, consider it--  
37 - and it is, can I have-- that one?

38  
39 So that's the new category that was developed different from low  
40 and high that we had. So, there was this discussion about some of  
41 them being medium risk but very high value, right, for each of the  
42 islands. That's where a queen conch would fit for Puerto Rico and  
43 Saint Croix. And that's where your angelfish and a misty grouper  
44 and the like would fit for Saint Thomas. And then the low  
45 risk/medium value, all of the other, the lane snapper, white grunt,  
46 etcetera.

47  
48 So, the group developed this new category and DNER also had

1 reported that they would like to consider one of these intermediate  
2 categories to discuss these species.

3  
4 So, does that fit into? Any questions about these new categories?  
5 I don't think it would be a problem adding them to matrix because  
6 it really describes that intermediate stage that everyone  
7 recognizes that could happen. Okay. So, finally, some additional  
8 comments.

9  
10 So there was a bit of discussion and going back and forth regarding  
11 the MPAs, that's the area closures that we have in place, to keep  
12 them closed as they are right now, to open the water column in  
13 some of them, to actually open a place like Tourmaline that's been  
14 closed since the '90s, but really doesn't respond to protecting  
15 any of the red hind aggregations that were supposed to be there,  
16 to keep the Hind Bank and the Grammanik in place, acknowledging  
17 that there has been little monitoring of many of the species that  
18 are within these areas.

19  
20 However, it just happened that the Coral Reef Conservation Program  
21 had provided some funds for the Council to look at Tourmaline  
22 specifically, to determine whether it's being effective in  
23 actually protecting the red hind aggregation at that site. And the  
24 way that the proposal was developed had to do with having the  
25 fishers be part of the site selection process, use technologies of  
26 different kinds so that the scientists will be teaching the fishers  
27 how to use all this technology, but they would be involved in all  
28 of the process of data collection and actually management advice  
29 to the Council. So, that's in place right now. We do have the  
30 authorized funding available for that.

31  
32 So, there was discussion about the monuments and the monuments are  
33 under the purview of the Department of Interior. So, these have no  
34 take, no fishing restrictions. There might be some specific species  
35 that can be harvested from these areas, but that they are a source  
36 of recruits to the fishery in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

37  
38 The issue that we mentioned at the beginning of the ACLs versus  
39 the seasonal closures versus the overprotection of these species  
40 that needs to be revised. They catch reports that Julian mentioned  
41 earlier and the same thing for the deep-water snappers of Puerto  
42 Rico. And then a lot of discussion had to do with what fishers  
43 call the market driven fisheries that really need to be assessed  
44 as such.

45  
46 There is variability in the amount of fish that the restaurants  
47 require. There is variability in the number of tourists that come  
48 through the islands. There is a specific request from those who

1 buy in great quantities from the fishers of sizes, etcetera. So,  
2 these things really have a lot to do with what you see in the data  
3 that are reported by them to the local authorities and to the  
4 Science Center. So, that was a big part of the discussion  
5 throughout all of the determination of whether a species should be  
6 maintained in the EEZ FMU or not.

7  
8 And then there had been a request for a very long time to start  
9 looking at that variability in prices because that really will  
10 lead to whatever you are going to be landing. So, your landings  
11 will go up and down depending on what you expect to receive in  
12 return from that work.

13  
14 And finally, the discussion on the imports for certain species  
15 that are iconic to the islands, but are being drowned by the  
16 imports, which offer, in some cases, a lower price or offer the  
17 species that is under a seasonal closure to be available at a  
18 higher price. So, it makes a really complex situation for the  
19 fishers and a burden that they do have to carry. And not only for  
20 that period of time, but for the continuation, once the fisheries  
21 open again, there is still that problem of imports and price  
22 competition to the local fishers.

23  
24 And finally, if I can have the next one, I think I mentioned most  
25 everything that we discussed. This you can read, but this is the  
26 Excel file that we forwarded from Genio's communication. So, it's  
27 not only the reasoning why, but if there are any regulations that  
28 are in place that need to be taken off the table, that's what we  
29 really are moving towards, to answer these questions.

30  
31 So, this exercise of the Ad Hoc Committee, it's by no means the  
32 determination that it's made and presented to the Council, but  
33 it's a suggestion in terms of those species that the group  
34 considers should and should not be part of that management. So,  
35 that alongside that matrix that Sarah presented, I think that the  
36 Council will be in a very good position to put all that information  
37 together and provide us with the Excel data.

38  
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But we also need to make clear that the  
40 two-- the immediate thing is to fill that table and send it back  
41 to Washington. And as Andy said, we don't need to have a list of  
42 all the species. It is just the actions that we are going to  
43 undertake or propose to undertake. That had to be submitted by  
44 September this year.

45  
46 So, Graciela, with the information that we have, the discussion  
47 that we had today, do we have enough to fill that table or at least  
48 begin to work on it so we can submit it on time?

1  
2 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** With the information that we have,  
3 especially with Sarah's table where it actually records the  
4 regulations that are in place for any of these species, if there  
5 is compatibility or not, and that kind of thing, I think that we  
6 can provide you with some information. I don't know if this  
7 includes what gaps we have in the data, because the first one that  
8 comes to the table is the lack of recreational information we have.  
9

10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But we can also say that in our communication.  
11 And for the record, that's what is being required from us, to list  
12 the-- as an example that you have on the screen that you cannot  
13 see --list of the actions that we can take, a list that we already  
14 have. And don't worry, we're going to send that to everybody, and  
15 it is in our web page. But that's what they need. In a conversation  
16 with Mr. Piñeiro, he said, "Yeah. That's what we like to see."  
17

18 Regarding the Kelly's Cross, they don't want to call it Kelly's  
19 Cross anymore, but at least we need to put that into a language  
20 that would address, you know, we have species that follow these  
21 categories, and these are the actions that we want to undertake to  
22 address those.  
23

24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, what María had said earlier?  
25

26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graci, Sennai has a question.  
27

28 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, have some concerns about simply stating that  
29 we're going to make amendments to the FMPs as part of our response  
30 to this request for the E.O. without it going through the process  
31 that we go through to make amendments to our FMUs and FMPs.  
32

33 And, you know, unless I am seeing specific directives from National  
34 Marine Fisheries Service with that is what they want, then I'm  
35 hesitant to do that. My understanding and what I read in the EO,  
36 the letter, which is the only directive that I, you know,  
37 representing the Virgin Islands as a council member, has received  
38 was that we will commit to a work plan and a schedule for  
39 implementation to ensure these actions are prioritized.  
40

41 I think we can easily identify this process in the letter that  
42 we're going to go through to reevaluate the FMUs and describe the  
43 process by which we're going to evaluate what we're going to make  
44 amendments to the FMUs, but I see no directive that tells us that  
45 we need to specify a list of fish that we are going to take out of  
46 the FMUs. And I don't think that without it going through the  
47 process that we've established as a Council by which we do that,  
48 it's necessary to do that at this time.

1  
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** To that point? You're right. Actually, that's  
3 what we were discussing with Kelly and the others. At the  
4 beginning, they thought that we had to have this list and  
5 everything, but the thing is more complicated than they thought.  
6 There are some works that have been done actually, and they can  
7 address that.  
8  
9 But you're right on point. You know? This is this is a process  
10 that they started. Also, we are going to discuss it at the October  
11 meeting with the CCC. Where are we?  
12  
13 But at least I would like to see some progress being made regarding  
14 this, well, process. And that's what we're going to do. Actually,  
15 the more you talk, the more I think that I will send you the track  
16 so you can work on it with the staff so we can send the essence of  
17 the sentiment of the Council to comply with.  
18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a chat. Oh, Andy.  
20  
21 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, first, I wanted to agree with Sennai's  
22 comment. If we get back up to the recommendations of the ad hoc,  
23 it was the written recommendations. It was a couple slides back.  
24 Or is this-- This might be the spreadsheet, that is something  
25 separate.  
26  
27 So, I know we're scheduled to take a lunch break, and then we're  
28 going to come back and talk about the Executive Order  
29 recommendations. Yeah. That slide that you just passed. That one.  
30 Yes.  
31  
32 I'm going to share during the break with Graciela and Miguel, and  
33 I can share with the rest of the council members just some of the  
34 initial input that we received from the Gulf Council and South  
35 Atlantic Council. It's a very high level, but it's more along the  
36 lines of what you have here on the screen from the Ad Hoc Committee.  
37 And I think, you know, if we could spend some time after lunch,  
38 then looking at a comprehensive list of ideas that you would want  
39 to move forward for consideration to address the Executive Order.  
40  
41 That gets also to Sennai's point with regard to, we'll maybe  
42 committing to looking at this. Whether or not we make changes would  
43 depend obviously on this body and the work that we put in to  
44 obviously evaluate whether or not the changes need to be made. But  
45 this to me provides some good input from the fishers as some  
46 direction that the Council may want to look at. And I'm sure  
47 there's other ideas that people have that could add to this list  
48 as well as the Fishery Management Unit changes.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I had somebody on the chat, I think.  
3  
4 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** No. There is nobody on the chat. When  
5 I raised my hand, it was because there were some people asking me  
6 for the presentation. It's already on ISSUU. Mhmm.  
7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.  
9  
10 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** So, for those that ask, you can go to  
11 ISSUU, and you can get it.  
12  
13 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, that's what we have for you.  
14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
16  
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, do you want to say something? Go  
18 ahead.  
19  
20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. This is María López. So, if I  
21 understand correctly, then, after we break for lunch, we continue  
22 the discussion, and my understanding is that there is other  
23 information that wants to be shared by other council members in  
24 terms of ideas to potentially include in here and discuss. Also,  
25 maybe some progress on evaluations for the reserves and things  
26 like that, for example a CRCP project that was approved, etcetera.  
27 So, things like that will help us to populate this list of  
28 priorities. Is that correct?  
29  
30 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So that's going to be very short. But  
31 then again, mean, are going to hear from the Science Center  
32 tomorrow. One of the main, the very, very important things that is  
33 happening is the data triage exercises that are so important to  
34 this whole process. And secondly, the SEDAR 103, which is going to  
35 change the game a little bit because it's not single stock species  
36 assessment. It's looking at alternative methods to do that.  
37  
38 So, if there are any specific ideas that have come out of the  
39 development of the SEDAR 103, this would also be a good time to  
40 bring them up.  
41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I guess in this discussion, I would also like to  
43 maybe find out what happens to these species that we're going to  
44 put under the ecosystem plan. Because I just don't want to forget  
45 about them since, you know, we have important species that are  
46 grazers, and we just can't abandon them. And then those that the  
47 state will manage or put to the state to manage, you know, the  
48 Saint Croix Fisheries Advisory Committee would make

1 recommendations to the state as to what we would like to see maybe  
2 in catch limits or so.

3  
4 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi, this is Sarah. In response to the  
5 ecosystem component, the IPT process would likely probably,  
6 develop some criteria for those ecosystem component species. They  
7 could be different based on the rationale of what you want to do  
8 for them. For instance, the corals, the urchins, the parrotfish,  
9 the ones that are grazers, you might want to, you know, come up  
10 with a criterion that is specific to their role in the ecosystem.  
11 There might be other species that you want to maybe keep as  
12 ecosystem component species because maybe you don't want bycatch  
13 of those species to get out of control, so you want to keep an eye  
14 on them.

15  
16 So those types of criteria, again, for ecosystem component species  
17 could be developed along with criteria for why you might remove  
18 completely. So, all of that's probably going to be packaged and  
19 brought back to you to look at, to chew on to say, like this  
20 option, not at that option. So, they're not being removed. They're  
21 not even being pushed to ecosystem yet. They're going to be-- the  
22 IPT process will put together options for you to consider, and  
23 then you can then you can decide as a Council at that time what  
24 you might like to do with them.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

27  
28 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. I just heard Graciela  
29 mention SEDAR 103. And, of course, right away, my phone lights up  
30 from my people that are following. What is SEDAR 103?

31  
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I'm going to tell you all-- this is Kevin McCarthy,  
33 for the record. I'm going to tell you all about it tomorrow  
34 morning, and you're going to hear more than you ever want to hear  
35 because one of the things we have to do, the Council needs to do  
36 is approve the terms of reference.

37  
38 And so, we're going to go through all of those. You'll see what  
39 it's all about. But the headline is we want to look at all different  
40 kinds of ways to analyze the available data to provide management  
41 advice. Whether that's something very data limited or whether  
42 that's ecosystem based and everything in between.

43  
44 Because, you know, 95% of our species, right, are in that Tier 4  
45 where what we've got is an ACL based on expert opinion. And so,  
46 we've had those ACLs for ten, twelve years. And one of the things  
47 we'd like to do is to go back and look at that with some of these  
48 analyses and say, is that ACL does it make sense? After ten, twelve

1 years, is it in the right place? Are there are there indicators  
2 that suggest it should go up, it should go down?

3  
4 And we want to have that recommendation for every managed species  
5 across all the islands. So, that's the goal. That's the headline.

6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

8  
9 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I think I understand most of what you're saying,  
10 but we're talking mostly here about seafood competitiveness. We're  
11 talking about food. And I think that we have to get a report, or  
12 I don't know if they did it in the ad hoc or not, whether we are  
13 eliminating things that are wanted by the people to eat, that we  
14 can export to other places, and that we are commercially getting  
15 better by doing what we're doing. That's one thing that I think we  
16 should be aware of, because we're talking about food, not about  
17 the species or anything. We're talking about creating more jobs,  
18 creating more work and exportation of ore. What do we eat in Puerto  
19 Rico, what do we eat in the Virgin Islands, and I think we should  
20 focus on that too. Thank you.

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** More comments?

23  
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Talking about eating, Mr. Chairman, can we go for  
25 lunch?

26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Lunch? Okay. Sure. So, we'll break for lunch for  
28 one hour. We'll be back at 01:15. Okay. 01:30.

29  
30 Lunch is on your own but try not to go too far because the hour  
31 goes by real fast.

32  
33 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 12, 2025.)

34  
35 - - -

36  
37 AUGUST 12, 2025

38  
39 TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

40  
41 - - -

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alrighty. We're going to get started again so if  
43 you all can find your seats.

44  
45 So, the next thing on the agenda is the CFMC's Response to NOAA  
46 Fisheries on the E.O. 14276. Who does that?

47  
48 **CFMC'S RESPONSE TO NOAA FISHERIES ON E.O. 14276**

1  
2 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, we received an email from Andy  
3 Strelcheck with the information from the South Atlantic and the  
4 Gulf of Mexico. We've also reviewed the 2020 reply to the Executive  
5 Order 13921, which is the original issue. So, with the information  
6 that we have, and I think if the Council is agreeable to that, as  
7 soon as possible get the DAPs together to work on both the matrix  
8 and the framework and the information that they provided through  
9 the ad hoc. So, that would be one thing to do. The other thing  
10 would be to review what has come under review now, because I see  
11 that there is a couple of places where they want to remove species  
12 from management, and they also want to transfer the management of  
13 the spiny lobster to the state rather than to keep it under federal  
14 management for Florida.

15  
16 So how high level we want to discuss that, that would be-- I mean  
17 these are bullet points, what they provided here. So, I was trying  
18 to figure out, you know, think that the DAPs are extremely  
19 important. They should put, I think that what Roberto said before  
20 we left on the side of, you know, this is to push forward the  
21 availability of seafood, the economics, the commerce of those  
22 species, and with the export information that we got for the  
23 yellowtail snapper are things that the Council might want to  
24 consider.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

27  
28 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Graciela. And so, I shared before  
29 the lunch just the preliminary information that those two Councils  
30 have put together and as Graciela points out, it is a simple  
31 bulleted list right. It's a list of ideas that the council members  
32 had through just kind of a round table discussion.

33  
34 So, you know, I would certainly encourage the Council if you have  
35 any input or thoughts today, in terms of deregulatory actions that  
36 this Council might want to consider, that you offer those up for  
37 consideration. I agree with you, Graciela, that involving the  
38 advisory panels, getting input, going forward, obviously, it'll be  
39 critical.

40  
41 But the timing of this response is, what? September 30. So, we  
42 essentially have a little over a month to gather that information  
43 and provide a response at this point based on what you have.

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

46  
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. And this is the tricky part. If we are going  
48 to meet the DAPs, we need to announce it in the Federal Register.

1 And then, we need forty days to send the agenda to the Federal  
2 Register. So, Graciela had to be kind of ingenious in order to  
3 backtrack. So, it's thirty days in September. So, probably by this  
4 week, we have to put together the agenda and send it out.

5  
6 In the case of the DAPs, what we'd like to have is the presentation  
7 by Graciela, the presentation by Sarah, and also all the topics  
8 that we discussed here. So, we will then inform the DAPs in  
9 advance. So, the three Chairs will be there. Actually, probably  
10 that meeting could be Chaired by you, Julian, or Julian. So, the  
11 thumb indicated that the Chair of the three DAP meeting would be  
12 Julian Magras.

13  
14 And then we have to hurry up to see how we can incorporate whatever  
15 comes out of the DAPs into the discussion, not in the discussion,  
16 but into the document that we are going to submit to Washington.

17  
18 A question I have for, probably, with Sam here. In that document,  
19 can we just list the topics, talk about the regulations that we  
20 want to modify, the management plan we have to modify. But we don't  
21 need to write exactly what we're going to do. Is that true? Or do  
22 we have to have an indication in that document of "this is what we  
23 would like to do."

24  
25 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH III:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Executive Order  
26 envisions that the Council will both identify actions that it  
27 believes should be undertaken and commit to a work plan to do that.  
28 But we recognize that it's difficult for many Councils to actually  
29 do that, for the reasons you stated to go through all that process.

30  
31 So, the Executive Order suggests a work plan. I think that most  
32 Councils will be unable to completely fill that out with a full  
33 well, thought out how we're going to get from here to there or  
34 many of these things.

35  
36 We will accept all the letters, but I just wanted to be clear that  
37 the Executive Order does seem to imply a work plan. I do not think  
38 you will be the only one having difficulty preparing such a work  
39 plan. Thank you.

40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, when talking about bullets, I want to maybe  
42 recommend to the DAPs when they meet to-- I looked at that document  
43 from Andy, especially for the what The Gulf had. That's something  
44 that we tried years ago, maybe ten years ago or something like  
45 that to allow for rollover of our ACLs if they're not used. I think  
46 I saw something in the Gulf regarding that. Except for queen conch.  
47 We don't want to roll over queen conch overages. But other species,  
48 maybe we can consider that.

1  
2 And also, I know that-- actually, I can only speak for Saint Croix,  
3 but we don't really target sharks, but access to some sharks would  
4 be something that maybe the DAP could consider as deregulatory.  
5 They are caught once in a while incidentally, so we don't want the  
6 fishermen to get in trouble because they have a hammerhead. Those  
7 are two of my points for now.

8  
9 And I think what Gerson mentioned in the April meeting-- No. Not  
10 in the April meeting. He mentioned it in the ad hoc that the  
11 fishermen don't want to open any monuments or expand-- or I mean,  
12 they don't want any more closed seasons, but they don't want to  
13 open the monuments or the closed areas. They want to protect those  
14 because those are nurseries for reproduction. But Gerson can speak  
15 on that later.

16  
17 Graciela?

18  
19 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, for example, one of the things that  
20 we have been discussing has been this low priority species or  
21 species that belong to the state. Would that make it into the plan  
22 such that the Council discussed at this meeting the consideration  
23 of these species. Now we have to go and talk to the Science Center  
24 and the Regional Office and make sure that these species really  
25 are not in the EEZ. So, that by December, we would have something  
26 to present to the Council and move forward with that, but that  
27 requires an amendment, and the same thing with the ecosystem  
28 component species.

29  
30 So those bullets are already on the table. It's a matter of putting  
31 them in the schedule, so do we have the time to meet with the DAPs?  
32 It will have to be the week of September 15<sup>th</sup> if we send the agenda  
33 this week. So, that gives us, you know, three days of the DAPs and  
34 turn over to respond.

35  
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That should be included in the work plan and  
37 outlined because we had to inform the Council by December. Here we  
38 are and here is where we're going to go, and these are the steps  
39 that we have to take.

40  
41 Also be mindful that every one of these steps cost money and  
42 people. And in some cases, we don't have neither the money nor the  
43 people. And that's something that had to be included in the  
44 equation.

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy? And then, María.

47  
48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi, this is María López. So, regarding what

1 Graciela just said. Earlier we made a motion, or the Council made  
2 a motion-- where is it? Yeah, so we made a motion saying, "Develop  
3 an amendment to move forward with the framework presented by staff  
4 to evaluate and revise the FMUs."  
5

6 To me, that's an action, right? So, there's already a plan that  
7 can be included in the list. And the schedule for that, we already  
8 talked about bringing this in December, bringing options for  
9 December and I think that constitutes something that the Council  
10 already made a decision, that we're going to be looking at the  
11 species that are going to be managed. So, that to me that's one  
12 action and we can just put it like that and then staff can develop  
13 it further as needed. I don't know if you agree.  
14

15 And then other things that can be included if council members want  
16 to discuss now other actions. For example, when we were at the Ad  
17 Hoc, I remember Nelson as the DAP Chair mentioning some things  
18 that they would like to see as deregulatory actions-- maybe, this  
19 is just a suggestion. I'm not a council member. But just a  
20 recommendation or suggestion that maybe those things can be  
21 discussed now, and the Council can discuss further and decide if  
22 this is something that we want to at least explore, right?  
23

24 Because I would think that considering something doesn't mean  
25 committing to it. So, consideration of something that they would  
26 like to deregulate is a plan, to me, and then the Council is  
27 obviously not going to look into it in the next three months, but  
28 it will have a plan to look into it and determine if it's something  
29 that has merit to move forward with or not.  
30

31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?  
32

33 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Knowing that, you know, funding resources  
34 are limiting, I guess a couple of thoughts. One, if you're going  
35 to convene the DAPs, do it virtually right. I don't know if that's  
36 what your plan was in the first place. If you can't because of  
37 timing in terms of a notice, then maybe you could at least solicit  
38 input from the DAPs. That could be, you know, providing written  
39 comments. Right?  
40

41 These are just recommendations. You have to synthesize that and  
42 then put it together in terms of a letter that comes to the Fishery  
43 Service.  
44

45 And then kind of a broader deregulatory action, which right now,  
46 I don't think we know what it would be, but it was mentioned  
47 earlier. You know, we have catch limits in place. We had some  
48 regulations that were kind of pre-catch limits that are

1    constraining harvest. Right? So, kind of looking at the network of  
2    management measures in relation to kind of our manager regime and  
3    determining whether some of them are no longer needed. Right? And  
4    so, that's a broad brush generalized, but I think that's really  
5    good interest for the fishermen in terms of other things that are  
6    constraining harvest more than we need them to.

7  
8    **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I got a question. These deregulations  
9    recommendation, that's strictly in the EEZ. Right? Nothing  
10   involving state waters, local waters? No? Okay. Well-- Graciela?

11  
12   **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Well, I do have a question, because in  
13   terms of fisheries, it would be kind of a cumulative action because  
14   you do have the state waters jurisdiction and regulations. In  
15   addition to that federal government within the state waters,  
16   especially in the Virgin Islands, and on top of that, the EEZ under  
17   the Department of Commerce.

18  
19   So, my question was to see if we could address, I mean, one thing  
20   would be the ACLs and the size limits, etcetera. The other thing  
21   would be areas that are already under management, seasonally  
22   closed, no take zones, etcetera. So, the Department of Interior  
23   does not close them for fisheries reasons, but they have a no  
24   fishing or no take in place for many of these areas.

25  
26   So, you know, how do we bring all that into the picture? Is it  
27   possible to bring it into Fisheries Management Council, SERO  
28   Science Center.

29  
30   **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

31  
32   **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, how do the  
33   Executive Order, you know, they're asking, well, how can we restore  
34   the American Seafood Competitiveness? Well, in order for us to do  
35   more than what we are doing as fishers, because we are market  
36   driven is we need to relax some of the rules that are in place, if  
37   possible, like what the Saint Thomas Fisherman Association put  
38   forward for the Saint Thomas/Saint John District, and cut back on  
39   the amount of imports that are coming in.

40  
41   Every time a regulation is put in place in this room or whichever  
42   room we have in the meetings, all of a sudden, that product shows  
43   up in our supermarkets. And that's competition for us as fishers  
44   that slows us from selling our product, our fresh locally caught  
45   product. Because it's not enforced by our local government that  
46   the businesses, the restaurants, the hotel must buy fresh local  
47   first before buying imports. And the fresh local product is way  
48   cheaper than the imported products. Imagine that.

1  
2 But because we are tied to a lot of different regulations, the  
3 competition is there. So, let's use grouper as a perfect example.  
4 Thousands and thousands of pounds of grouper, cases and cases come  
5 in weekly into our islands, and it is sold as fresh local grouper  
6 on the menu. But we're not catching no grouper. That's a perfect  
7 example.

8  
9 The yellowtail snapper, we put the size limit in place for federal,  
10 and the locals were going to make that compatible because that's  
11 what the fishers want. 12-inch carapace with the 12-inch length  
12 with the tip of the tail. Next thing, what shows up in our big  
13 supermarkets? A case is a yellowtail from Nicaragua and Belize.  
14 Exact rules that are in place, that have been put in place, show  
15 up in our market.

16  
17 We fought for the lobsters to a high extent, to keep our 3.5  
18 carapace length a few years back. They were trying to get us to go  
19 to 3.0. The fishers fought, "No. We want to keep the 3.5." Three  
20 months later Florida got a 3,000,000-pound increase on their  
21 lobster annual catch limit. Where do you think those lobster tails  
22 were going to end up? Into our market. Are they still ending up in  
23 our market? Yes.

24  
25 There's plenty of undersized tails that are coming into our market,  
26 and it's not regulated because there's no enforcement. No  
27 enforcement. We had a federal enforcement officer, Alex, who was  
28 well on the tail of these people, and all of a sudden, he's gone,  
29 and there's no one left. We got two local enforcement officers,  
30 and one of them is the assistant director in the Saint Thomas/Saint  
31 John District. So, here it is, the fishers are fighting a battle.

32  
33 I read the Executive Order over and over and over. How can we  
34 enhance? Well, we need to be able to catch more and sell more, but  
35 we have got to find some way to slow the imports coming in. It's  
36 killing us. We want to make the money, but we have got to come up  
37 with some rules. I know you guys are mandated through congress to  
38 follow the rules and regs that has to keep healthy fisheries. And  
39 that's what we should be focusing on, and we ease over regulating.

40  
41 I would really like this Council to take into consideration, at  
42 least for the Saint Thomas/Saint John District, the letter that  
43 was provided by the Saint Thomas Fisherman's Association. Which  
44 was that meeting was held with five DAP members. We just pulled  
45 together five of us, out of 13 of us. We didn't get paid. We just  
46 did it because we needed to be prepared for the ad hoc committee  
47 meeting to have something to present to you guys.

48

1 And today, present, I have the vice-president of the Fisherman's  
2 Association, Joshua Quetell. He's actually a DAP member and Louis  
3 Blanchard. So, we had Daryl Bryan, we had Shirley Ledee. We had a  
4 group of all, and we sat down there, and we came up with-- This is  
5 what we thought would be best as a starting point for the Saint  
6 Thomas/Saint John District.

7  
8 I know you guys want to put something together to present, but I  
9 think that's a great starting point for us to start with. Thank  
10 you.

11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

13  
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, we are discussing the response. And so,  
15 far, a couple of things. If we don't need to have the DAP meeting  
16 to respond because we are talking about generalities, and we  
17 believe that we have all the information that we need, then the  
18 meeting of the DAP will be focusing on the presentation that  
19 Graciela put together, the matrix. So, by the December meeting, we  
20 have, better understanding what it this is all about.

21  
22 Or if you want to wait until we meet with the DAP, the quickest  
23 that we can do it now, using the 40 days, is September 26<sup>th</sup>. The  
24 agenda will be just that. The presentation by Graciela. The  
25 presentation by Sarah Stephenson, and then some recommendations  
26 there.

27  
28 But probably, we don't need that for the response to Washington,  
29 because the letter that Julian was talking about is very good. It  
30 has all the elements that we need to put together the response to  
31 Washington. We also have the example of the Gulf Council and the  
32 South Atlantic that we can use. And as everybody is saying here,  
33 this is a process.

34  
35 So, the question to the Council is, do you think that in this  
36 agenda item, we have enough to respond to National Marine Fisheries  
37 Service request on the E.O. 14276 and then follow-up with the  
38 procedures that we are discussing?

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

41  
42 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I mean, I would say we have a good start.  
43 I think what Julian was saying is helpful. I need to re-review the  
44 letter and maybe collectively the Council agrees with most but not  
45 all of the suggestions. That's where it becomes important as to  
46 what are we putting forward as a Council. Not just because the  
47 Saint Thomas Fisherman's Association submitted it, we agree that  
48 we're going to put forth everything.

1  
2 So, I think there has to be some review and vetting process. I'd  
3 love to obviously get information from Saint Croix and Puerto Rico,  
4 from Puerto Rico DNER, from the U.S.V.I. government.  
5  
6 You know, the more we can collect all of that information input,  
7 have you draft a letter, even share it around with the council  
8 members before the thirtieth deadline, I think it would be helpful  
9 to then best inform, obviously, the Executive Order input.  
10  
11 But, yeah, we've all been, I think, taking some notes here, and I  
12 think there's certainly a good starting list of things that can be  
13 further refined.  
14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chairman, if we follow what we just said,  
16 then the staff should prepare some draft response. Circulate it  
17 among the council members, everybody, the DAP Chairs, and then  
18 once we have the input of everybody, we can fine tune the letter  
19 and send it to Washington on time. In the meantime, we will  
20 continue with the schedule with the DAPs in September. And  
21 everything that we have said that we are going to bring to your  
22 attention at the December meeting.  
23  
24 Graciela, do you have a question about what we're supposed to do?  
25 Okay.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?  
28  
29 **SENNAI HABTES:** I have a couple of questions. One, this to me is  
30 far too open ended of something that needs a response for the  
31 thirtieth. And part of the reason we have meetings is so that we  
32 as a Council make the decisions as to what is going to happen with  
33 responses to these. We're here now. I think we should identify the  
34 specific actions that we are recommending as a Council that the  
35 council staff in conjunction with NOAA puts together into a letter  
36 as a response and identify the structure of what we want that  
37 response to be. We're here to do that; we should do it now. That  
38 is my recommendation.  
39  
40 The only thing that I have heard that we made a clear decision on  
41 was amending the FMUs. That is the only thing that we have taken  
42 a vote as a Council and decided. And I don't like the idea of,  
43 like, you know, taking a letter from here and there and ideas from  
44 here and there and then saying that is the decision that the  
45 Council has made, because it is not.  
46  
47 So, I think what we should do now is put up a sheet of paper, have  
48 someone take notes, identify the main points that we are thinking

1 or how we're going to respond to the E.O., and then, you know,  
2 give a recommended plan as to how we're addressing it, and then  
3 have the staff in conjunction with NOAA's staff put together a  
4 recommendation that each of these groups then review, give their  
5 agreement on, and then the council members do as well, which we  
6 can do through email, even if we need to have a vote or convene  
7 in, like, video conference, after reviewing it, before it gets  
8 sent out. I think every one of the council members would agree,  
9 like, to do it.

10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Probably, you need to lead the discussion  
12 yourself but remember the timing that we have. Even if I have a  
13 one-day virtual meeting, it has to be on September 26<sup>th</sup>. So, can  
14 you just start the discussion? How would you like to see it  
15 discussed this time? Because I believe that you're right. You know,  
16 once we have that in the in the right direction, that's the way to  
17 go.

18  
19 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I mean, for me, I think one of the things we  
20 did was we recommended we'd have an amendment to the FMUs. Right?  
21 So that is something that we as a Council are agreeing to look at.  
22 And we can describe the process by which we're going to do that,  
23 which I think we have a good understanding of. And that's one of  
24 the action items that we're going to put.

25  
26 We should have a timeline that we are identifying whether it be  
27 twelve months, eighteen months that we'll have a decision on. The  
28 second thing that I heard just now from, you know, the Saint  
29 Thomas/Saint John DAPs is imports. Right? That's not something  
30 that we've discussed. From my understanding, what I've seen in  
31 federal law, the one thing that would address that is the seafood  
32 import monitoring program. That's one option.

33  
34 But that wouldn't mean removing regulations. That would actually  
35 be a recommendation to add, which would be to identify species  
36 that are within our FMUs in which the fishermen are getting  
37 affected by improper or illegal or legal importation that is making  
38 it hard for them to compete. Right?

39  
40 Right now, the majority of the higher numbered fish in our FMUs  
41 that we monitor are not included in that program. Right? And so,  
42 that means that is why you have a lot of these other species that  
43 can come in through importation and they don't have to meet a lot  
44 of the same bureaucratic requirements that our commercial fishers  
45 do. So, that's one thing that I would recommend, but that might  
46 not be something we want to put into the E.O., but that's something  
47 that we can look at.

48

1 But I would say another action item that we are going to focus on  
2 would be to create a plan that identifies bureaucratic hurdles  
3 that are reducing our fisher's ability to compete with imported  
4 seafood in The United States. And we will identify specific actions  
5 that we will do as a Council to limit that. Right? That's the  
6 second thing. Put a timeline on it. How we're going to address it?

7  
8 I don't remember what the other ones that we were talking about  
9 is, but I would like to see those other ones from either other  
10 council members or other people that are in the room listed out so  
11 that we all know what are the ones we're agreeing to before we  
12 leave for the day. That would be my recommendation on how we do  
13 that.

14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Let's take the one on imports. We have been  
16 discussing imports over the last forty years. The only thing that  
17 we can do is recommend to the higher up authorities, to look at  
18 it. But I believe that following your train of thought, we need to  
19 identify those issues regarding imports that affect the local  
20 fisheries. So, do you have a line or two that we can add for the  
21 discussion, probably?

22  
23 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** This is María. I'm going to suggest, that a  
24 document is started, and we put it on the screen so we can start  
25 throwing ideas in there. Then, once an idea is in there, we can  
26 add a little bit. It doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be  
27 an idea and see if there is consensus among council members as if  
28 that is something that we can move forward with.

29  
30 So, Cristina or Liajay do you think that will be possible. Thank  
31 you. Sorry for the interruptions, Sennai.

32  
33 **SENNAI HABTES:** No. I appreciate that. That's what I would like to  
34 see as well.

35  
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Estas lista Cristina? ¿Liajay?

37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** While we wait for that, Julian.

39  
40 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. I just wanted to  
41 say, well, I agree with what Andy was saying and what Sennai just  
42 said, and María followed up with it. I think this is the best  
43 opportunity we have right now with us being in a room together,  
44 and we start.

45  
46 We have to start at some place. I think once we get started, what  
47 I have seen over time, in many meetings, is that once we get  
48 started, we make progress. We might not finish, but it's going to

1 be a start, and we have a guidance on where we headed. Some kind  
2 of foothold on where we headed, and then it also would make the  
3 process easier to gather the information from the other groups  
4 that we need information from. So, I agree that we get started and  
5 try something.

6  
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Mr. Chairman, probably now Sennai can  
8 dictate a line or two regarding the topic about the imports so  
9 that everybody will have an opportunity to share it.

10  
11 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I think, we could say develop an action plan  
12 to identify bureaucratic hurdles or bureaucracy-- No, no. Numero  
13 dos.

14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Liajay. Liajay. Ponlo-- there.

16  
17 **SENNAI HABTES:** Develop an action plan to improve local fisher  
18 competitiveness against exports or imports. Right? That's what  
19 we're talking about. We can work around-- or "develop an action  
20 plan to reduce bureaucratic burdens on local fishers." How about  
21 that? Is that better? "To improve local fisher competitiveness."  
22 Yeah. That works.

23  
24 So, after hurdles, just put "to". And then underneath, I would say  
25 do a sub bullet. Right. And then under "4," do "4a." And then I'd  
26 "specifically identify ways" or "specifically" yeah "identify ways  
27 to change species in SIMP." You can just-- yeah. "Associated with  
28 Caribbean."

29  
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You have to spell it out, Sennai?

31  
32 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. So, you could do, so "SIMP" is for "Seafood  
33 Import Monitoring Program." Because I think that although we cannot  
34 directly change that, I think we can make recommendations and  
35 explain how it impacts our fishers. And so, that's one, right?  
36 Like, lobster is not on there, yellowtail. Conch isn't on there,  
37 and conch is now, you know, ESA listed. So, all of those are things  
38 I think that highly affect our fisher's competitiveness.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

41  
42 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, with regard to number four. I think  
43 this is general enough, but what I would emphasize is this can  
44 also be a whole of government approach. Right? So, it doesn't  
45 necessarily have to rest with this Caribbean Council or the Fishery  
46 Service. If you have concerns about imports that could be more  
47 broadly addressed by other agencies, right, that could be part of  
48 the response. I'm not understanding bullets two and three.

1  
2 I-- well, I was just going to suggest, yeah, we maybe add some  
3 other-- so a few other things that I've written down. Carlos  
4 mentioned carryover of unused quota. Right? Mhmm.  
5  
6 And then, Carlos, help me out here. You were mentioning, I can  
7 say, expanded harvest of sharks or alleviating some shark  
8 restrictions?  
9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. Some shark. Things like tiger and  
11 hammerhead. Is tiger protected?  
12  
13 **SENNAI HABTES:** They're not.  
14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Well, hammerhead, then.  
16  
17 **SENNAI HABTES:** Hammerhead is.  
18  
19 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** And then I mentioned reviewing-- let's see, how  
20 do I say it? It's, essentially, revising regulations that are not  
21 compatible between federal and state. María, you want to add  
22 others.  
23  
24 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Something that was mentioned earlier  
25 today. Revising regulations that are duplicative in their  
26 objective. For example, and correct me if I'm wrong, I believe you  
27 mentioned seasonal closures for a species with already an area  
28 closure that is already set up for the species. Julian, I think  
29 you were the one mentioning something like that.  
30  
31 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Seasonal closure. To get rid of the seasonal  
32 closure that already have either the area closure or annual catch  
33 limit targeted to it.  
34  
35 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, we can phrase this as "revise  
36 regulations that are duplicative in their objective," and that  
37 could involve a myriad of things that can be explored.  
38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** What about-- Martha?  
40  
41 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Thank you. I just remember that when the Council  
42 was doing the IRA proposals, there was one proposal specifically  
43 for this issue. So, I, perhaps, want to include the possibility to  
44 liaise with some of the IRA projects that are already implemented  
45 because we may have some synergetic actions that can provide and  
46 support this activity. Thank you.  
47  
48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I'm sorry, Martha. Could you come back and

1 repeat? We couldn't hear you very well. What project are you  
2 referring to so we can capture it in the document?  
3  
4 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Yes, we are working with consultores educativos  
5 [educational counselors] in liaison with fishers on identifying  
6 some actions and potential future plans to evaluate how extreme  
7 events are influencing their activities. And so, part of that  
8 refers to the potential in affected markets and so on.  
9  
10 So, we may have some linking activities where we can support this  
11 Council's task. Thank you.  
12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?  
14  
15 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.  
16 At one moment, I brought the issue about importations and also the  
17 problem that we have in Puerto Rico with the misidentification of  
18 the species with the importation. In some moment, they brought  
19 some species and served it as another type of species, and I think  
20 that it is necessary to revisit that too.  
21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Are we going to include in there the letter from  
23 the Saint Thomas Fisherman Association? Are we going to include  
24 that to review that also. Or is that already up in the notes?  
25  
26 **SENNAI HABTES:** You're asking should we review it to look for other  
27 things to add?  
28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.  
30  
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I mean, I think two of the things that Julian  
32 had mentioned were included on that.  
33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.  
35  
36 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think if you want to have it read on to the record  
37 again, I think that we can do that.  
38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No, I just want to make sure that--  
40  
41 **SENNAI HABTES:** I would just ask him to make sure that we're  
42 capturing--  
43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. I just want to make sure we're capturing  
45 what they said. Vanessa?  
46  
47 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for  
48 the record. Just to put in the record that also the situation that

1 he exposed from Saint Thomas is the same situation that we have  
2 and are present in the markets of Puerto Rico.

3  
4 With the importation, especially with the high target species as  
5 the lobster, especially, with the tails and the queen conch fillet  
6 that is imported is practically taking our market. And in this  
7 time that we're in a closure, you can go everywhere, and you will  
8 find it. Thanks.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

11  
12 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Vanessa, thank you. For clarification, when  
13 you're talking about the closures, are you referring to the  
14 availability of imports when there's a seasonal closure for that  
15 determined species? Can you elaborate and if this is something--  
16 Because this is a little bit different than what Sennai mentioned  
17 before, and it's extremely important too, so maybe we can  
18 articulate it better in this document.

19  
20 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Thank you María. Especially, in the example  
21 of the queen conch. During the time that we are in a closure, the  
22 importation of the fillet, clean fillet, that's something that hit  
23 us directly, not only because the price is lower than the usual  
24 price that we have in the market, but also because once the  
25 restaurants use that kind of fillet and see that for the restaurant  
26 is going to be a lower cost, once the closure is open, then we  
27 still lose that restaurant, and we still have issues to deal with  
28 the price and getting more people that can or want to buy our  
29 product.

30  
31 Also, in the supermarkets we can find a variety of species. Not  
32 only with the queen conch or the lobster tail, also with the  
33 snapper, the mutton snapper, and the line snapper which they are  
34 bringing in at a very low price. Once we are in the fish market it  
35 is very hard for us, for example, to have the ability to take the  
36 food stamps, for example. But the supermarkets can do it. So,  
37 people prefer to go to the supermarkets and use their food stamp  
38 to buy the imported fish instead of buying the local catch. Thanks.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater and then Julian. I mean Crespo.

41  
42 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I assume that you're suggesting that whenever we  
43 have a veda, all imports stop for that item. That's what you're  
44 suggesting. I believe so, yes. Because right now in Puerto Rico,  
45 the only fish that I think you'd know is going to be fresh, fresh,  
46 fresh is salmon. And we don't catch it here. Let's face it.

47  
48 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** That's a great example. But yes, it's practically

1 a direct hit to our fishermen. We can't sell, not even the  
2 inventory that we have in the freezers. We need to close that, and  
3 then the importations come and take advantage of the people and  
4 the restaurants. Yeah.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

7

8 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. A couple of the other  
9 things that we have here in the letter, I'm looking at it, one of  
10 the things was the removal of the dolphin and wahoo from the  
11 managed species list because it's a highly migratory species. I  
12 know we had a lot of discussion about this before, but I would  
13 like us to revisit that one.

14

15 One thing we want to put on the record to make sure that it's  
16 clear, we don't want to see any more area closures. And I don't  
17 know if this is the proper place about the revision of the CCR  
18 trap, to have a trap CCR for itself so we can gather correct  
19 information for when we're doing assessments.

20

21 I gave Graciela a copy of what we would like to see that she can  
22 share with everyone, but those are some of the other items. Thank  
23 you.

24

25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo?

26

27 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On same line as Vanessa  
28 said, it is important to evaluate all the species that have closed  
29 season or are under management here regarding the importation.  
30 Because right now we have an abundance of lobster in the Caribbean,  
31 and it's really hard to sell. What happened? We raised the ACL,  
32 and we are going to afford accountability measure, but the reality  
33 is that the abundance is so high. We can't compete with  
34 importation. So, it's hard, you know, to develop a good market and  
35 make money with all the penalties we have to afford.

36

37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I just remember something that listening to  
38 Crespo. I don't know if this is going to fall within this or not,  
39 but I think Crespo mentioned increase the bag limit for skip jacks  
40 in the Caribbean Small Boat Permit. But I don't know if we can  
41 really do that. Because that's HMS.

42

43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's something for the Council to send to HMS  
44 for consideration. It is not part of this. We included it in the  
45 ad hoc committee because we wanted to incorporate it into the  
46 record.

47

48 Nelson, do you care to repeat what is the issue with that

1 particular point at the AD? Because we need to send a letter to  
2 the appropriate people.

3  
4 **NELSON CRESPO:** The problem we have with the small boat permit and  
5 the skipjack is that the bag limit assigned to it is too low. The  
6 skipjacks are a very important species for the commercial fishers  
7 and now for the restaurant, because the restaurant started offering  
8 them as a part of their menu. It's hard for us, when we find a  
9 school of skipjacks, we don't catch skipjacks every day. But when  
10 the schools are there, we can easily catch thirty, forty of them.  
11 And then maybe a few weeks will pass until we find it again.

12  
13 That species is really important for bait, and now for food. And  
14 it is key, you know, for making our money with the deep-water  
15 snapper because that's the main bait that we use it for it. It's  
16 necessary to increase the bag limit or take it out from the Small  
17 Boat Permit. Because most of the fishers prefer to take the other  
18 permit which is the HMS permit that has no limitation for that  
19 species.

20  
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, the question is, Mr. Chairman, and that's why  
22 I said that it is not part of the list that we have here. Two  
23 avenues. One, Nelson can write directly to the HMS officials about  
24 that point with or without the endorsement of the Council. So, the  
25 question, Mr. Chairman, is do you want to endorse what Nelson is  
26 bringing to our discussion? Because that's the only thing that you  
27 can do, either endorse it or not. It's not within your authorities  
28 to work with HMS.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Yeah. I do endorse it, and I would like to  
31 get a response to Nelson's question years ago about using skipjack  
32 for bait that HMS never did respond. They wanted to be able to cut  
33 it because you have got to land them whole or something. Sennai?

34  
35 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, don't we have a Caribbean rep on, like, the  
36 HMS, like, count-- like, who is that, currently?

37  
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, I don't know if we have a Caribbean rep,  
39 but we do have representation from HMS typically at Council  
40 meetings and we have been in constant communication with our  
41 colleagues from HMS.

42  
43 We are, I'm not sure if she's here at this time virtually, but she  
44 was certainly planning to participate in the discussion. We were  
45 going to discuss that tomorrow under other business. So, if you  
46 would like to wait until tomorrow to further discuss so they can  
47 clarify some questions and then the Council can decide if they  
48 would like to endorse a letter for NMFS to request this or if this

1 is something that can happen as a separate item, like, for example,  
2 like Miguel was saying that it would come directly from a  
3 fisherman.

4  
5 But yes, we have been in constant communication with HMS, and they  
6 will address this as requested by the Council. So, if--

7  
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Marcos is still representing HMS. Yeah. HMS. So,  
9 anyway, you can table this until tomorrow as, María suggested, and  
10 then you can take a decision.

11  
12 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think we can table it till tomorrow. I also think,  
13 like, that's one thing, like, when these issues come up, it would  
14 be a good idea to summarize them and send them to Marcos and make  
15 sure that he is also including that in his discussions when he's  
16 in their meetings. You know?

17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Actually, you're right. Usually, what we do is  
19 when we send a letter to HMS for an issue, we send a copy to him.  
20 Of course, at that time, he was the Chair of the Council, but he  
21 is willing and able. He said it's no problem.

22  
23 We still have Carlos. We can ask him to send the Chair the letter  
24 too.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

27  
28 **NELSON CRESPO:** I'm pretty sure that Marcos, at one moment, sent a  
29 letter to Randy Blankinship and we didn't receive any response  
30 from them.

31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, but that's the point. By the way, you're  
33 talking and discussing this. In 1975, I made a whole study of  
34 import/exports. And then I prepared this for my boss. And almost  
35 every single item that you have here in your report, I got in my  
36 report. That was in 1975. I'm still waiting for the response from  
37 my secretary. So, anyway-- and then a lawyer in Washington told me  
38 to forget about it because I was-- anyway, that's a long story.

39  
40 But, Mr. Chairman, I believe that if we do what is being suggested,  
41 then tomorrow we can address the HMS. Probably we won't even need  
42 a letter, probably the lady representing HMS can take notes and be  
43 able to respond to us. At least we might have a response before  
44 December so we can have it in the agenda for the December meeting.

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

47  
48 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the

1 record. I just want to make a comment about the importance of  
2 checking on this, especially for the commercial fishermen when  
3 they need it for bait. And I will give you an example that we had  
4 last week.

5  
6 We had our commercial fishermen that couldn't go out because they  
7 didn't have bait and they needed to start buying small mackerel,  
8 imported, to supply as bait. So, we run around with the situation.  
9 We couldn't find our bait. We had it over there, but we aren't  
10 able to catch it in the way that we need it. And then had to go  
11 back to the import bay. So, thank you.

12

13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

14

15 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes, a couple of clarifications on the list.  
16 With number seven, is that separate and distinct with what we're  
17 proposing in number six or are those one and the same? I'm reading  
18 them as accomplishing the same thing, but I want to confirm I'm  
19 not missing something. Are they duplicative?

20

21 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I agree with Andy. They're duplicative, and  
22 I think what happened was we made six more general and left seven  
23 there. So, I would recommend removing seven.

24

25 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Okay. Then with Julian's comment about  
26 removing dolphin and wahoo, that's very specific. I think that's  
27 addressed with our first bullet, which is evaluating the species  
28 in the Fishery Management Unit. So, I just wanted to comment on  
29 that specifically.

30

31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, do we have anything else for the list?

32

33 **SENNAI HABTES:** I have a question that I wanted to ask. So, this  
34 isn't directly related to reducing burdens, but I think it really  
35 does have a lot to do with how much we can provide the fishers in  
36 support, specifically focused towards, like, you know, the  
37 management that they want to see happen.

38

39 Currently, the rules regarding administration of, like, awards and  
40 the bureaucracy that we have to go through for things in the U.S.  
41 Caribbean doesn't fit the area that we're in. Our agencies are  
42 generally small. They don't have the same administrative ability,  
43 and we have a lot of burdens that make it very difficult for us to  
44 really work directly with the fishermen which is what this requires  
45 in an area like this.

46

47 Are there aspects to, you know, the burdens that we have from  
48 administrative and bureaucratic rules that we can address through

1 this Executive Order, or is it something that maybe we should just  
2 continue to talk about and find other avenues? Because I know, for  
3 us, every time we get a new award, that's something else I have to  
4 administrate, and that takes time away from the things that they  
5 want to see.

6  
7 In addition, trying to get that money to fishermen to help with  
8 like doing the science, which they really want to see, is almost  
9 impossible. Right? And so, I think those are two things that we  
10 should-- are there ways that we can look at that and address that  
11 under this E.O. or maybe not? I mean, I don't know.

12  
13 Just food for thought.

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

16  
17 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. I've been thinking about this maybe a  
18 little bit different, but similar perspective, Sennai. So, that  
19 could be, if you wanted to add some challenges for the region,  
20 description of things that maybe aren't regulatory in nature but  
21 burdensome that could go into this letter, that would be helpful.  
22 The other aspect, once again, is not regulatory, is data  
23 collection, right? We are really challenged by data collection in  
24 this region.

25  
26 So, acknowledging the importance of we could better manage our  
27 resources if we had fishery independent monitoring or more port  
28 sampling. Right? Expanding upon that, even though it's not  
29 something that we're going to be able to do around this table that  
30 requires funding, acknowledging those limitations and where we  
31 need help would be beneficial. Sennai, do you have input on what's  
32 being written over there?

33  
34 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Sorry, Sennai. I just wanted to-- remember,  
35 this is not going to go out like this, but as long as we have the  
36 right idea, we can develop. So, I said, "Consider adding challenges  
37 for the region, including data collection and monitoring and the  
38 lack of infrastructure," which is what I think you have. Or  
39 "support for infrastructure to"

40  
41 **SENNAI HABTES:** I would say, "manage and administer fisheries  
42 related funding."

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

45  
46 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. And to go along  
47 with what Andy was just saying. For the data, where we mentioned  
48 "to create a form," a CCR for the trap alone, you know, because

1 90% or more of the Saint Thomas/Saint John Landings are traps and  
2 having the right form where we collect as much information and  
3 then to go along with that, to have the port samples and everything  
4 else would help us greatly in our process. And that would improve  
5 where you set your annual catch limits, etcetera, etcetera. You  
6 would be able to say, well, "maybe we can move this from a Tier 4,  
7 eventually, five years, eight years, whatever it takes, to a Tier  
8 3.

9  
10 It's not impossible, but what makes it impossible right now is we  
11 don't have the data to support it. So, that would be part of  
12 improving everything.

13

14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos, do we agree with the language?

15

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.

17

18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do we need anything else that the Council wishes  
19 to bless for the staff? Okay. In that case, Mr. Chairman, I guess  
20 we finished with this part of the agenda, and I think that the  
21 staff has enough guidance.

22

23 María and Graciela, do you have any questions? Do we have enough?

24

25 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. I think that's something that staff  
26 can work with. Obviously, this is a process. I would think that if  
27 there's anything else throughout the discussions that the Council  
28 will be doing today, that the Council would like to include in the  
29 list, I think that's something that can always be revised.

30

31 We can go back to it tomorrow before the end of the day. We still  
32 have an afternoon and another one full day of discussion of  
33 different topics. So, something may come up as a priority for the  
34 Council.

35

36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Sabater?

37

38 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I don't see there the suggestion by Vanessa of  
39 having a way of being able to control the imports with the vedas  
40 in Puerto Rico, or the United States, or any place, you know, just  
41 to control the imports so that does not harm the commercial fisher  
42 money.

43

44 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Right. Thank you, Mr. Sabater. So, number 2 in  
45 letter b says, "regulate imports of species during their seasonal  
46 closures. For example, the availability of the species in markets  
47 during the closure. I think that addresses part of what you are  
48 expressing, and that will be something that we can develop from

1 there. Thank you for your input.

2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Continuing with the agenda. 2025 Annual  
4 Catch Limit Monitoring. Andy?

5  
6 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, we can talk specifically spiny lobster in  
7 general or all catch limit monitoring? María, is it just spiny?

8  
9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Give us one moment so we can bring up the  
10 information.

11  
12 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Well, yeah, we'll just speak to spiny lobster  
13 right now. Yeah. Yeah. Let's wait for people to come back to the  
14 table.

15  
16 **2025 ANNUAL CATCH LIMIT MONITORING UPDATES—ANDY STRELCHECK, NOAA**  
17 **FISHERIES, SERO**

18  
19 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay, thank you. This is María López. I'm just  
20 going to give you a summary of the 2025 annual catch limit  
21 monitoring for Puerto Rico stocks and stock complexes.

22  
23 NMFS evaluated the landings from Puerto Rico to determine any  
24 needed response to annual catch limit overages in 2025. Landings  
25 exceeded the ACLs for three reef fish stocks, which is jacks 1,  
26 which is crevalle jack, jacks 3, which is rainbow runner, and  
27 snapper 6, cubera. However, the overages were determined to be  
28 from enhanced reporting, therefore, no accountability measures are  
29 required. So, that's for the reef fish.

30  
31 Landings of the pelagic fish stocks, barracuda and wahoo exceeded  
32 their annual catch target and their ACL. The AM for pelagic fish  
33 stocks requires that NMFS and the Council review the overage to  
34 determine if any corrective action is needed. However, at this  
35 time, as I mentioned earlier, today, the Council has not  
36 established a process for determining what, if any, corrective  
37 actions are necessary for ACT and ACL overages. So, we can talk  
38 about that later this afternoon. That's for the pelagic.

39  
40 Now for the spiny lobster, the ACL for the spiny lobster stock was  
41 exceeded. It's 144% over of the ACL. And NMFS determined that the  
42 exceeding was not attributed to improved reporting. So, as a  
43 result, accountability measures will need to be implemented for  
44 the species.

45  
46 So, that's the summary of the annual catch limit monitoring. I  
47 think Andy would like to discuss some about the spiny lobster.  
48 Thanks.

1  
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Thanks, María. So, we've had a lot of good  
3 conversations leading up to the meeting and even over lunch as  
4 early as today. So, the as María mentioned, we received landings  
5 data. Our most recent landings data indicates that the overfishing  
6 limit of 426,000 for spiny lobster was exceeded. That triggers a  
7 determination of overfishing.

8  
9 We have an accountability measure then that would implement a  
10 federal waters closure of spiny lobster that works backward from  
11 September 30<sup>th</sup>. And if we don't have sufficient time in the year  
12 to close from going backwards from September 30<sup>th</sup>, then we implement  
13 the closure going forward after September 30<sup>th</sup>. That closure would  
14 be only in federal waters. Right now, we are working on a closure  
15 notice given the overage.

16  
17 With that said, kind of a great timely opportunity. We have a new  
18 stock assessment, SEDAR 91, that is pending. We had notified both  
19 the Council that overfishing is occurring and I had reached out to  
20 Puerto Rico DNER to ask for compatible regulations. There's been  
21 a lot of conversation around the actual assessment itself, some of  
22 the information and data that, goes into that assessment. After  
23 talking with the Science Center and talking with Puerto Rico DNER,  
24 we think the most prudent course of action for Puerto Rico's spiny  
25 lobster assessment is for the Science Center to work on developing  
26 some fishery dependent indices of abundance that come from the  
27 commercial sampling data that's collected by Puerto Rico.

28  
29 There seems to be indication that catch rates have been increasing  
30 over time despite effort being fairly stable or level. And so,  
31 that will help us better inform the stock assessment. That would  
32 mean that the SSC meeting in September, Miguel, would not review  
33 the Puerto Rico stock assessment, and we would wait until the new  
34 information is available from the Science Center.

35  
36 But we feel it's really important that we get this right in terms  
37 of this overfishing determination, how the catch limits are set.  
38 And so, we think this new information needs to be explored. We  
39 don't obviously know what the outcome of that'll be, but we'll  
40 integrate it into the assessment.

41  
42 For Saint Thomas, Saint John, Saint Croix. We don't see the same  
43 concerns with regard to the spiny lobster assessment. We don't  
44 expect that the status will be overfishing for those islands. We  
45 need obviously to have the peer review done with the SSC and  
46 recommend that those assessments go forward for peer review in  
47 September.

1 So, I wanted to acknowledge all this because we were going to come  
2 here today to talk about really two things. One was because you're  
3 overfishing, the Magnuson Act requires you to end overfishing  
4 immediately. It doesn't define immediately, but essentially it  
5 sets the Council on a path that you have to work on an amendment  
6 to end the overfishing. We think that that's going to be best  
7 informed based on the stock assessment, right? We've already taken  
8 action to trigger the accountability measure.

9  
10 The second aspect of this, which I think is going to be important,  
11 and María will be able to discuss here in a minute, is the  
12 accountability measure as designed is not really working, right?  
13 Because it closes federal waters, but it's not constraining catch.  
14 Now you could argue that catch is set too low, or it doesn't need  
15 to be constrained, but the reality is that without compatible  
16 regulations from Puerto Rico or buy in from fishers and Puerto  
17 Rico with regard to the accountability measure, we're not able to  
18 constrain the catch to the level that's specified for overfishing.

19  
20 And so, we want to obviously look at something that would be an  
21 improvement to the accountability measure that everyone can be on  
22 board with, that we're going to cooperatively be able to develop  
23 that's goes beyond obviously the seasonal closure that only occurs  
24 in federal waters.

25  
26 So that's what we're really going to focus on today with the need  
27 to come back and discuss the overfishing as soon as the SEDAR 91  
28 stock assessment is made available. So, I know there's a lot there.  
29 I want to just pause. Ricardo, we had lunch. I don't know if  
30 there's anything you'd love to add, or Kevin McCarthy sitting  
31 behind me with regard to the science and the overfishing  
32 determination.

#### 33 34 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

35  
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, one question. The accountability measure for  
37 the spiny lobster of Puerto Rico in 2025, that would be postponed?  
38 Or are we forced to have that closure of dates beginning September  
39 30<sup>th</sup> backwards?

40  
41 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, because right now we don't have a new  
42 assessment to tell us what's going on with spiny lobster, the  
43 accountability measure has been triggered. And so, we have moved  
44 forward, obviously, the closure notice for consideration. Whether  
45 that gets implemented or not, to be determined, but that's under  
46 review.

47  
48 That's non-Council action. In terms of the SEDAR 91 stock

1 assessment, that would be pending the results and next steps by  
2 the Council.

3  
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Because I think I got confused by the  
5 fisherman asking the same question. Once we receive the letter,  
6 what is the next step? They just wanted to have a yea and nay. Are  
7 we going to be closing September 30<sup>th</sup> backwards, or are we talking  
8 about 2026?

9  
10 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, that would be an accountability measure  
11 that's implemented by the fishery service this year. Anything that  
12 happened in 2026 would be informed by the results of SEDAR '91 and  
13 the stock assessment of work that would be going on, with the  
14 Council, like, in December and afterward.

15  
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, we can answer to them. You know, 2025, yes.  
17 You have the accountability measures. 2026, it will be reviewed  
18 based on the discussion that we have today. Thank you.

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

21  
22 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Well, I have many questions. Maybe I could get some  
23 clarifications today. Julian Magras, for the record. So, the  
24 426,000-pound limit, is that both recreational and commercial for  
25 Puerto Rico?

26  
27 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Commercial.

28  
29 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. So, I'm here looking over the 2018 document  
30 that was that was prepared by Bill Arnold when we were looking at  
31 the Tier levels and the SYL and I'm saying this because I would  
32 like some clarification. The SYL for spiny lobster was 924,968  
33 pounds. And the ABC was set at 554,981. So, that clearly tells me,  
34 and I remember it and I continue bringing up at every meeting, and  
35 I still can't get a clear answer on the process of.

36  
37 It was said, at that meeting, that we were setting the annual catch  
38 limit at this amount, but if there were overruns, we would go back  
39 and revisit the data that was used to set the annual catch limit  
40 and make changes from there. It was set lower. In the minutes of  
41 the 2018 SSC meeting, which took place in April 2018, it stated,  
42 in those minutes, that if there were overruns, we would revisit,  
43 the SSC would revisit, with NMFS-- with the Southeast Fishery  
44 Science Center, I should say. --revisit and see if a different  
45 outcome, different annual catch limit can be set.

46  
47 We have never seen that in all the overruns that have taken place  
48 for Puerto Rico. What we have seen is accountability measures.

1 From that same document, it shows, in one of the slides, the  
2 landings of Puerto Rico and the carapace length which clearly  
3 identifies, from what I'm seeing, I'm not a scientist but I'm a  
4 fisherman scientist, that because of the sizes of the carapace  
5 length, we have a very healthy fishery.

6  
7 And with that said, we are catching lobsters in the range of the  
8 carapace length from 3.5 all the way to almost 4.25. Those are,  
9 for me as a fisherman, those lobsters that are ranging from a pound  
10 and a half all the way up to four-pound lobsters.

11  
12 So, we're not seeing the small lobsters. We're not seeing under  
13 the 3.5. What we are seeing is a healthy fishery that's been  
14 consistent from 1980 up to 2015. This is why I continue asking.

15  
16 I'm fighting for my Puerto Rico fishermen because they've been  
17 getting hammered with this, and I think the reason why they're  
18 getting hammered is because the limit is set too low. Now maybe it  
19 might be set correct, but I think that is a directive that should  
20 be given to the right person, which I think is the SSC, to review  
21 the documents and review those minutes from 2018 and see if  
22 something can be done.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Go ahead, Andy.

25  
26 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks for your comments, Julian. A few  
27 things. So, we have, obviously, had the SSC review SEDAR 57, the  
28 update assessment. They're going to review SEDAR 91. I think the  
29 bigger issue or question here is with regard to what the assessment  
30 is telling us and whether or not we can integrate these fishery  
31 dependent survey estimates into that assessment. Because that  
32 could very well change the catch levels, based on, you know, the  
33 way that those catch rates are trending, and better inform  
34 obviously how those catch limits are set.

35  
36 So, that's essentially what I was discussing earlier and what we've  
37 talked about with the Center and with Ricardo and others that there  
38 was information that was brought forward during the stock  
39 assessment process. It wasn't brought forward in a level of detail  
40 that could be readily used. There had to be more analysis and work  
41 to be done. But we feel like now is a good time to step back,  
42 really carefully take a look at that data and integrate it into  
43 this assessment and then have the SSC do their review thereafter.

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

46  
47 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. That sounds great. So, as it pertains to SEDAR  
48 91. On the SEDAR website, it says right now that the final review,

1 which is your external review outside of the SSC looking at it.  
2 This is a hired group of scientists that come in and look at all  
3 the information that was collected for the entire process. It says  
4 on the website that it has been canceled.

5  
6 Now the DAP members have received an email saying that the SSC is  
7 going to be the one to do the final review. What I would like to  
8 know is in the SEDAR process where does it say that if they don't  
9 have the money to pay for the final review, which is an external  
10 review outside of the people who see the data every day, that the  
11 SSC should be tasked with the outcome of the review.

12  
13 So, I'm just trying to understand, so I could answer to my peers  
14 that process.

15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

17  
18 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks. Kevin McCarthy. So, let me talk you  
19 through the SEDAR process. Great question, Julian, because it's  
20 confusing.

21  
22 So, in the SEDAR process, let's say this is the first time we've  
23 done a stock assessment for Species X. There's going to be a data  
24 workshop. Some of you have participated in those. There's going to  
25 be then a series-- and there are decisions made at that data  
26 workshop.

27  
28 Then following that, there's a series usually of webinars. That's  
29 the assessment part of it, where you're talking about the modeling.  
30 Some of you participate in those. And then, if this is a brand-  
31 new species, you would have what's called the CIE review, the  
32 Center for Independent Experts. It's those outside experts that  
33 come in and do the review.

34  
35 At that point, that's the end of the SEDAR process. You get a  
36 report from each one of those. The CIE were like the one we were  
37 at a couple of weeks ago for Yellowtail. They're going to write a  
38 report, and then that's the end of the SEDAR process. And then  
39 always, always, it goes to the SSC. Because the SSC can say, you  
40 know, CIE people, great job, we disagree.

41  
42 So, the end of the day, it's always the SSC that gets to say, we  
43 think this is useful for management or we don't. Not that the CIE  
44 isn't important, they're going to read those reports. It's going  
45 to be very informative. They are experts, no question about it.

46  
47 In the case of spiny lobster this time, for SEDAR 91, we did the  
48 data workshop, we did the series of webinars for the modeling part,

1 and then the decision was made, I think, primarily financial, but  
2 also because there were not a lot of changes to that assessment  
3 compared to 57. There weren't a lot of new data sources brought  
4 in, although we'll get to that in a second and Andy's already  
5 spoken to it.

6  
7 So, the decision was made way above my pay grade that we weren't  
8 going to do a CIE review. So, the assessment workshop report was  
9 the final part of the SEDAR phase and then it goes to the SSC just  
10 like it always would. We've just taken out that CIE review.  
11 Primarily, because there were not a lot of differences in the way  
12 that stock assessment was run compared to 57 and the 57 update.

13  
14 What Andy just mentioned was we think, in collaboration with our  
15 DRNA colleagues, that there is some additional data we can bring  
16 to the table for Puerto Rico, specifically that may or may not  
17 change the result, but we certainly need to look at it. And I think  
18 it's still appropriate that the SSC be the reviewers of that.  
19 They're going to review it anyway, right? Ultimately, they're the  
20 final reviewers before it goes to the Council, always.

21  
22 So, the recommendation that I'm suggesting and that I think Andy  
23 just put forward is let's go ahead in September with the Virgin  
24 Islands. We'll do those two. Those are going to be, hopefully,  
25 non-controversial. It's essentially an update of what was done in  
26 57. The results are essentially the same.

27  
28 But with Puerto Rico, we've got some additional analysis that we're  
29 going to work on between now and whenever we get it done to get it  
30 right. And then the SSC would review that. So, I hope that was  
31 helpful, but that's the process in a nutshell, and I think where  
32 we need to go with 91. And that would then inform the results or  
33 the decisions for the Council to make in 2026.

34  
35 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. Well, you know, I'm just asking these  
36 questions because the Council voted on doing a term of references  
37 that included an external review. So, I'm learning the process as  
38 I go along, and I know how important the CIE report is because I  
39 experienced the one in 57. I was there. I just did the yellowtail  
40 and a stoplight parrotfish where we saw what took place for three  
41 days with the models. Okay? Last day, we got something figured  
42 out.

43  
44 But and that's my great concern. Here it is. We're going to bring  
45 it again without that external review to the SSC who has vetted  
46 this more than once. And I'm just concerned that sometimes someone  
47 from the outside looking in sees something different than we see.  
48 And because it's part of the process, you know--

1  
2 Who made the decision? who made the actual decision not to do the  
3 peer review and send it straight to the SSC because of funding?  
4 That's the question I would like answered. And then I'll leave it  
5 alone until we have the meeting in September. Thank you.

6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

8  
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. One follow-up, Julian. Unfortunately, I  
10 don't have the answer to that question. I just know it was at a  
11 much higher level than me, which you don't have to go very high up  
12 the ladder to be at a much higher level than me. But still, somebody  
13 farther up the chain who worries about those kinds of budgets made  
14 that call. I don't disagree with you.

15  
16 But what I will say in the case of SEDAR 91 spiny lobster in  
17 particular, we did have two, both on the SSC, but recognized stock  
18 assessment experts, Jason Cope and Eric Williams. And that's kind  
19 of different than sometimes what you see in an assessment workshop.

20  
21 So, not always during the assessment phase, even though it's the  
22 modeling part, and we're talking about those assessment models,  
23 not always do you have reviewers at that phase that are at the  
24 level of Jason and Eric. So, there is that going for 91. So, I'm  
25 pretty confident in their ability to take things in.

26  
27 And they, you know, they both happen to be NOAA, but they're not  
28 going to pull any punches, not those two guys. If they think we  
29 were on the wrong track, they weren't-- and part of the reason for  
30 them being involved is to get us on the right track. You know,  
31 it's not to beat up on the model. It's like, "Hey, we think you're  
32 doing the wrong thing here. Let's try something else."

33  
34 So, the whole process is meant to improve the thing, not just  
35 criticize. So, I think in the case of 91, we're on a good path  
36 with that.

37  
38 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. Thank you.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

41  
42 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the  
43 record. Thank you, Julian, for bringing the point of Puerto Rico's  
44 situation. Kevin, I just wanted to know for the number that you  
45 received about the spiny lobster for Puerto Rico, does that number  
46 only include the amount that is caught on federal waters or is it  
47 all within state waters?

48

1 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** It's the whole commercial landings. So, wherever  
2 they caught it, it's part of the total.

3  
4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. And so, knowing that practically 90% of our  
5 spiny lobster came from state waters, not only because the deep  
6 waters that are in the EEZ zone, also because the small boats and  
7 because most of our fishermen in Puerto Rico are divers, is there  
8 any way for us to divide those numbers to see how much was caught  
9 in federal waters?

10  
11 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I think some of those have been estimated. I don't  
12 know if it's completely always clear, but your number is about  
13 right. I think what some of the folks that looked into this found  
14 was that it was about 7% in the EEZ. So, it's pretty close to what  
15 you were saying.

16  
17 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. I have been working as a volunteer with  
18 some of the sampling that has been made during the past years. One  
19 of the things I have in my mind is that I've worked on this since  
20 2011 in one of the main ports of Puerto Rico for lobster,  
21 especially spiny lobster. What we saw was totally different. The  
22 amount of pounds that we move every day, between the numbers and  
23 quota that we have. Especially because our divers, most of them  
24 are from state waters.

25  
26 One of the things in sampling is that a couple of times I have  
27 asked why they are not sampling from the divers, and they are only  
28 sampling from the traps. So, definitely the amount of lobster and  
29 also the size of those lobsters is going to be smaller than the  
30 size that we really receive daily. So, every day we see seven,  
31 eight, up to 11 pounds, sampling of lobsters in those sizes.

32  
33 We know that many of the restaurants are not asking anymore for  
34 the biggest lobster. They are usually asking for two to three-  
35 pound lobsters. So, that's something that the divers keep in mind  
36 when they go out for the spiny lobster. Because we already know  
37 our buyers, the restaurants don't want them.

38  
39 So, is there any way that we can go back and review those numbers  
40 that we have? Because as Julian said, we are really low on the  
41 reality of our spiny lobster in Puerto Rico and what we move daily.  
42 Thanks.

43  
44 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah, just a quick response. So, one of the  
45 challenges when you're dealing with what we'd call fishery  
46 dependent data, right, information coming from the fishery itself,  
47 is caught up in the way the fishery operates, right? So, if there  
48 is a desire to have a particular size of lobster, say, and you

1 don't want it to be too big, you're limited to how small it can be  
2 by the regulations, that tends to give you sort of a size  
3 composition that kind of never changes, right, because of the way  
4 the fishery operates and the and the demand. So, size composition  
5 from the fishery may not be always the best indicator. It may just  
6 be flat.

7  
8 So, what DRNA has found is the catch rate is going up. And so,  
9 that's the thing that we want to look at, because if we can work  
10 it all out, that will be a big informant to the model. Because  
11 there is what we call contrast; it's not just flat. It's doing  
12 something. And so, that's going to be very informative for the  
13 model.

14  
15 That's what we're proposing to work with with Ricardo's staff,  
16 with Daniel. Can we get the data in a way that's going to help  
17 inform the model? So that's what we're going to try. And that's  
18 why we want this delay with the Puerto Rico assessment so that we  
19 can thoroughly investigate that. And I think we have a good way  
20 forward.

21  
22 But you're right. What would be good is a fishery independent  
23 survey where you've got divers, or you've got-- we've got one going  
24 on right now. A trap study where you're going to see the full range  
25 of sizes. Because we're not worried about what the-- If you're  
26 doing a fishery independent survey, you don't care what the  
27 restaurant wants. You're just measuring everything that's out  
28 there. And that's the way to go with getting that complete size  
29 information. And that would be very helpful. And we're working on  
30 it.

31  
32 We've had about eighteen months of sampling and we're moving on to  
33 another year. And as long as funding stays good, we're going to  
34 keep doing it. And that's based in Puerto Rico with the fishers.

35  
36 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you for that, Kevin. I also want to mention  
37 for the record that after 2019 and 2020, we received the migration  
38 from recreational fishermen. That's when they go and make their  
39 license process to go commercial. So, that also increased the  
40 numbers, not only for the paper reports, also in eReporting. That's  
41 why we are seeing the increasing as well.

42  
43 I could say that we have, at least coming back, the new generation  
44 of young fishermen, not only in the West Coast, but in the East  
45 Coast, Vieques and Culebra Island. So, those things are going to  
46 increase the numbers as well, because we are bringing more people  
47 to the fishery. Thanks.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

2  
3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I swear it's the last thing. So, just so that I  
4 give proper recognition. So, Grisel Rodríguez, right, we're  
5 working with her on the recreational side. If they bring back an  
6 animal or they bring back anything that they caught in the ocean,  
7 they're measuring it, and they're getting a count on it. So, that  
8 includes lobsters from the recreational side. And the same is true  
9 with Sennai's group in the Virgin Islands getting at the commercial  
10 and the recreational fleet and the for-hire fleets.

11  
12 So, if they're bringing it back, lobster, oysters, squid, whatever,  
13 they're getting a count and a measurement on it. And recall years  
14 ago when there was the MRIP, the MRF study, if it was a lobster,  
15 they want to measure it. It was only fish. So, this is a big  
16 improvement over that.

17  
18 So, the data are starting to come together. I wish it was five  
19 years from now, and then we'd have all that information, but we're  
20 building it now. And largely, it's the local agencies that are  
21 doing all the work.

22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

24  
25 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.  
26 First of all, Julian, thank you very much for your support of the  
27 Puerto Rico fishers. Thank you to Jesús Rivera for the support.  
28 There have been weeks of intensive reading. I've never read so  
29 many minutes in my life to get this through. We've prepared a  
30 letter that I want to read to you.

31  
32 "Member of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

33  
34 Considering a recent Executive Order from the President of the  
35 United States promoting the fishing industry, it is paradoxical  
36 that we are currently discussing the potential implementation of  
37 accountability measure for spiny lobster. I sincerely hope we are  
38 not disregarding a presidential directive, especially when the  
39 available evidence does not support the notion that spiny lobster  
40 is at risk of overfishing.

41  
42 Since 2019, the number of commercial fishers has increased  
43 significantly, largely due to job displacement caused by the COVID-  
44 19 pandemic. Puerto Rico has lost approximately 1,000,000  
45 residents due to hurricanes, earthquakes, and worsening economic  
46 situation exacerbated by the disasters and the pandemic. This  
47 results in a reduction of price for lobster because there's more  
48 lobster than people buying. For that reason, lobster fishers had

1 to reduce the volume of lobster harvested per trip to avoid market  
2 saturation, which would severely impact their income.  
3 Unfortunately, we continue to face long lasting challenges in  
4 fisheries' management.

5  
6 The increase in fishers has not been matched by a corresponding  
7 increase in enforcement personnel. We lack clarity on the impact  
8 of the correction factor on total lobster catch, whether it  
9 positively or negatively affects the stock assessment. Enforcement  
10 remains a critical issue, and while we now have an electronic data  
11 collection system that has improved the reporting of fishing trips,  
12 it does not fully address the system gaps.

13  
14 Concerns about the accuracy of the annual catch limit have  
15 persisted since the SEDAR 57 assessment and its 2022 update. The  
16 ACL was notably lower than those calculated between 2011 and 2020.  
17 Key issues include the absence of local biological data, unreliable  
18 abundance indices and underestimated recruitment rates. Despite  
19 this concern, the decision was made to proceed with the assessment.

20  
21 The SSC recommend a new assessment, SEDAR 91, incorporating the  
22 updated age and growth data on a trap study by Doctor Gedamke.  
23 However, it is unclear whether this data was included and  
24 regrettably by the review process has been cancelled.

25  
26 This leaves us with only one path forward, demonstrating improved  
27 data collection and monitoring by NMFS. Fisher have consistently  
28 supported the Council initiative including new management plans,  
29 regulatory compatibility, and even promoting elimination of  
30 certain fishing gear to protect the marine species and ecosystems.  
31 However, the only guaranteed outcome of implementing an  
32 accountability measure under current conditions is an increase in  
33 imports, which benefit large importers while harming the  
34 socioeconomic aspect of the fishing communities. It's risk eroding  
35 trust between fishers, scientists, and managers, potentially  
36 compromising catch reporting, scientific collaboration, and most  
37 concerning the credibility and support of the Caribbean Fishery  
38 Management Council to the fishing community.

39  
40 Given that, according to SERO, only 4% of the spinning lobster  
41 catch occurs in federal waters and 96% in state water. I strongly  
42 believe that this species should be managed at the local level. I  
43 hope these measures are not part of a hidden agenda aimed at  
44 restricting our livelihood through closure or other accountability  
45 mechanisms.

46  
47 To be absolutely clear, Puerto Rico's lobster fishers do not  
48 support enacting more intrusive regulation that will lead to

1 economic hardship for our local fishing industry without rigorous  
2 and clear scientific evidence to support such regulation.

3  
4 Thank you very much for your attention.”

5  
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Crespo. Andy?

7  
8 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. Thanks, Carlos. So, this has been a good  
9 discussion and appreciate all the comments around this. So, I think  
10 we have a path forward for the science right now in terms of SEDAR  
11 91. My recommendation is for María to go through a quick discussion  
12 of the accountability measures and then we can kind of wrap this  
13 up and take a break before we move on to the next topic, if you're  
14 good with that.

15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Maria?

17  
18 **EVALUATING ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR THE SPINY**  
19 **LOBSTER STOCK IN PUERTO RICO FEDERAL WATERS, NOAA FISHERIES,**  
20 **SERO**

21  
22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. Okay. Alright. So, nope. This is  
23 the wrong one. So, if you can please put the accountability  
24 measures for the spiny lobster. Okay. Can you go to the next slide,  
25 please?

26  
27 So, some of the topics that I was planning to discuss in this  
28 presentation in the first few slides had to do with the overfishing  
29 determination, but that is something that Andy Strelcheck already  
30 discussed in terms of what are the Council responsibilities and  
31 NMFS responsibilities. So, I'm just going to focus, at this time,  
32 on the second bullet here, annual catch limit overages,  
33 accountability measures, and NMFS and Council responsibilities.

34  
35 This is kind of like an outline. This is going to be a short  
36 presentation. What are the current AMs and why are they not working  
37 for the Puerto Rico spiny lobster and what needs to be done?

38  
39 We can consider some options to change AMs. We can consider, also,  
40 additional management measures to end overfishing, which is  
41 something that we will set aside for now, right, because we're  
42 waiting for SEDAR 91. And other ongoing stock assessment, which we  
43 already discussed. And the new catch advice that is expected from  
44 there.

45  
46 So, this is meant to start the conversation. So, we can go to the  
47 next slide. And let's move to the next one. This is overfishing  
48 what I talked about earlier that Andy already discussed. Can we go

1 to the next one? Next one. And the next. I apologize for that.  
2 Okay. Let's stay here.

3  
4 Let's see here. Okay. So, this is basically a summary of what are  
5 the responsibilities and the requirements for annual catch limit  
6 and accountability measures. So, Section 303(a)(15) of the  
7 Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the FMP to establish a mechanism for  
8 specifying ACLs at a level that ensures overfishing does not occur  
9 in the fishery, including measures to ensure accountability. So,  
10 what do we do for that? For spiny lobster, the ACL is based on the  
11 combined federal and territorial landings reported by Puerto Rico  
12 commercial fishermen, and NMFS uses those data to monitor landings  
13 relative to that reference points.

14  
15 The ACLs for Puerto Rico were first established in 2012 and then  
16 revised in the Puerto Rico FMP implemented in 2022. ACLs for spiny  
17 lobster were again revised through Framework Action 1, which was  
18 implemented in 2023 and later on through Framework Action 2, which  
19 was in 2024.

20  
21 In terms of annual catch limit monitoring, commercial landing for  
22 spiny lobster in Puerto Rico are not monitored in-season, only  
23 post-season. Recreational landings are not currently monitored or  
24 reported. The commercial and recreational sectors are managed  
25 under stock ACL and a post-season accountability measure for the  
26 entire stocks. That means that that AM applies for the whole entire  
27 stock, recreational and commercial sectors.

28  
29 The commercial landings are provided by the Puerto Rico Department  
30 of Natural Environmental Resources, and we know that they  
31 experience a one-to-two-year delay in availability. Puerto Rico  
32 landings are adjusted using an expansion factor, which is  
33 determined by the DNER, which is based on intercept sampling of  
34 commercial fishermen. Next slide.

35  
36 So, why are we discussing the spiny lobster today? Well, the MSA  
37 or the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that AMs be established for  
38 all federally managed stocks. These AMs are management controls to  
39 prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct or mitigate  
40 overages of the ACL if they occur.

41  
42 Now, as we know, AMs are separated into two parts, the trigger,  
43 which is what activates the AM, and the application, which is the  
44 corrective actions that is applied because the ACL was exceeded.  
45 So, this is what the current AM for spiny lobster says. "For the  
46 spiny lobster stocks, the most recent 3-year average landings are  
47 compared to the average ACLs during that same time period. If  
48 average landings exceed the average ACL and the exceedance is due

1 to increased catch and not enhanced reporting, then NMFS will  
2 reduce the length of the fishing season within the current fishing  
3 year by the amount necessary to prevent average landings from  
4 exceeding the ACL for the current fishing year.”

5  
6 Now, as you all know, that AM based closure only applies to the  
7 federal waters around Puerto Rico, which is nine to 200 nautical  
8 miles. And you also know that the vast majority of that harvest  
9 occurs in state waters, which remains open to harvest of spiny  
10 lobster.

11  
12 The issue is that applying an AM that closes harvest in federal  
13 waters is not sufficient to fully constrain total spiny lobster  
14 landings to the applicable ACL, and, as you know as well, unless  
15 there are compatible regulations in state waters. Now, let's go to  
16 the next slide.

17  
18 So, this slide is just to show you-- I know we cannot see it very  
19 well. At least I can't. It's just to show you the comparison  
20 between the landings that come from federal, state, and unknown  
21 areas for the period of 2012 and 2023. With the blue being federal  
22 waters, which is the less amount, then state waters, which is the  
23 green, and then unknown, which, as you can see, there is more  
24 landings that are unknown at the end, and this is because there  
25 are some issues with the e-Reporting. The landings that come from  
26 the eReporting they are not capturing where the lobster is being  
27 landed.

28  
29 So, this is just to give you an idea of the discrepancies among  
30 the three areas in terms of where lobster is being reported that  
31 is being fished from. Next slide.

32  
33 Now in this slide, we wanted to show you the ACL average that's  
34 had happened in recent years. So, we have in 2016, the fishery in  
35 federal waters was closed for twenty-two days. In 2017, it was  
36 closed for twenty-four days. In 2019, there was no closure due to  
37 hurricane recovery. In 2020, there was no closure due to pandemic  
38 and earthquakes. In 2021, the fishery was closed forty days. In  
39 2022, it was closed eighty-one days. In 2024, there was no closure  
40 due to delays in data.

41  
42 In 2025, which is currently the three-year average of the most  
43 recent commercial landings of Puerto Rico's spiny lobster exceeded  
44 the three-year average of the applicable ACLs, which is what Andy  
45 explained to you earlier. And that exceedance was attributed to  
46 increases in harvest rather than improved data collection of  
47 monitoring. However, if you see this based on current harvest  
48 patterns, it is expected that landings will continue to exceed the

1 applicable ACL under current regulations. And this is something  
2 that we have been discussing throughout the whole entire day for  
3 all of the reasons that the Council has been mentioning and  
4 participants have been mentioning throughout the day. So, let's go  
5 to the next slide.

6  
7 Now, National Standard 1 guidelines state that if the ACL is  
8 exceeded more than once in a four-year period, then the system of  
9 ACLs and AMs should be reevaluated and modified as necessary to  
10 improve its performance and effectiveness. Because of the recent  
11 overages of the ACL, in addition to time lags in receiving  
12 commercial landings data, the Council and NMFS need to consider  
13 new management measures and alternatives to the current AM to  
14 ensure that ACLs are not exceeded on a regular basis.

15  
16 Now let's keep in mind, as we talked earlier, that SEDAR 91 for  
17 Puerto Rico, San Croix and San Thomas is currently in progress and  
18 that if accepted for management use, the result from that SEDAR  
19 91, including an updated ACL, would be considered as best  
20 scientific information, again, if accepted for management, for the  
21 spiny lobster stock and could be incorporated into an amendment to  
22 each one of the FMPs.

23  
24 So, we also talked about, as Andy mentioned earlier, that for  
25 Puerto Rico, I'm sorry, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the SSC will be  
26 discussing the assessment in September, and then there were going  
27 to be other information that is going to be reviewed for the SEDAR  
28 91 for Puerto Rico, and then it will be reviewed later on for the  
29 SSC.

30  
31 So many of the things that need to be done with the spiny lobster  
32 are going to be pending, right, the results or what comes and what  
33 information comes from the SEDAR 91. However, as you see from this  
34 slide and from the discussion that we have been having, we have a  
35 responsibility to revise the system of AMs to improve the  
36 effectiveness. So, give me one moment here. Okay, go to the Next  
37 slide, please.

38  
39 Okay, so based on all the discussions that we have been having  
40 today, so rather than presenting options to modify both the trigger  
41 and a corrective action, we would like to hear from the Council  
42 ideas on how to address the issue. And we're talking specifically  
43 about the issue for the accountability measures, knowing that the  
44 assessment is out there, right?

45  
46 So, we wanted to put this out there, and what this slide is showing  
47 as potential options to modify the trigger. Right now, you know,  
48 the trigger is when the average landings from the most recent three

1 years exceed the average ACLs in place during those years, and  
2 then it's determined that it's due to increased catch and not  
3 enhanced reporting. And I'm not talking about the action that is  
4 implemented, the corrective action. I'm talking about what  
5 triggers, what creates those events that right now the way that it  
6 is said, it closes the fishery.

7  
8 So, this slide is showing you, like it says, number one, no action,  
9 what we currently do right now. And it has some pros and then some  
10 cons that you already know about. So, one of the good things about  
11 this one is it's already established. We don't have to do anything  
12 else. However, one of the things that doesn't work for it is that  
13 if landings data are not available in a timely manner, then the  
14 monitoring occurs later in the year and may not be able to  
15 constrain landings as needed.

16  
17 As you know, we were recently only able to obtain the data in a  
18 way that we could be used for monitoring, just recently. So, that  
19 means that if there is a closure, we only have a certain amount of  
20 time that could be used for this closure until the end of the year  
21 and that is not ideal. That amount of time may not be enough to  
22 constrain landings as needed.

23  
24 Another option that the Council could consider is to trigger an AM  
25 if the ACL is exceeded, using the trigger that we have in process,  
26 which is the exceedance of the average of the landings, and the  
27 fishery dependent abundance trend, that means it could be size  
28 composition or CPUE, is declining over the same time period.

29  
30 So, you have two things in here and that fishery dependent  
31 abundance trend, you know, based on the information that we would  
32 have available, and this is something that will require the IPT to  
33 work with the Science Center and the Department of Natural  
34 Environmental Resources to determine what information is  
35 available. It would be an opportunity to include information that  
36 comes from the fishery that could help explain why those landings  
37 are declining over the time period that is being evaluated.

38  
39 So, what are the pros of this option? It uses additional data to  
40 inform the trigger that may better reflect the actual condition  
41 and trends of the spiny lobster population. What are the cons of  
42 this option? That fishery dependent data for spiny lobster is  
43 limited, may be insufficient, may not be timely, or similarly,  
44 annual differences in lobster size might not be substantial due to  
45 existing limits.

46  
47 So, this is just an option of something that could be done instead  
48 of the current process that we have. Something that can be added

1 to it that would consider the information that may already be out  
2 there, that may have already been collected that could be utilized  
3 for this AM process. Okay, just go to the next slide, please.

4  
5 As I mentioned earlier, rather than going through a document and  
6 putting up there options of what to do instead of closing the  
7 fishery the way that we're doing it, because we know this is a  
8 conversation that needs a little bit more discussion than just  
9 throwing options in there, right? We need to take this opportunity  
10 to, as a Council, discuss what would you like to see, understanding  
11 that we do have a responsibility to implement accountability  
12 measures, but those accountability measures have to make sense.  
13 They have to work in constraining those landings and the way to do  
14 this is something that we'll have to discuss.

15  
16 So, I think the next step will be for an IPT to amend the FMP to  
17 address, obviously there's going to be a part that will be  
18 addressing the SEDAR 91 stock assessment. Whatever comes out of  
19 that, there's management advice that would prompt for changing,  
20 for modifying reference points. And maybe in that same amendment,  
21 we can adjust AMs to, like I said, something that will work better  
22 for this fishery.

23  
24 The Council can also discuss a timeline for the development of the  
25 action and options to be included in the amendment. Are there any  
26 options you would like to consider for addressing overfishing? We  
27 already talked about overfishing. There are several tools that are  
28 in the management toolbox that can be discussed. However, I think  
29 that it's something that we can keep in mind, but let's wait until  
30 the SEDAR 91 continues its course and it's discussed, etcetera.

31  
32 But in terms of the accountability measures, are there additional  
33 ideas you have for adjusting accountability measures? So that's  
34 what we would like to discuss today. This was a short presentation,  
35 just something that we need to consider, keep in mind, and aligns  
36 very well with everything else that we have this been discussing  
37 about the spiny lobster. That's it.

38  
39 Thanks.

#### 40 41 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo?

44  
45 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. María, I got two questions.  
46 Can you go back to the to the table that you presented? You said  
47 that the gray ones are from unknown, can you explain that to me?  
48 about the gray ones.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Unknown.  
3  
4 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi. This is Sarah. I'll take a stab at that.  
5 So, when we get the data, I've noticed that the eReported landings,  
6 the package that we get, that data field is not filled out. It's  
7 just blank.  
8  
9 So, that means when we're making graphs like this, we just code it  
10 as unknown. But in talking to Vanessa, I've realized that that  
11 information is available. I just need to work with the Science  
12 Center to make sure that the chunk of data that we get that we  
13 then crunch has that information.  
14  
15 So, I think it's available. It just wasn't at the time that we  
16 prepared this graph. So, it's likely going to turn out that those  
17 gray bars are probably green, but we just need to work on that.  
18  
19 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yeah. Thank you. Because it's weird to me because  
20 we often use the electronic reporting and if you don't fill out  
21 all the requirements on each page, they don't allow you to pass to  
22 the next step. So, I think that, how you said it, that information  
23 has to be available. And can you go to the last slide?  
24  
25 Regarding the planning teams, who's going to be part of that team  
26 if it's established?  
27  
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah, so the planning team is something that  
29 is created every time that there's an action, an amendment to a  
30 fishery management plan. Okay?  
31  
32 So, the interdisciplinary planning team is composed of staff from  
33 NMFS and from the Council. It usually has from NMFS, a plan  
34 coordinator, which in the case of the Caribbean would be either  
35 Sarah or myself, will have somebody from General Counsel, which  
36 will be Anne or Kate. We will have OLE, which would usually be  
37 Miguel Borges or one of his colleagues. It will be either Graciela  
38 or Liajay from the Council. We will have an economist, which will  
39 be an economist from NOAA Fisheries SERO and an economist from the  
40 Council, a social scientist from NMFS, and another one from the  
41 Council.  
42  
43 We would also have somebody from NOAA Fisheries Protected  
44 Resources, and somebody from NOAA Fisheries Habitat Conservation.  
45 This is because many of the actions that involve changing  
46 management measures may or may not have effects either in protected  
47 species or in habitat, etcetera. Depending on the action, we may  
48 have people from different ones too. Am I missing somebody? And

1 then we will have a regulations writer also from the NOAA fisheries  
2 team.

3  
4 This is not something that is created. This is something that we  
5 always do whenever there is an amendment. And the idea for the  
6 IPT-- sorry, I want to say a couple more things.

7  
8 So, the IPT has the task to take the information that comes from  
9 the Council, the mandates from the Council. The Council says,  
10 "Let's start working on an options paper. We want the option papers  
11 to include this and that" or "Bring me back some actions," then we  
12 start with that. We all sit down, we discuss, we go through  
13 whatever the Council discussed, and then we start developing  
14 options. And as part of the options, we also analyze what are the  
15 environmental effects of each one of those options. And then we  
16 bring all of that back to the Council, including the economic  
17 analysis, social analysis, etcetera, based on the information that  
18 we have.

19  
20 I'm sorry, I forgot to say that we also have a scientist from the  
21 Science Center-- I apologize for that --within this process. And  
22 then they also review the information and the data and provide the  
23 data that we will be using.

24  
25 So, we will have access to the data that is provided by the DNER  
26 or the DPNR provided by the Science Center. And then we bring all  
27 of that. Whenever you see us with a presentation here saying,  
28 "option 1, these are the pros, these are the cons," or "these are  
29 the effects," all of that came from an IPT.

30  
31 The idea is to bring everything in front of the Council so that  
32 the Council can make an informed decision by weighing all of the  
33 different effects.

34  
35 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you. External people cannot be part of that  
36 team?

37  
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** No. This is a team that is part of NOAA  
39 Fisheries and the Council. However, the Council benefits from  
40 inputs by their advisory panels and from persons from the public,  
41 right? So that's why there's the District Advisory Panels and the  
42 SSC and they provide recommendations to the Council so that they  
43 can incorporate that onto their documents. They also have public  
44 comments, and the public can comment on anything and all of those  
45 things are considered by the IPT when they're creating the  
46 document.

47  
48 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** What's next? The next steps? Andy?  
3  
4 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, you've heard, obviously, some ideas  
5 with regard to the accountability measure trigger. We thought that  
6 would obviously be at least beneficial, not only looking at  
7 landings data, but trends in the fishery. So, if you're okay with  
8 that or if you have other ideas, we'd like to hear that. And then  
9 if you would want us to proceed, we would, you know, want a motion  
10 essentially to establish the IPT and move forward with an  
11 accountability measures amendment.

12  
13 One other thing I'll add is I think it would be worth-- so right  
14 now, because of the timing of when we get the Puerto Rico DNER  
15 data, that any sort of accountability measure rather than being,  
16 you know, triggered in the fishing year in which we are getting  
17 that data, because it often comes in middle to two thirds of way  
18 through the year, that we actually started it on January 1 in terms  
19 of any accountability measures or implement the accountability  
20 measure for the following year on January 1. Just suggesting that  
21 for consideration. We don't have to obviously adopt that, but I  
22 think it's worth evaluating from a timing perspective.

23  
24 **SENNAI HABTES:** María, Sarah, can I just ask a question? You  
25 indicated we don't believe that the trigger is being caused by  
26 increased reporting. Do we have a good idea from the landings data  
27 and trends, what is triggering the overfishing? Is it increased  
28 landings that is, and it's been a trend that we're seeing with an  
29 increase in landings occurring regularly. Right?

30  
31 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Right. And so, that's obviously why SEDAR 91 is  
32 important because is that trend in landings increasing because  
33 more people are going on harvesting lobster, and they're more  
34 abundant. Right? And is the abundance up because of increased  
35 recruitment or other factors? So, we need to obviously understand  
36 all that, because our catch limits could be set too low relative  
37 to the current size of the population, and we're triggering an  
38 overfishing determination simply based on the catch limit being  
39 exceeded or the overfishing limit being exceeded.

40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo.

42  
43 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Ricardo, for the record. Dr. Sennai, I  
44 want to answer part of your question. Yes. It could be triggered  
45 because we are getting close to the ACL. But, also, what I  
46 discussed with Kevin and Andy is that it also could be triggered  
47 because the ACL is not well calculated. And that is my concern  
48 that the basic statistic to calculate the ACL, one of it is an

1 abundance estimate. And as far as I know, we don't have an  
2 abundance estimate of the deep-water and all the habitats that we  
3 have in Puerto Rico in federal waters.

4  
5 I can understand that in the past we didn't have the technology to  
6 do that. I guess that now with the different robot types of  
7 machines and the new technology, the RVs and all that, we can do  
8 an effort to start calculating and storing the habitat of the  
9 lobster deeper. Where we don't have divers, we cannot use cage  
10 traps. That is an unknown for us. We don't know how many lobsters  
11 we have in the in the complete habitat. So, what I'm asking for is  
12 for a better representative sample of the abundance, mostly.  
13 Thanks.

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I got Sabater.

16  
17 **ROBERTO SABATER:** In these samplings-- I used to dive. I remember  
18 we used to use a speargun. Okay? Now you have to use a nozzle.  
19 Now, when did we change the way we measure from pounds to specimen?  
20 And like she was saying, now we choose what we want to get. We  
21 don't get what is not going to be sold.

22  
23 So, is the data that we have scoped in the same page as how the  
24 fishermen are collecting a specimen to be sold. Are they letting  
25 the big ones stay there and just taking the little ones? And that's  
26 why the big ones are reproducing more, so we have more lobster now  
27 than before and then our limits are too low.

28  
29 I think that's something that we should check out to see if our  
30 data is correct.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

33  
34 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Miguel, did you want to respond to that? Okay.

35  
36 So, a couple things going back to Sennai's question. So, the  
37 straightforward way to say, is it better reporting? Is to look at  
38 the reporting forms back in the day when we set the ACLs, and I  
39 was on the SSC when that happened, and we had landings from that  
40 time that may or may not have had the species on the form.

41  
42 If the species was not on the form back then when the ACL was set,  
43 it was likely set too low, right, because it entirely relied on  
44 write ins for that species. So, if it wasn't on the form then and  
45 it's on the form now and they exceeded the ACL, that's better  
46 reporting. Anything else, we don't know.

47  
48 Getting at Ricardo's comments, and we spoke about this at lunch

1 too, but just for the group. With the fishery independent trap  
2 survey that we have ongoing now in Puerto Rico, the intent is to  
3 sample all lobster habitat, deep, shallow, wherever we can,  
4 wherever we are likely to have lobster habitat.

5  
6 And as far as the-- I mean, the fishers would have to answer if  
7 they're doing any sort of grading on the boat and putting the large  
8 lobsters back because there's no market for them. That's what I  
9 hear, but they're better qualified to answer that than I am.

10  
11 But the TIP sampling should be-- So, the dock side sampling for  
12 sizes should be getting a representative sample of everybody who's  
13 coming in. It shouldn't matter what the gear is. They're not  
14 sampling absolutely everybody, but they should be sampling, a  
15 representative way. And my understanding is that's what's  
16 happening. But if they're but if the fishers are grading to get a  
17 particular size range of lobsters, then that's what they're going  
18 to see.

19  
20 But fishery independent sampling should allow for all sizes of  
21 lobsters that are occurring in the population to be sampled,  
22 because they're going to measure everything to catch, because  
23 they're not worried about selling it.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I have exactly that question for Kevin.  
28 When do you think that report of that study would be available?  
29 2026? 2027?

30  
31 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Which study are we talking about?

32  
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The one that you mentioned. The survey.

34  
35 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Oh, so that's going to be ongoing. So, we have the  
36 results from the first year, which probably the first round of  
37 sampling maybe took about eighteen months. That was just a setup  
38 and dealing with the logistics of working with the fishers and  
39 getting everybody out there. So, we didn't have a standardized  
40 trap design. They could fish whatever they wanted. We just wanted  
41 to get it going.

42  
43 Now, there's a standardized trap design agreed to by all the  
44 fishers. In fact, they designed it. So, everybody's using the same  
45 design. We have a standard trap that has the regulation size mesh,  
46 and then we have another trap that has smaller mesh with the  
47 intention of catching the small lobster because the whole idea is  
48 to have a recruit index. You know, would these small lobsters next

1 year or in two years are going to molt and be legal size. So, we're  
2 trying to get a recruit index. So, the first year that is happening  
3 now.

4  
5 So, they're building the traps or maybe they're already built.  
6 Once we get through hurricane season, they're going to put them in  
7 the water, and we'll get our first true survey year in.

8  
9 But we do have information from the survey. It was incorporated  
10 into, SEDAR 91 for the size composition because they measured  
11 everything that came on the boat. But we didn't have a standard  
12 trap then so it's not exactly part of the time series yet, but it  
13 is providing useful information that was included in the  
14 assessment.

15  
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, thank you, Kevin. Yeah, my point is that  
17 until we have that information, we're stuck with action one. So,  
18 we want to make sure that everybody understand that we need to  
19 abide by the law of the regulation that we have so far. And one of  
20 the reasons we have this issue with the ACL is because the fishermen,  
21 decided that they only report 50% of what they catch, and I had  
22 that on record from the DAP in Puerto Rico. They were laughing  
23 about it, but you're going to be shooting yourself in the foot.  
24 Okay. We have that.

25  
26 So, option two, we need to have that report or a similar report in  
27 order for us to move forward with that, option two. When we had  
28 the first management plan of the spiny lobster, we compared the  
29 data that was collected by Puerto Rico and the Virgin Island that  
30 was sent to the fisheries, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
31 for report. And, also, we had a biologist fisher who took the areas  
32 around Puerto Rico that had habitat that could be used by lobster  
33 that were already at the first age in the fishery. The size of the  
34 lobster that can be caught by the fishing gear.

35  
36 It was amazing because he came within a few pounds to the same  
37 maximum sustainable level that we got. At that time, I was a member  
38 of the task team for the spiny lobster. But that was a long time  
39 ago. I don't think that we can use that approach again, although  
40 it could be useful to somebody get the habitat that is available  
41 for lobster and see if we can have an estimate of the availability  
42 of lobster.

43  
44 Also, you guys discussed this some years ago, and five fisher who  
45 visit our office committed themselves to catch the lobster,  
46 actually, they were catching it, but to send all the information  
47 to the fishery research laboratory. Carlos Velasquez was the first  
48 one who did it.

1  
2 They sent the information to the laboratory, and then he's still  
3 waiting for the report. Something happened, it disappeared. At  
4 that time, we had three of the top catchers of fish, fishermen in  
5 Puerto Rico, and they all agreed that the size that they had was  
6 way beyond the 3.5 carapace length. They were saying that the  
7 abundance of the lobster indicated to them that it was a healthy  
8 fishery.

9  
10 So, anyway, all this is to make sure that for the record, this is  
11 a process that we're having, but probably in 2026, we will have  
12 another closure unless we have better information that will address  
13 the issue that we have now with the AM. So, for 2025, we have the  
14 AM in Puerto Rico. 2026, unless we have some more information and  
15 the situation is similar to what we have here, we will have another  
16 closure in the EEZ in 2026.

17  
18 So, I don't want to rain in neighborhood parade, but we have to be  
19 mindful about the regulations, the information that we have, and  
20 what we can do.

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, are we going to do this motion to  
23 create an IPT for SEDAR 91? I hear you.

24  
25 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, Cristina or Liajay, can you just leave up the  
26 presentation with the two options on the screen for a minute? Just  
27 for discussion.

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

30  
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I mean, based on the available data, it doesn't  
32 seem to me like option two would be likely. Like, I don't know if  
33 we have enough from either, fishery dependent or independent to  
34 develop, you know, that way of monitoring the trigger for the AM.

35  
36 So, you know, I think it would be difficult and may not really be  
37 an appropriate way of identifying if that's looking at the  
38 population. And, you know, if we're going with the best available  
39 science to make our management decisions, I really don't-- I have  
40 not been able to come up with another AM that we could enact. So,  
41 based on what's available to us, I think no action would likely be  
42 the best available option.

43  
44 I would also recommend though if we are going with that, that we  
45 take Andy's recommendation to move the accountability measure to  
46 the following year given how long it takes to compile the data  
47 from the dependent monitoring to make that identification of the  
48 AM being triggered?

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?  
3  
4 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. The size composition data is obviously  
5 more readily available for use. I agree in terms of a catch per  
6 unit effort index for Puerto Rico that's under exploration, right?  
7 So that's something that may be viable. We're not certain.  
8  
9 You know, I think it's something that the IPT could continue to  
10 explore, and we could come back to you in December or April next  
11 year, depending on timing and advise, on whether we think that is  
12 something the Science Center, SSC, others would recommend moving  
13 forward with or not. But I don't think I'd want to eliminate it  
14 right now if we can figure out something.  
15  
16 And then, we're not suggesting changing the accountability  
17 measures for U.S.V.I. at this point. Right? It'd just be for Puerto  
18 Rico.  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?  
21  
22 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I would remind everyone, we've got fishery  
23 dependent abundance trend up there, but right now the one fishery  
24 independent survey that we've got, that is of a sufficient length  
25 of time, is the NCRMP dive survey. Right? That's been used-- they  
26 don't look at lobster, but they look at reef fish. So, and all of  
27 the recent assessments of fish that has been included as part of  
28 the data for analysis. And they look at a whole lot of different  
29 species. Many of them are not managed, but many of them are.  
30  
31 So, may be abundance trend data there. It's fishery independent,  
32 which in some ways is an advantage, compared to fishery dependent  
33 because we've talked about it a little bit, but it is another data  
34 source that could be considered. It's not going to work for  
35 everything, but it could work for some.  
36  
37 I would also point out that as I mentioned earlier today, SEDAR  
38 103 is looking at different ways to analyze the available data.  
39 And I know that when we talk here in the Caribbean, especially me,  
40 you know, things are almost there. They're almost there. I know  
41 that's frustrating, but, you know, the Gulf has a lot of these  
42 things in place, but they didn't thirty years ago. So, they were  
43 at the almost their stage too. Ahat's kind of where we are for a  
44 lot of things. A lot of things are coming online. It doesn't solve  
45 your immediate problem.  
46  
47 There is this review that's going to happen in the next year. It's  
48 scheduled for next spring. So, we'll have some recommended ways to

1 provide additional information for this Council. But one that is  
2 already online is the NCRMP data, the dive survey data. So that's  
3 another thing to look at.

4  
5 So, whether or not you want to leave it as fishery dependent  
6 abundance trend or make that more general, that's up to you. But  
7 that information is there. Again, it won't be informative for  
8 everything, but it will be for some species.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

11  
12 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Well, I'd like to make a motion unless there's  
13 questions. Alright. *Motion would be to develop an amendment to the*  
14 *U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico FMPs to address the SEDAR 91 stock*  
15 *assessments. And modify Puerto Rico accountability measures for*  
16 *spiny lobster.*

17  
18 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, we don't need to identify a specific action to  
19 take in terms of AMs between one or two at this moment? Alright.

20  
21 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** I mean, if there's anything that you are opposed  
22 to that wouldn't want to be considered at this point, then we'd  
23 like to hear that now. But otherwise, we'll bring back an options  
24 paper or a draft that you can consider further.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, I need a second before we discuss it. Is  
27 there a second to the motion?

28  
29 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, I second.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. The motion is to develop an amendment to  
32 the U.S.V.I., and PR FMPs to address the SEDAR 91 stock assessment  
33 and modify Puerto Rico's accountability measures for spiny  
34 lobster. Motion by Andy, second by Sennai. Discussion? Julian?

35  
36 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just a suggestion. Julian Magras, for the record.  
37 I think it should be two separate motions. The Puerto Rico issue  
38 should be the Puerto Rico issue, and then the FMPs should be the  
39 FMPs. At least, I think it would read clearer. I don't know how  
40 you guys feel. Just a suggestion.

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

43  
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Actually, you only need one that's why I said the  
45 Council's desire is already complied with there. You can go either  
46 way. But this one, you are saying to develop an amendment to the  
47 U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico. Those will be separate. Remember, the  
48 amendment goes to each one of the FMPs that we have. We cannot

1 have an amendment for everything.  
2  
3 So, what you're saying here is that you have to look at the  
4 U.S.V.I., Puerto Rico. In the case of U.S.V.I., you have Saint  
5 Croix, Saint Thomas/Saint John and Puerto Rico. Those three plans  
6 have to be considered for any possible amendments.  
7  
8 Liajay, the spiny lobster es en minúsculas.  
9  
10 Any further discussion y que voten.  
11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? Okay. Well, roll call  
13 vote. Roberto?  
14  
15 **ROBERTO SABATER:** What is your question again?  
16  
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Aye or nay?  
18  
19 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.  
20  
21 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, Aye.  
22  
23 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** I abstain.  
24  
25 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, abstain.  
26  
27 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, yes.  
28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlo Farchette, yes.  
30  
31 Two abstentions. María? No. That's-- Oh, okay.  
32  
33 *So, we have two abstentions, four yes. Any nays? Hearing none.*  
34 *Motion carries.*  
35  
36 María?  
37  
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to clarify  
39 what this means in case there are some questions. So, the amendment  
40 to the Saint Thomas/Saint John FMP and the Saint Croix FMP and the  
41 Puerto Rico FMP to address the SEDAR 91 is because when the SEDAR  
42 91 assessment is reviewed by the SSC, and if there is a  
43 recommendation that the results from the assessment are acceptable  
44 for management advice, that means that new reference points are  
45 going to come after that and then new ACLs, right, at the end that  
46 the Council recommends. So, that will need an amendment to be  
47 developed so those numbers can be implemented. Okay, so that's one  
48 thing.

1  
2 And the other thing that we were just discussing is that the  
3 Council needs to modify the accountability measures for the spiny  
4 lobster for Puerto Rico so they can better constraint catches to  
5 the ACL based on the discussion that we had before. So, the SEDAR  
6 91 is going to be-- this is just a recap.

7  
8 SEDAR 91 is going to be discussed by the SSC for Saint Thomas/Saint  
9 John, Saint Croix in September. And then there are going to be  
10 other processes that are going to be done with the data. The  
11 Science Center is going to be working with that in SEDAR. And then  
12 that means that the SSC is not going to be looking at the Puerto  
13 Rico in September, but later on.

14  
15 So, I just wanted to bring that to your attention, so you know  
16 what to expect and what the staff is going to be working on. Also,  
17 we are going to be working on, the IPT is going to be working on  
18 an options paper related to accountability measures, of course,  
19 taking into consideration what's coming out the SEDAR 91. Thanks.

20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to take a ten-minute break.

22  
23 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Let's get going.

26  
27 **SENNAI HABTES:** Carlos. You got a gavel?

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The mighty Thor.

30  
31 So, next thing on the agenda is the Discussion on Potential Options  
32 for Revising Accountability Measures for Pelagic Species in the  
33 U.S. Caribbean Federal Waters. SERO.

34  
35 **DISCUSSION ON POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR REVISING ACCOUNTABILITY**  
36 **MEASURES FOR PELAGIC SPECIES IN US CARIBBEAN FEDERAL WATERS--NOAA**  
37 **FISHERIES, SERO**

38  
39 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good afternoon, everybody. This is the last  
40 presentation of the afternoon. We're going to be talking about  
41 modification of accountability measures for pelagic stocks that  
42 are managed under each one of the Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, and  
43 Saint John, and Saint Croix fishery management plans. Next slide.

44  
45 So, why is the Council discussing accounting measures for Pelagic  
46 stocks? As you know, the Pelagic stocks under each one of the FMPs  
47 are new to federal management. For Puerto Rico, the Pelagic stocks  
48 that are federally managed include dolphinfish, pompano

1 dolphinfish, wahoo, little tunny, blackfin tuna, king mackerel,  
2 cero mackerel, great barracuda, and the tripletail. For Saint Croix  
3 and in Saint Thomas/Saint John, under each one of the FMPs, the  
4 pelagic species that are managed under those plants are just  
5 dolphinfish and wahoo.

6  
7 So, the Council relied on existing landings data to develop  
8 management reference points for pelagic fish included in those  
9 FMPs. Now, during the reference period of landings that was used  
10 to set those referring points, the data collection for some of  
11 those stocks may have been less complete, likely missing key  
12 temporal and spatial variations in the fisheries.

13  
14 Because of that reason, the Council used a different approach for  
15 setting accountability measures for pelagic stocks until a more  
16 complete understanding of these important fisheries was obtained.  
17 Here I'm singling out the economic and cultural considerations  
18 because those are things that are very important to this fishery  
19 for this particular species. So, next slide.

20  
21 I am in the wrong one. Hold on. Excuse me.

22  
23 Okay. So, as required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Section  
24 303(a)(15), FMPs need to establish a mechanism for specifying ACLs,  
25 which we already did in the island-based FMPs, at the level that  
26 ensures overfishing does not occur in the fishery, including  
27 measures to ensure accountability.

28  
29 So, how were the annual catch limits determined for the species?  
30 They were based on the combined federal and territorial landings  
31 reported by each of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands for  
32 commercial fishermen. These ACL for pelagic stocks were first  
33 implemented in 2022, as I mentioned, through the fishery management  
34 plans, island-based fishery management plans.

35  
36 What are the accountability measures for the pelagic stocks, the  
37 ones that are effective right now? What is the trigger and the  
38 application? So, the Council established an annual catch target  
39 that would serve as the AM trigger. Meaning, that once that ACT is  
40 exceeded, NMFS and the Council will determine corrective action.  
41 However, as I mentioned earlier today, no corrective actions are  
42 identified in the regulations, so there is a need for the Council  
43 to specify AM corrective actions when an ACT overage occurs. Next  
44 slide.

45  
46 Okay, so talking a little bit more about the current AM triggers  
47 for pelagic stocks. The ACT was established to address uncertainty  
48 in the landings of this species, all of which are new to management

1 and are consistent with the National Standard 1 guidelines of the  
2 Magnuson-Stevens Act. So, that ACT serves as a target below the  
3 ACL, but it provides stability for fisheries that are apt to  
4 fluctuate around a target catch rate.

5  
6 The ACTs for each of one of these pelagic stocks in all three FMPs  
7 were set at 90% of the applicable ACL and served as the AM trigger.  
8 Again, the AM would be triggered if the applicable landings, for  
9 example, sector landings, as available, that's where Puerto Rico,  
10 exceed the applicable ACT for that stock or stock complex.

11  
12 So, in the case of Puerto Rico, I just wanted to know that when  
13 landings for one sector are not available for comparison to that  
14 sector's ACL and ACT. The ACL and ACT for the sector with the  
15 available landings are the ACL and ACT for the stock or stock  
16 complex. Basically, that's the one that we are going to be using  
17 for monitoring purposes. Next slide.

18  
19 Okay, so this is how the annual catch monitoring process for  
20 pelagic species goes. So, the first step is that as soon as  
21 landings are available each year, SERO, the Southeast Regional  
22 Office, compares each pelagic stock or complex landings to the  
23 applicable ACT. If landings are less than the ACT, then there's no  
24 corrective action. If the landings exceed the ACT, then NMFS  
25 notifies the Council of the overage.

26  
27 The next step, although not required by the AM, it is not specified  
28 on the regulations, we'll still do it, SERO staff sends a summary  
29 memo listing those pelagic stocks with ACT overage to the Science  
30 Center for their review. The same way that they conduct reviews  
31 for reef fish and spiny lobster. And then the next step, NMFS and  
32 the Council discuss and determined appropriate corrective action,  
33 which is something that we are asking the Council at this time to  
34 make decisions on. Okay, next slide.

35  
36 So, let's go to the issue. Need for the Council to specify  
37 corrective actions when an AM is triggered. The recent monitoring  
38 of pelagic species landings has triggered AMs for some species. If  
39 you recall earlier today, I mentioned that for 2025 there were two  
40 pelagic stocks in Puerto Rico that went over their ACT and their  
41 ACL. No corrective actions have been taken to date because there  
42 are no specific corrective actions currently identified in the  
43 regulations.

44  
45 Note that for many of these stocks, both the ACT and the ACL were  
46 exceeded, which may emphasize the need to review the use of an ACT  
47 as to whether it is serving its purpose. That is, we have an ACT  
48 that will be a buffer before the ACL is exceeded, and in many of

1 the cases that ACT has been exceeded too. That's something that  
2 the Council may want to review, if the ACT is fulfilling its  
3 purpose, serving its purpose.

4  
5 Commercial landings of pelagic stocks in Puerto Rico and the  
6 U.S.V.I are not monitored in-season, only post-season. These are  
7 some of the things that we need to keep in consideration when  
8 determining corrective actions. That recreational landings are not  
9 currently monitored or reported for federal management. Commercial  
10 landings experience a one-to-two-year delay in availability for  
11 federal management use. And then the Council may want to consider  
12 removing the ACT and use the ACL as the trigger for the pelagic AM  
13 or implementing other management measures that may constrain  
14 harvest to the ACT or ACL. For instance, NMFS recently implemented  
15 new size limits for dolphin and wahoo that may be sufficient to  
16 constrain touches to the ACT and or ACL. Okay, so let's go to the  
17 next slide.

18  
19 I just want to show you. In this next slide is a summary of ACL  
20 monitoring for pelagic stocks, many of them that exceeded the ACT  
21 or the ACL since implementation of the island-based FMPs. If you  
22 see the first column it has three species, dolphin for Saint  
23 Thomas, barracuda for Puerto Rico, and wahoo for Puerto Rico. And  
24 the year when the determination was made, either, '23, '24 and  
25 '25. The year of landings evaluated, the applicable landings in  
26 pounds, the applicable ACL, the applicable ACT, which is 10% less  
27 than ACL, and the percentage that the ACT went over, and the  
28 percentage that the ACL went over.

29  
30 What I want to show in this graph is that if you see all the three  
31 stocks, all of those three stocks not only went over the ACT, but  
32 most of them were over the ACL in almost all of the year except  
33 for the wahoo in 2022. And this is why we were mentioning earlier  
34 that, you know, that's something that the Council may want to  
35 consider continuing using the ACT. Okay, so next slide.

36  
37 So, these are some options that present alternatives to the current  
38 AM that the Council could consider for the stock to better address  
39 the ACL overages. So, the first one says, potential options if the  
40 ACT is exceeded. This is what we currently have. If the ACL is not  
41 exceeded, then no corrective action is required. If the ACL is  
42 exceeded, remember this is if the ACT is exceeded first and the  
43 ACL is exceeded as well, NMFS implements corrective action as  
44 recommended by the Council. If the corrective action is needed,  
45 NMFS would implement a corrective action as recommended by the  
46 Council through an amendment to the FMP.

47  
48 What are the pros of that? That the AM could be implemented

1 following the years of an overage and would define a clear AM  
2 corrective measure without further consultation with the Council.  
3 This is an option that we could do. It's a little bit different  
4 than what we have right now because right now what we have is if  
5 the ACT is exceeded, then the Council will determine what  
6 corrective action to take, but nothing has been determined yet. In  
7 this option, if the ACL is exceeded, then there is a corrective  
8 action that will be already established in the regulations. So,  
9 there's not going to be any further consultation. It's something  
10 that can be decided right now.

11  
12 The cons for this one is that any delays in landings could limit  
13 how quickly an AM can be implemented following an average. This is  
14 the same issue that we have with monitoring of other species  
15 depending on when the landings are available for monitoring. And  
16 changing corrective actions each year could create confusion among  
17 fishers. Okay?

18  
19 So those are some pros and cons, and I just noted the differences  
20 between this one and what we have currently have. So, the next  
21 slide, if you can go to the Next slide, please.

22  
23 This one, this slide shows some corrective actions that the Council  
24 could consider and by no means this is the only thing that they  
25 can do. These are just suggested recommendation and the idea here  
26 is to start conversations and see what the Council would like to  
27 do. Because again, it would be advisable to have a corrective  
28 action to take that is in tune with the characteristics of the  
29 pelagic fishery.

30  
31 One of the reasons that it wasn't done before, right. We have  
32 pelagic stocks that vary a lot, they are seasonal. Sometimes we  
33 have a lot of influxes depending on certain things. For example,  
34 the influx of sargassum, etcetera. So, these are stocks that their  
35 abundance in a certain year may vary. So, it's important that  
36 whatever measures are taken, we take many different things into  
37 consideration.

38  
39 So, a corrective action could be something that would be specified  
40 in the AM, which is something that we don't currently have. And  
41 the following measures that I'm going to mention here, potential  
42 options could be considered as a post-season corrective action,  
43 meaning that it will happen the year after that the determination  
44 is done.

45  
46 One example of one management tool that is used, that could be  
47 used is a temporary fishery closure, which could be similar to  
48 that established in the process for the reef fish application.

1 What are the pros of that? That it reduces the rate of harvest in  
2 federal waters. What are the cons? It may not have the intended  
3 effect due to temporal and spatial variability of pelagic fish, as  
4 you know. It would also require territories to adopt compatible  
5 regulations to be fully effective.

6  
7 I want to note that we are listing here the pros and the cons so  
8 that you know whenever-- and this is part of what the process is  
9 when, right now we don't have an IPT for this action obviously,  
10 but when we are going through all of these alternatives and trying  
11 to think about ways of how to address a certain problem, it's  
12 important to list the things that would be of benefit and things  
13 that would not necessarily be, that will perhaps not allow this to  
14 go the way that it should go. So, it's important for us to list  
15 all of those things so that the Council, when they're making the  
16 decisions, have all the best information to do that.

17  
18 Another option for Pelagic stocks is a trip/bag limits adjustment.  
19 This is something that we can implement or modify existing  
20 commercial trip or recreational bag limits. This is something that  
21 we already have in place as recent as July 25<sup>th</sup> for dolphin and  
22 wahoo for the recreational bag limit. And a commercial trip limit  
23 could slow the rate of harvest, if that was something-- that's  
24 something that I know that you guys already discussed when we were  
25 doing the Amendment 3.

26  
27 So, what are the cons for a commercial trip limit or changes to  
28 existing recreational bag limits to be effectively implemented? It  
29 will need, obviously need support from territorial natural  
30 resource agencies. Establish a commercial trip limit as an  
31 accountability measure could increase informing issues and require  
32 additional communication with fishermen. Imposing changes in trip  
33 limits in-season or from year-to-year will require also increased  
34 communication with fishers and could create confusion about  
35 existing restrictions. So, let's go to the next step. Next one.

36  
37 Another option-- remember, these are corrective actions for AM  
38 purposes. Size limit adjustment, implement or modify current size  
39 limit for stocks. A pro is that it could slow the rate of harvest.  
40 And we also know that we have some size limit recently implemented  
41 for dolphin and wahoo in all of the islands.

42  
43 What are the cons? May need support from territorial natural  
44 research agencies to be fully effective. Remember, we have a size  
45 limit right now for dolphin and wahoo in Puerto Rico and the U.S.  
46 Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico also manages other species, pelagic  
47 species that are not in the U.S. Virgin Islands. So, keep that in  
48 consideration. What this option is basically saying is if the

1 current size limit-- well, they're evaluating if there has to be  
2 an adjustment to the size limits, current size limits. Imposing  
3 changes in size limits in-season or from year-to-year would require  
4 increased communication with fishers and could create confusion  
5 about existing restrictions.

6  
7 And then, obviously we're basically opening this for your  
8 consideration in terms of do you have any other measures that could  
9 be considered for an accountability measure, assuming that the  
10 Council will want to specify something in the regulations to do  
11 when that ACT or the ACL is exceeded. Understanding obviously, you  
12 know, the limitations in the data, understanding that now we have  
13 more data than we had before when the island-based FMPs were  
14 implemented, and that there are characteristics of pelagic species  
15 such as temporal and spatial variation. So, for an AM to be  
16 effective we have to take that into consideration. Then let's go  
17 to the next slide.

18  
19 This is just an additional consideration. This is not necessarily-  
20 - this is not an AM, but it is something to think about. You can  
21 decrease discard mortality for small fish release, and this is  
22 another way perhaps of adjusting for some gear modification that  
23 would help with those fish that you release. Obviously, this is  
24 not for fish that you catch. So, just something to throw out there.  
25 The last slide, please.

26  
27 So, at this time, we just want to discuss the issue. Include input  
28 on some of those options presented, as I said, and others that you  
29 may have, suggestions that you may have. Also, the Council can set  
30 an IPT to develop an action to amend the AMs to specify what would  
31 be the appropriate corrective action. And also, we can discuss the  
32 timeline for developing of the action.

33  
34 And again, there is an AM for the pelagic stocks because that's  
35 one of the requirements. The difference here, what is lacking is  
36 that there's no corrective action. And that's something that given  
37 the past history of the pelagics going over the ACT and ACL, the  
38 Council may want to look into that and specify something that they  
39 want to do. Understanding of course what I mentioned before about  
40 the temporal and spatial variability of this species.

41  
42 Okay. So, with that, I want to open to comments, discussion of the  
43 Council, Mr. Chair.

44

45

#### QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

46

47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Crespo, and then Gerson.

48

1 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. María, I'm a little confused  
2 regarding the barracuda. Are you're talking about the stinky, as  
3 we call it, the one that has a provision that we cannot sell or  
4 are you talking about the one we call the picudilla, that is a  
5 small-scale fishery by artisanal fishers.

6  
7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** The barracuda is the great barracuda,  
8 sphyraena barracuda. This is the one that it's managed, federally  
9 managed. The picudilla is not federally managed.

10  
11 **NELSON CRESPO:** Because I don't see any reason to manage the great  
12 barracuda because we have a provision to not sell. So, the people  
13 that take it to the house is at their own risk. And I don't think  
14 many people do that because, you know, of its highly ciguatoxic.

15  
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yep. And so, this is one of those species that  
17 would benefit from what we were discussing this morning, the  
18 matrix, the framework to reevaluate the species that are currently  
19 being managed. However, that species is currently managed.

20  
21 It's included on the federal management. It has AMs and it has  
22 ACLs. However, it's one of the species, like, if you had a chance  
23 to look at the matrix that Sarah put together, it will be one of  
24 those that, based on the reasons that you're saying, maybe you  
25 wanted the Council to consider further management of that species.  
26 Okay?

27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

29  
30 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Just to add to the conversation about  
31 the barracuda. The trip tickets that we feel that the fishermen  
32 fill they talk about the picudilla. They are not talking about the  
33 Great Barracuda. We don't have data from the great barracuda.

34  
35 So, if we go back to the table that you presented, my question is,  
36 is that table talking about the-- well, it has to be talking about  
37 the picudilla and not the great barracuda?

38  
39 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Ricardo. No, the only species that  
40 is managed under the fishery management plan, Puerto Rico Fishery  
41 Management Plan, is the great barracuda. The reason the rationale  
42 that is included in the FMP for that one was because of the  
43 importance of the barracuda for the recreational sector.

44  
45 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** So, it's not taking into consideration the  
46 information of the commercial sector, because we don't have that  
47 data.

48

1 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** All of those things were included. It should  
2 be in the Fisher Management Plan, but some of the species, I think  
3 that was one of the criterions. I don't know if it's criterion B  
4 or D that were used. When the SSC and other persons went through  
5 the list and they were reviewing the information that was available  
6 and went through the process, it is kind of like the same process  
7 that went through the ad hoc and going to the species, what data  
8 is available, etcetera, they consider including that species  
9 because of the importance to the recreational sector.

10  
11 So, maybe some species were included because of the importance for  
12 the commercial and that was a decision that was made by the Council  
13 with the FMP. But again, if this is a species--

14  
15 This is why it's important to go through this process. If this is  
16 not something that the Council is interested in continuing to  
17 manage, then that's something that can definitely be done.

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I know I have Gerson, but I'm going to  
20 hold Gerson off for a minute to give Kevin a chance [inaudible]  
21 talking barracuda.

22  
23 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. Yeah, this is directly to that question.  
24 So, I'm wondering if what we've got here is not species confusion  
25 by the fisher, but there's species confusion when we're compiling  
26 the statistics. So, I think that's something we need to look at to  
27 make sure that it's reported as one. It's meant to be that. It  
28 somehow becomes barracuda, just a group, and then that gets  
29 confused. So, I think we need to investigate that.

30  
31 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Kevin. That is exactly my point.  
32 Because what we have in commercial fishery is called the spanish  
33 picudilla, but in English, it called barracuda, and that could  
34 create some confusion. Thanks.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I got Gerson and then somebody on chat.

37  
38 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. I'm very  
39 frustrated to hear more regulations on pelagic fish. In the Virgin  
40 Islands, we get the leftovers of the Lesser Antilles because they  
41 have the Chinese fleet down there. A fisherman spends more than  
42 \$4,000 in gas to go out fishing every day to try and catch these  
43 pelagic species. To put this burden on them and us, I include  
44 myself, is ridiculous. This species is not an important species  
45 for a reef. It's a pelagic species that just comes through our  
46 waters and end up someplace else.

47  
48 I'm very disappointed that we have been going to limits to even

1 put burden on these guys. I admire the people who run fishing  
2 because it's so expensive to go out there and I always said, and  
3 I know this will sound harsh, only drug people could run fish  
4 because they could afford it. But the people that don't run drugs  
5 that need to survive from these species, you are putting so much  
6 pressure on us.

7  
8 Farchette, this is what really frustrates me about these meetings.  
9 This is why sometimes I just say I cannot represent fishermen if  
10 I go and get a heart attack in one of these meetings. Because as  
11 a fisherman, I'm not saying that we're going to get rich from  
12 fishing, but you guys are making it difficult for us to make an  
13 honest living. I'm not saying that I'm going to do illegal stuff  
14 neither. But then there needs to be a stop where we can say, "let  
15 me let the fisherman live," especially for species that don't have  
16 to do nothing with the reef.

17  
18 I think you guys need to get a different approach. This section  
19 needs to be left alone. I think you guys should just throw away  
20 this part and work on the reef. The reefs are very important. But  
21 when you are taking fisherman from the reef and putting them to  
22 run fish, and then put all these burners on running the fish too.  
23 So, what are we going to end up doing?

24  
25 Fishermen are the only people that are told you can only make this;  
26 you can only fish to this amount. I don't think there's any agency  
27 that tells their workers you can only work nine months out of the  
28 year and just stay home and find a way to live for the rest of the  
29 year.

30  
31 Right now, we have a big issue with conch closure. Five months  
32 closure. I don't really live out of diving the conch, but I buy  
33 the conch from the other fishermen, and that makes an economy for  
34 my people that I can support by buying from them. And now that is  
35 a slow season, we can go and run fish and yet... bag limits, size  
36 limits.

37  
38 When is enough going to be enough? I think we have given our soul  
39 to this to this committee, and we have given too much and yet,  
40 still today, we are taking away more from the fishermen. And I  
41 hope I didn't offend nobody, but that's how I feel. Enough is  
42 enough.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Somebody on chat? No? Okay. Sabater and then  
45 Julian.

46  
47 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have mixed feelings because we spent two years  
48 discussing sizes of dolphin, wahoo, behavior, everything, and we

1 came up with some restrictions on sizes and catch. And all of a  
2 sudden, the chapter comes back. So, you know, why don't we stop  
3 right now and see if what we did did something? But if we start  
4 discussing this and then come up with more restrictions, then we  
5 never know if what we did was right or wrong.

6  
7 So, I think we should just press the delete button and think about  
8 this thing because we just discussed for two years what we were  
9 going to do and now... what did we do? How are we going to find  
10 out we did the right thing or the wrong thing or we should have  
11 kept on mouth shut or whatever. I don't know.

12  
13 I don't think-- I don't know the direction this is going, but I  
14 know the direction we came all the way to certain sizes, certain  
15 limits of these two fish, and now I don't know. It seems to me  
16 that I'm going back two years from now.

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

19  
20 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. So, you bring up a good point, Roberto. I  
21 had asked my team to look at wahoo, for example, the overage and  
22 how much we're estimating based on the new restrictions to reduce  
23 harvest. Right? And so, it may be sufficient to reduce catches  
24 back within the catch limit, which is a good thing. Right? That's  
25 where we want to be. We want to be not busting the catch limit.

26  
27 So, the reason we're talking about this today is because right now  
28 we have a trigger. We're hitting that trigger for some species  
29 periodically, but we don't have a corrective action. That's what's  
30 missing. Right? So, we can talk about it as a Council, but that's  
31 not a corrective action.

32  
33 Our goal obviously is to not have to trigger these accountability  
34 measures, but when we do and we have exceedances, then we need to  
35 have something that's available and in place in order to consider  
36 obviously for implementation.

37  
38 As Gerson is putting it out, right, we're not trying to be  
39 punitive. Right? We're trying to maintain these fisheries at  
40 sustainable levels. That's why the catch limits are set where  
41 they're at. But if we exceed catch limits, then we need to have  
42 some sort of accountability measure in order to implement.

43  
44 So, that's why we're bringing this back before the Council. They're  
45 newly managed species. There was some unknown about them. Now that  
46 we're obviously gaining more information, we just want to tweak  
47 the accountability measure and improve upon what currently exists.

48

1 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. The dolphin and wahoo  
2 are perfect examples of the Executive Order. We spent like Mr.  
3 Sabater said, correct me if I'm saying it wrong. We spent two years  
4 studying this fish.

5  
6 At one point, Andy, you said you wouldn't have a problem if it  
7 wasn't managed. We still ended up putting management on them. At  
8 the SSC meetings back in 2018, I go right back to that same year,  
9 there was no recreational data. We set it off of a small number.  
10 It was set at that meeting, if there were overruns, we needed to  
11 go back and revisit what the issues were in the overruns.

12  
13 The Virgin Islands lifted the moratorium and fishing licenses for  
14 line fishing. These two species might be part of this. I don't  
15 know. Maybe at some point Sennai can answer that, but by lifting  
16 the moratorium and the fishing licenses for line fishing only,  
17 this would be two of the species that fishers would target.

18  
19 We don't have any recreational data to this day. These fish are  
20 passing through. Like Mr. Martínez says, we get the leftovers from  
21 the Dong'ao Island from what the Chinese, the Japanese, the  
22 Taiwanese, all of them leave come through. They are allowed to  
23 fish them down there with the nets and give the government money  
24 for their infrastructure, while we, down the stream, suffer.

25  
26 So, what's passing through? We might have a good year, a good  
27 month, a good week, and that's it. And that's why we feel that  
28 under the Executive Order that these two species should be removed.  
29 Now I don't have a problem, and I'm sure none of my fishers have  
30 a problem, with keeping a size limit and a bag limit in place. But  
31 as it pertains to a number where it will trigger an accountability  
32 measure, that's a problem. That's a big, big, big problem.

33  
34 Because in Saint Croix, I can speak a little bit for Saint Croix.  
35 They depend heavily on these fish during the closure of their conch  
36 season. In the Virgin Islands, we depend on it to keep our tourism  
37 going. The tourist come and they want to get out there in the  
38 boats, and this is what they're going to go catch. This is what  
39 they're going to eat.

40  
41 But here, once again, if we can't land them, they are imported.  
42 Mahi-mahi is imported by the hundreds of thousands of pounds into  
43 these islands. When you go to the restaurant, fresh mahi locally  
44 caught. How much of it is actually locally caught? A very small  
45 percentage.

46  
47 And we need to revisit the dolphin and the wahoo. I am not saying  
48 we don't keep something in place, but we don't need accountability

1 measures. It should be monitored like Mr. Sabater said for a while,  
2 and let's see actually what's going to go on, maybe for the next  
3 five years and then make a decision from there and see if by then  
4 we have the recreational, for all sectors, information being  
5 collected again and what information from the commercial has been  
6 landed and move forward from there. But for right now, to say that  
7 we need to put accountability measures in place, you're killing  
8 us. You're killing us.

9  
10 And like President Trump said, for every new rule you put in place,  
11 take away 10. What 10 do we have to give up? None. We don't have  
12 10 for every new rule. And all I'm seeing every time I come to  
13 these meetings is a new rule to be put in place. So, I'm asking  
14 for this to be con reconsidered once again. I understand a lot of  
15 hard work went in with María and Sarah to put all of these stuff  
16 in place, but it needs to be revisited. Thank you.

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

19  
20 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Right. So, thanks, Julian, for your comments.  
21 So, just to be clear, the Magnuson Act requires annual catch limits  
22 and accountability measures. So, it's not a choice that we cannot  
23 implement an accountability measure. What we have is flexibility  
24 though in terms of how we implement that accountability measure  
25 and that's why we're talking about this right.

26  
27 So, we did not implement essentially a functional accountability  
28 measure. We essentially said we'll talk to the Council, but then  
29 we're not doing anything about it right or we are not making any  
30 changes so that's why we're talking about this. This is not to  
31 come back and be punitive. It's not to come back because we like  
32 to do this. It's a requirement of the Magnuson Act. That's a  
33 federal law.

34  
35 In terms of the deregulatory action you commented, the 10 for one  
36 applies to rules that are deemed significant, which is \$100,000,000  
37 threshold or some other factors, right? So, in terms of regulatory  
38 actions, yes, we can implement regulatory actions, but we have to  
39 account for the cost of those and we have to also look at whether  
40 or not it's a routine action. That something that is done as part  
41 of the Council process. In this instance, obviously, this is  
42 something that is mandated and required, and we are looking to the  
43 Council to help us make adjustments and improvements to that  
44 accountability measure.

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

47  
48 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Follow-up. So, again, the SSC and this Council is

1 who approved these two species to be on the managed species list.  
2 And this same group can take them off of the managed species list.  
3 Just like we have done before, they can be taken off. They don't  
4 have to stay on the managed species list.

5  
6 If they're not in the managed species list, then we don't need to  
7 set accountability measures for any overruns. This is what we're  
8 asking for. We said so from the very, very beginning. We want these  
9 two species not to be on the list.

10  
11 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Right, Julian. I appreciate that. We talked  
12 about the species within the Fishery Management Unit this morning,  
13 and we're moving forward with an amendment to look at that. Right  
14 now, dolphin and wahoo are included in the Fishery Management Plan.  
15 If this Council ultimately decides that they should be excluded  
16 from the Fishery Management Plan, then you're exactly right.

17  
18 This amendment or this action would go away because we wouldn't  
19 need it at that point. But I don't have that luxury right now to  
20 say we aren't going to move forward with it until a decision is  
21 made as to whether or not those species will or won't be included  
22 in the Fishery Management Unit.

23  
24 What we do know with dolphin and wahoo is that they're commonly  
25 caught in federal waters. Right? And so, they are species that we  
26 should be looking at carefully as to whether or not they should  
27 continue to be managed with this Council and body.

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson.

30  
31 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** I see us going backwards. I see this presidential  
32 mandate spitted on because the President is looking out for his  
33 people, and his own people are tying the fisherman's hands from  
34 making a living. If we continue setting these measurements or  
35 measures to protect a resource from whom is my question, because  
36 they're only passing through. We are just cutting our legs. We are  
37 not doing anything for our presidential mandate. We are not doing  
38 nothing for fishermen.

39  
40 Since I became a fisherman and I've been involved in these  
41 meetings, I've always seen us being looked down as the problem  
42 that we have. The people who are taking and never putting back  
43 into the resource. I've learned to fish with the regulations that  
44 have been in place. I've never went to no government agencies to  
45 ask for help. I've known to sustain my family and be glorious to  
46 God that he will always supply me.

47  
48 But you guys are putting us in a bad position. When you put an

1 animal in a corner, he's going to bite back. I'm not threatening  
2 nobody. But eventually, you're going to have fishermen breaking  
3 the law to survive. If you make 100 regulations and you don't have  
4 enforcement to enforce them. I know Coast Guard is here today, and  
5 we have that issue.

6  
7 If you don't see enforcement out there, you're just wasting our  
8 time coming here to this meeting, getting stressed, going back  
9 home. Wife asking us what is wrong with you, and we cannot tell  
10 them they are taking away more from our plate today because then  
11 we affect them too. We affect our family. You are affecting our,  
12 what's the word I can use? Our happiness.

13  
14 You're taken away from us. Every single time I come to this meeting  
15 is the same thing. I think you guys should consider and reconsider  
16 what you guys are doing. I respect what Andy is saying that you  
17 have to protect the resource, but to what limit? From whom is my  
18 question. Not for us.

19  
20 If we are protecting the birds that are flying into our garden,  
21 and then when they fly to my neighbor's, my neighbor is eating  
22 them. Who am I doing a benefit for? Me or the neighbor? I think  
23 enough is enough. I think you guys should start considering and  
24 stop sitting down on a table and making up regulations.

25  
26 You're taking away from our pocket. And I think that should come  
27 into consideration when you're making these decisions.

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo?

30  
31 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The way I see it, of all the  
32 fisheries Councils we have in U.S., this is the smallest one. I  
33 know we are in the Caribbean, but this is the Council that has the  
34 biggest amount of species under management, and we have to-- I  
35 support the comments of my counterparts. I think it's time to sit  
36 and think about what is worth, and we don't have to. Because, like,  
37 Gerson and Julian said, that's too much. Thank you.

38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

40  
41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Vanessa Ramírez, for the  
42 record. Thank you all for all the nice information that you are  
43 bringing to the table. Me, as you, my house depends on the fishery  
44 also. So, I know that this is very, very inside of our hearts, but  
45 hearing what Andy explained, we moved on the past action to include  
46 the mahi and the wahoo in management, and please correct me, Andy,  
47 if I'm wrong. Now, we have to take an option just in case next  
48 year the numbers go above that quota. So, today we need to take

1 one of these potential options.

2  
3 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, there's no immediate action, right? This is  
4 essentially modifying the regulations that exist now to adjust the  
5 accountability measure. We'd have to go through an amendment like  
6 we would be doing for spiny lobster we just passed.

7  
8 The point here is if we go over and we repeatedly go over or  
9 exceeding the catch limit, we need to account, you know, adjust  
10 for the overages. And how we adjust for that depends obviously on  
11 any sort of changes that we make here around this table.

12  
13 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So, for today, do we need to present a motion  
14 based on the presentation that we have? Or can we leave this for  
15 the December meeting?

16  
17 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, we had as far as next steps starting to  
18 develop amendment or action that would look at adjustments to the  
19 accountability measures, right? So, if the Council would like to  
20 do that, you could make that motion today. María, Sarah and the  
21 team would work with the council staff on bringing back a document  
22 for you for consideration and we'd go through the amendment process  
23 like we normally do, over the next several meetings.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater.

26  
27 **ROBERTO SABATER:** We are doing this or talking about this because  
28 something was triggered. Right? The fact that there is some  
29 regulation or some law that says that when this happens, you have  
30 to do this. Right? Well, that's what I thought you said.

31  
32 Then, if we already did something before this was triggered and it  
33 just came into a solution, why don't we just wait to see if what  
34 we did is correct or not? Because we'll never know then if we now  
35 we start doing changes and changes and changes, and we are going  
36 to end up not knowing if what we did is right or wrong, and we are  
37 not going to be following the directive that says less regulation  
38 and let's look at things, how they develop.

39  
40 That's what we should be doing, waiting to see if what we did prior  
41 to the problem that you're naming happened. So, let's see if what  
42 we did is correct or not.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

45  
46 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, we have a catch limit, a quota that  
47 we set, and then you have management measures that help to control  
48 the amount or rate of harvest. Right? Whether it's a size limit,

1 a bag limit, a trip limit. I mean, it varies depending on the  
2 species we manage. Right? Those are all intended to manage the  
3 rate of harvest, and then total landings at the end of the year  
4 are calculated and compared against that catch limit, typically  
5 over a multi-year period to determine if the catch limit or in  
6 this case the catch target was exceeded.

7  
8 So, you're right in terms of we just implemented dolphin and wahoo  
9 regulations. If those are successful, they're going to bring down  
10 catches and we will not trigger the catch limit or the catch target  
11 from being exceeded. But if they're not sufficient, right, the  
12 problem is once it's triggered, we don't have then an action of  
13 how we're addressing the overage going forward. And so, that's  
14 what we're essentially suggesting here, that despite the new  
15 restrictions that are being put in place, which may be successful.

16  
17 In the event that we have future overages, right, we still need a  
18 mechanism in terms of how to address them like we do with all the  
19 other species we manage in the Caribbean or Gulf or South Atlantic.  
20 And so, this would just be starting the exploratory phase as to  
21 how we could adjust that in a way that makes the most sense,  
22 obviously, for these fisheries and these fishermen.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai.

25  
26 **SENNAI HABTES:** I just want to help understand. Right? So, like, we  
27 created these IBFMPs. That is a choice that we as a Council made.  
28 This is a part of that. Right?

29  
30 What we're doing now is evaluating what action we can take that  
31 would be the best one. Right? We only have those choices because  
32 of what's been already enacted. That we enacted. Right?

33  
34 I think that needs to be made clear. That is *our* Fishery-Based  
35 Management Plan that has, "if this happens, this will occur."  
36 Right? This isn't something that was instituted by NMFS. It's  
37 something that we put into our management plan.

38  
39 So, we're at a stage now where we can decide upon what type of  
40 accountability measure is enacted. So, that also means we can look  
41 at the impacts that it would have and find the one that works best  
42 within the options that we have. In addition to that, whenever  
43 there are changes to data collection, meaning there'll be increased  
44 reporting that can show us more information about the population  
45 of the stock, or there are things that are showing us what other  
46 management actions we put in place are impacting those levels, we  
47 can take that information into account and make a decision. But if  
48 we don't make a decision on what type of accountability measures,

1 we're going to be right back at the table, and we'll have less  
2 options that we can decide upon what accountability measure to  
3 take. Right?

4  
5 We can also discuss removing these things from the management plan,  
6 but that's not the stage that we're at now. The stage that we're  
7 at now is identifying what is the best type of action we want to  
8 take for accountability measures that we are recommending.

9  
10 But if we simply say, I don't want to do it, that, both, denigrates  
11 the Fishery-Based Management Plans that we as a Council developed  
12 and denigrates the process by which we go through to make the  
13 decisions. That makes it less important for anyone to take any of  
14 the decisions that we make seriously. And so, I think it's  
15 important for us to understand those things when we are discussing  
16 these questions at this table.

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

19  
20 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Sennai, for that information. So, I  
21 want to know if I can present a motion specifically for Puerto  
22 Rico or does it have to be for all the FMPs.

23  
24 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** It would be relevant for all the FMPs.

25  
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Well, hearing that, I want to present a  
27 motion. Cristina, please, could you put option B in there? Okay,  
28 I would like to present a motion to select option B as the less  
29 worse that we have in here.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María.

32  
33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi, thank you. This is María. I just want to  
34 clarify. We're not making selections of options right now or  
35 anything like that. This is just examples of things that you can  
36 look at.

37  
38 At this point, we're just presenting that there is a need for the  
39 Council to do something that is mandated. The process of what ends  
40 up being the result of that, we're not there right now. The mandate  
41 will be right now.

42  
43 What the Council should be doing right now is just saying, "hey,  
44 let's look into this, right? Let's set up an IPT, let's come up  
45 with options and things like that."

46  
47 Does that help a little bit, Vanessa? In the sense that, I mean,  
48 it's good that we're looking into this. I think that's something

1 that we can take into consideration when there's a document done.  
2

3 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes, because the information that the DAP members  
4 here, Roberto, and everyone it looks like we need to move for  
5 something. So, I am confused with this because if we can leave  
6 this until December, it's going to be better having more time. But  
7 if we need to decide something now, then please clarify on that.  
8

9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes, of course. Let me clarify. Yes. So, what  
10 we are doing here is just presenting to you that there is a need  
11 to address something. So, at this stage, it's basically that the  
12 Council will task staff to look into it. That's it.  
13

14 They can create a white paper, a discussion paper. There are things  
15 that are ongoing right now. You just put a size limit and a bag  
16 limit. We want to know if there's a possibility that can constrain  
17 catch to the ACL. So, we don't know that yet because we just put  
18 it in place, right?  
19

20 So, this is not something that we have to do immediately. We just  
21 have to take action and start the process so we can look into those  
22 things. So, right now, what the Council could do is, say, maybe  
23 pass the motion to task staff that to look into creating an options  
24 paper to address the modification of AMs for pelagics to set a  
25 corrective action, something like that.  
26

27 And then in December, if the Council wants, we can bring options  
28 for the Council to discuss in December. And in December, you can  
29 decide, "okay, we're not ready to take action. We can. We want  
30 different actions. We are okay with these options." Or the Council  
31 can move forward and develop this into an amendment, etcetera.  
32

33 So, just something like that. But it's not an urgency to make a  
34 decision right now. It's just starting the path to move forward.  
35 I hope that clarifies.  
36

37 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, María.  
38

39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
40

41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I was going to say the same thing because that  
42 motion will be jumping ahead of what we need to do. Actually, what  
43 we need from the Council is approval of the-- Puedes poner el slide  
44 ese que tenia los Next steps.  
45

46 Just follow. What María was saying is a way to go. You know? You  
47 need to have an IPT look at this. Then, at the December meeting,  
48 you'll have other options to take. What you cannot do is to remove

1 anything without following the process. So, what the staff is  
2 presenting to you, we already had the discussion. We already got  
3 that done. The next step will be the IPT. And then, once the IPT  
4 develops the information that you need, it will be presented to  
5 you at the December meeting.

6  
7 The other thing that we need to do is to discuss the timeline. So,  
8 at the December meeting you'll have this document. Then in 2026,  
9 you will continue developing the strategy for this. If at the end  
10 of the process, you can convince the Secretary of Commerce that  
11 you can remove these species without nothing happening to the  
12 stock, fine. Since the beginning, I have had my own personal idea  
13 about these two species, but I'm not supposed to say anything.

14  
15 So, Mr. Chairman, what we need to know from you guys is, as a  
16 Council, do we want the IPT or not? Do you want to have a timeline  
17 to have this meeting in December, discuss the outcome of the IPT,  
18 and then what is the next step for you after December? Are you  
19 going to pursue this alternative?

20  
21 Because there is always a no action alternative. Actually, if you  
22 have the no action here then we stop with what we have. The one we  
23 have already. So, what is the pleasure of the Council regarding  
24 this.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

27  
28 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, can I just get clarification where you're  
29 looking for generalized IPT to evaluate all potential AMs for all  
30 pelagics or for the ones that have been identified as possible  
31 overages?

32  
33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Sennai. So, for the U.S. Virgin  
34 Islands it will be dolphin and wahoo. Those are the only ones that  
35 you manage. Puerto Rico has others other pelagic species. The  
36 pelagic species are managed as a group. AMs. The AMs will be  
37 specified for all the pelagics, right? So that would be something  
38 that the Council may be looking at.

39  
40 And again, that doesn't mean-- there were two options included,  
41 two or three options in there, but that doesn't mean that those  
42 have to be the options. There could be other things. There could  
43 be more discussions at the next Council meeting. There could be  
44 public hearing, whatever you want to do as a council member, you  
45 know, that's part of the process.

46  
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo.

48

1 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Ricardo López, for the record. My  
2 question is not about the process, but I would like to review the  
3 table that you presented with the dolphin and the barracuda and  
4 the wahoo. Can we see that on the presentation?  
5  
6 Yeah. That one. I don't quite understand. How did you calculate  
7 the last two columns, percentages. How did you get to those  
8 numbers?  
9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.  
11  
12 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi. This is Sarah. So, to get to that, you  
13 would, for instance, the first-row dolphin in Saint Thomas, you  
14 would divide the 10,000 pounds, 10,035 is what they landed, by the  
15 applicable ACT, the 8,800, and that would be, basically, a 114%.  
16 So, it's just 14% over what they're allowed, which is a 100%. Does  
17 that make sense? Let me do it.  
18  
19 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** You say that will divide the 10,035 by 8,800,  
20 and that will give me 14%.  
21  
22 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yes. Let me-- wait. Let me do it.  
23  
24 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** She's calculating that now.  
25  
26 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I already did it. It's 114. So, you're 14% over  
27 100. Right? If you exactly hit the ACT, you'd be at 100% and okay.  
28 But this is 114%, so that's where that 14 comes from, if that makes  
29 sense.  
30  
31 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** So, is this same as if we subtracted the 8,800  
32 subtracted from the 10,035, and then divided by 10,035, it should  
33 give me the 14%. Is it not the same?  
34  
35 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** You divide it by the 8,800. You could do that  
36 subtraction and divide by the 8,800.  
37  
38 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Alright. Thank you.  
39  
40 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** And I would have done it that way too, Ricardo,  
41 because that's the way my mind works.  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, I believe that we should go through  
44 the exercise that they mentioned and if somebody wants to make a  
45 motion to have the IPT develop so we can start this discussion and  
46 come up with all the options and all the recommendations, and then  
47 we'll see what we got from there and make our selections after  
48 that. But I can't make a motion.

1  
2 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, *I motion that the Council recommends*  
3 *staff to develop an IPT and provide recommendations for*  
4 *accountability measures for pelagic species in the Island-Based*  
5 *Fisheries Management Plans for the U.S. Virgin Islands in Puerto*  
6 *Rico.*

7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second.

9  
10 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Motion to recommend staff to create an  
13 Interdisciplinary Planning Team to develop an action to amend  
14 pelagic accountability measures in the Island-Based FMP to specify  
15 the appropriate corrective action. Moved by Sennai, seconded by  
16 Vanessa. Sabater? Discussion.

17  
18 **ROBERTO SABATER:** You're putting there, "amend." I would change the  
19 word amend to study or look into it, but not amend because you are  
20 already telling them to do something.

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Does the motion person wants to accept that or  
23 go back? Andy?

24  
25 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. Sennai, do you want to accept that as a  
26 friendly amendment or were you okay with "amend"?

27  
28 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I'm fine. I actually have some revisions. I  
29 would just say motion for staff to create an Interdisciplinary  
30 Planning Team to develop recommendations on pelagic accountability  
31 measures for the island-based FMPs.

32  
33 So, aren't AMs already corrective actions? So, I think you don't  
34 you don't need to specify the appropriate-- do we need to put that  
35 in there, or is it clear enough as is?

36  
37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, basically, what this is doing is specifying  
38 the corrective action in the AM. So, the AM includes a corrective  
39 action we just haven't specified that. And also, basically, the  
40 staff doesn't create the IPTs. Basically, the Council mandates the  
41 creation of an IPT.

42  
43 So, the AM is already specified NMFS, and the Council identify  
44 what the corrective action is. So, that's the thing that is  
45 missing. So, however you want to fix it. I'll help you.

46  
47 So, to develop-- Uh-huh.

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, you are saying that the recommendations need to  
2 be for corrective actions to be taken in accountability measures.  
3  
4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. Thank you.  
5  
6 **SENNAI HABTES:** Let's put that. Recommendations on corrective  
7 actions for accountability measures to pelagics in the Island-  
8 Based Fisheries Management Plans. And then delete everything after  
9 FMPs. Andy does that address what we need to address.  
10  
11 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes, I agree.  
12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. No further discussion. We'll take it to a  
14 roll call vote.  
15  
16 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.  
17  
18 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yes.  
19  
20 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.  
21  
22 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy, yes.  
23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.  
25  
26 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.  
27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** *Any further discussion? No "no" votes, no*  
29 *abstentions, motion carries.*  
30  
31 Okay. Now we're going to have the public comment period. We have  
32 Virginia Shervette. she's there?  
33  
34 **VIRGINIA SHERVETTE:** Thank you. This is Virginia Shervette,  
35 director of the USC Fisheries Conservation Lab at the University  
36 of South Carolina. I just wanted to revisit something relatively  
37 quickly. As a scientist that works collaboratively with U.S.  
38 Caribbean fishers on addressing research needs for management, I'm  
39 concerned about some statements made earlier in this meeting and  
40 have a question that hopefully we can further discuss tomorrow at  
41 some point, because I know we're at the end of the day.  
42  
43 Kevin McCarthy stated that the SEDAR process doesn't really include  
44 external review for species with prior assessments, but that is  
45 contradicted by two clear facts. First, SEDAR 91 terms of reference  
46 included an external review of the lobster assessments. I thought  
47 when we discussed this at the meeting, the Council meeting that  
48 y'all voted on that, the reason was because it's such an important

1 species, and the original review was done a while ago and then  
2 revisited several years ago, and then an update was done. So, it  
3 seemed appropriate. Everyone seemed like they agreed it was  
4 appropriate to have an external review.

5  
6 Number two, SEDAR 84 just did an external review panel for  
7 yellowtail snapper and stoplight parrotfish, two species that were  
8 reviewed previously through assessments. And the external review  
9 panel workshop that occurred a few weeks ago was actually extremely  
10 insightful, and several of the fishers that I work with commented  
11 that they thought it was super valuable to go through that process  
12 for those two species and were looking forward to actually having  
13 that same process for lobster, which is an incredibly important  
14 species for all three platforms.

15  
16 The Science Center committed to an external review panel for the  
17 lobster assessment as part of the SEDAR 91 terms of reference.  
18 That was voted on and approved by the Council, the Caribbean  
19 Fishery Management Council. With all of the concerns that we have  
20 heard expressed today for lobster, and I'm sure additional concerns  
21 will be expressed, in the future, as we go further on to discuss  
22 this stuff when Kevin presents something, an update on what's going  
23 on with the lobster assessment tomorrow. And then, the fact that  
24 y'all indicated multiple times today via Andy, Kevin, and Maria  
25 that new additional data that was not reviewed in the data workshop  
26 for the lobster assessment, and for which there's no working paper  
27 or any sort of paper for the public and fishers to review  
28 concerning what that data is, where it came from, how it was  
29 collected, will be somehow now added to the assessment model, or  
30 evaluation process. It just seems super important to stick to your  
31 original commitment for an external review, an external peer review  
32 of the process.

33  
34 Both Nelson and Julian already expressed concern about the  
35 assessment without any of us fully knowing what the assessment  
36 model or assessment report actually says yet, because it hasn't  
37 been released publicly, at least on the SEDAR website, the last  
38 time that I checked. From my experience, if we want fishers to  
39 trust results of an assessment or of any scientific study, and we  
40 believe in the science behind it, we want the fishermen to trust  
41 the science behind it, then we don't go back on a commitment for  
42 peer review of our efforts.

43  
44 So, essentially, my question for future discussion is, can the  
45 Council please request additional information on ensuring that  
46 SEDAR 91 follows through on its original commitments or some sort  
47 of statement that is not vague about higher ups, and so on, that  
48 decided without any discussion, including the Council or the

1 fishers that contributed to the whole stock assessment process,  
2 can we please go back and revisit those terms of reference and  
3 discuss why it is valid for a commitment that was made by the  
4 Science Center to do a very important peer review of their work to  
5 ensure scientific integrity, ensure that the trust is maintained  
6 with the fishers.

7  
8 Like, can we at least discuss this in a sincere way that is not  
9 just an arbitrary "Oh, someone decided this, so that's what we're  
10 doing." That's my concern. That's my question. It's always good to  
11 be reviewed have your work peer reviewed.

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Virginia, for your comments. We  
14 have another person here. Tony?

15  
16 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Good evening, folks. Tony Blanchard, for  
17 the record. I'd like to be very clear as to who I am representing.  
18 I am representing me, the commercial fisher. I would have to give  
19 thumbs up to the previous person that just gave their statements,  
20 Virginia. Thumbs up.

21  
22 I think that the managers of the fishery need to take a close look  
23 as to how the fishery is being managed. Perfect example is the  
24 lobsters of Puerto Rico. We are asking Puerto Rico to basically  
25 take cuts on 100% of their catch when really 7% of the catch of  
26 the lobster come out of the EEZ. But we wanted to suffer penalties  
27 for 100% of the fishery.

28  
29 I mean, they-- I mean, to me, it doesn't sound fair. Then we are  
30 asking the Puerto Rican government to buy into this, which I really  
31 don't know how they would-- I mean, if they think it through, I  
32 don't know how they would agree to that. Because I think they're  
33 getting the sharp end of the stick.

34  
35 I don't want to sound like a harbinger because, really, I'm not.  
36 But you know, some of us here at the table are worried about our  
37 jobs with NOAA and whatever part of the fishery they're involved  
38 in. Now this is where we stand by every day when regulations come  
39 down the pipe and we are on a sharp end. Now we have got to figure  
40 out where our money coming from.

41  
42 Just like regulations, they go on the books, they don't ever be  
43 revised, they don't ever be looked at most of the time. So, if you  
44 make a foolish decision, you never go back and fix it. And that's  
45 the problem with regulations. When you have a fool in the Chair  
46 not thinking it through and just think it's a vote and they vote  
47 on something that they don't really understand. These consequences  
48 last for years.

1  
2 Me as going to be one of the managers of this fishery, I think we  
3 need to take a close look at what we're doing, how we're doing it,  
4 and what we actually are asking of the fishers and the other user  
5 groups that are involved in these fisheries. Because I guarantee  
6 you if some of us sitting at the table was in their position, they  
7 would have a whole different take on it.

8  
9 So, what I'm saying is we need to think clear as to what we're  
10 asking, think it through and just not think, "well, okay, we can  
11 vote on it." Because remember that vote lasts forever in some  
12 circumstances. We make decisions on close areas that really are  
13 not manage properly in my opinion. It's impossible to manage a 14  
14 square mile area just sampling one part of the reef or two parts  
15 of the reef. Impossible. And although I'm not a scientist, I'm not  
16 a fool either.

17  
18 So, the message here is before we make a decision, we need to put  
19 ourselves in the shoes of the people that we are making decisions  
20 on and ask ourselves if this was me how would I take it? And I'm  
21 going to leave you on that note today.

22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, thank you, Tony. So, we will go on recess  
24 until tomorrow morning, 09:00. We have a closed session in about  
25 ten minutes. Only council members are in the closed session.

26  
27 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for the day on August 12, 2025.)

28  
29 - - -  
30  
31 AUGUST 13, 2025

32  
33 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

34 - - -  
35  
36 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días, esta es una prueba para el  
37 intérprete. We are testing. Good morning, Guillermo.

38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So good morning, everyone. This is the  
40 continuation of the 187<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council  
41 meeting, we'll do a quick roll call. I'm going to start on my left  
42 with Cristina Olán.

43  
44 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. Cristina Olán, Council  
45 Staff.

46  
47 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Liajay Rivera García, Council  
48 Staff.

1  
2 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela García-Moliner, Council Staff.  
3  
4 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Director.  
5  
6 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, DPNR, Designee for Commissioner  
7 Oriol, Council Member and EBFM TAP Chair.  
8  
9 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Good morning. Ricardo López, Puerto Rico DNR,  
10 Council Member.  
11  
12 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Good morning. Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.  
13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.  
15  
16 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH III:** Sam Rauch, Deputy Director of National Marine  
17 Fishery Service.  
18  
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.  
20  
21 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Good morning. Diana Martino, Council  
22 Staff.  
23  
24 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Anne Kersting, NOAA GC Southeast.  
25  
26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López, NOAA Fisheries.  
27  
28 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Sarah Stephenson, NOAA Fisheries.  
29  
30 **JAMES BUTLER:** Good morning. James Butler, U.S. Coast Guard.  
31  
32 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Good morning. Miguel Borges, NOAA Office of Law  
33 Enforcement.  
34  
35 **MAUREEN C. TRNKA:** Maureen Trnka, NOAA Fisheries Headquarters.  
36  
37 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Good morning. Tony Blanchard, U.S.V.I.  
38 DAP.  
39  
40 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries  
41 Science Center.  
42  
43 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair of  
44 Puerto Rico.  
45  
46 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning, everyone. Julian Magras, DAP Chair of  
47 Saint Thomas/Saint John.  
48

1 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Okay. Vance Vicente, Scientific and  
2 Statistical Committee.  
3  
4 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, Saint Croix DAP Chair.  
5  
6 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good morning. Jannette Ramos-García,  
7 Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Chair.  
8  
9 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Good morning. Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.  
10  
11 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Good morning. María Irizarry, Council  
12 Staff.  
13  
14 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos-Caraballo,  
15 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.  
16  
17 **RICHARD APPELDOORN:** Rich Appeldoorn, SSC.  
18  
19 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto  
20 Rico Fisheries Liaison.  
21  
22 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Good morning. James Kreglo, Commercial Fisher,  
23 Saint Thomas/Saint John.  
24  
25 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Si. Buenos días. Martha Prada, IRA Coordinator.  
26  
27 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ QUIÑONES:** Good Morning. Liandry de la Cruz,  
28 Saint Croix Fisheries Liaison.  
29  
30 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Good morning. Joshua Quetel, Saint Thomas/Saint  
31 John, DAP member.  
32  
33 **HELENA ANTOUN:** Good morning. Helena Antoun, Protected Resources  
34 Division, NOAA Fisheries.  
35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. First on the agenda is the  
37 Southeast Fisheries Science Center updates. Kevin McCarthy.  
38  
39 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Mr. Chair I am having some issues with  
40 the internet connection and I'm trying to download the  
41 presentation, but I'm still trying.  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I also forgot; can you mention the people  
44 that are online.  
45  
46 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** I have to read their names. We have  
47 online Mandy let me open the list. We have Carissa Gervasi, Grisel  
48 Rodríguez-Ferrer, Heather Blough, Kate Zamboni, Mandy Karnauskas,

1 Mick Walsh, Nicole Greaux, Rachel Banton, Refik Orhun, Shirley  
2 Ledee, Carmen Kevard, Virginia Shervette and Jesús Rivera-  
3 Hernández.

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Kevin, it's all yours.

6  
7 **SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES – KEVIN MCCARTHY,**  
8 **CARIBBEAN FISHERIES BRANCH, NOAA FISHERIES-PART 1**  
9

10 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Alright. Thank you. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast  
11 Fishery Science Center. Good morning, everybody. I do  
12 unfortunately have to start with, some concern about the errors  
13 that the Council and the council staff has made. You've both given  
14 me forty-five minutes to speak, and you let me start first thing  
15 in the morning. So, buckle up. Next slide, please.

16  
17 Okay. So, brief topics. I'm going to go through the stock  
18 assessment updates. These will be quick. SEDARs 84, 91 and then  
19 103. Something that I do need input from the Council on are the  
20 SEDAR 103 terms of reference. So, we'll need to have some, you  
21 know, a thumbs up, thumbs down kind of thing. And if you all have  
22 edits or suggestions or anything like that, by all means, let's  
23 get those noted.

24  
25 Then we'll go through some social science projects that the Center  
26 is doing, some strategic planning progress, update report, data  
27 and analytical improvements update, and collaborative projects  
28 with the U.S. Caribbean partners. Next slide.

29  
30 So, a couple things. You've seen this slide before or versions of  
31 it. This is the Caribbean Fisheries Branch. Since I'm giving a  
32 presentation, I get to be biased towards my own group. So, you get  
33 to see everybody's face there. You'll note, we do work with the  
34 strategic planning, the data collection. This is often in  
35 collaboration with regional partners and local fishers. We do a  
36 bunch of data analysis and provisioning, and we do the stock  
37 assessments for the region.

38  
39 You will note that, unfortunately, Matt Damiano has elected to  
40 leave federal service, which is a great loss to us, but it is the  
41 state of North Carolina's gain. But we do have Derek Soto, the  
42 snazzy photo there with the hat and sunglasses. Derek, some of you  
43 may know him. He's worked with us on various projects here in  
44 Puerto Rico. He's still located in Puerto Rico, and his job will  
45 be to help coordinate the many fisheries independent surveys that  
46 are happening in the region.

47  
48 He'll do some other stuff too, but this is a primary job. And he,

1 you know, he's not going to go in and tell people what to do, but  
2 often there are parallel efforts that are unaware of one another,  
3 or they could share resources or that we could in some way make  
4 things more efficient and get more bang for the buck in these days  
5 of limited funding. I think that's a good thing. Pretty much  
6 everybody else you all have seen and met before. Next slide,  
7 please.

8

9 So, let's start with the assessment updates. Next slide.

10

11 First, with SEDAR 84. So, the assessment workshop reports. That's  
12 the part where we talk about the modeling. Those have been released  
13 to the public. If you go to the SEDAR website there, SEDARweb.org,  
14 you could find those. They're available now. We went through the  
15 review workshop. A few folks in the room were participants in that.  
16 Vance, in fact, the Chair of that committee.

17

18 So, there was a combination of CIE and SSC reviewers. That workshop  
19 has been completed. It was back in July. The review reports are  
20 being prepared by the CIE and SSC combined panel. Also, individual  
21 CIE reviewers will also provide their own reports.

22

23 As a result of that workshop, a number of additional analyses were  
24 recommended. They were done at the workshop, and so that's what  
25 those addenda added to the AW report means. So, if you look at  
26 those assessment workshop reports, you will see some additional  
27 analyses tacked onto the end that were done as a result of the  
28 workshop.

29

30 In addition to that, there were other model runs that were  
31 recommended by the panel, and those will be explored before SSC  
32 review. That's sort of the way this process works. Anything that  
33 was done during the workshop gets added to the assessment workshop  
34 reports as an addendum, but any other additional guidance we would  
35 do between now and the SSC reports.

36

37 So, I think we've talked about this a little bit. What we're  
38 thinking now and what I'm proposing is that this assessment be  
39 reviewed at the November SSC meeting. So, that'll be three  
40 assessments. Yellowtail snapper Puerto Rico, yellowtail snapper  
41 Saint Thomas/Saint John, stoplight parrotfish in Saint Croix. And  
42 if we follow true to pattern after that SSC review, the SSC will  
43 present the results and their recommendations to the Council in  
44 December. Next slide.

45

46 So, SEDAR 91. The assessment workshop reports have been reviewed  
47 by the panel. I'm doing the final edits with Matt Damiano, who's  
48 been kind enough to continue to do that work. But once these

1 assessment reports are done, he'll Adyan will take over for the  
2 remainder of presenting those results.

3  
4 We've talked a little bit about '91. The recommendation right now  
5 is for the review of the Virgin Islands assessment to happen  
6 September 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> and present those results, well, the SSC will  
7 present the results Council in December as well as the SEDAR 84  
8 results. There'll be a lot of stuff for the Council to consider.  
9 That'll be five assessments. That's a lot. And we will be working  
10 on, as I noted, with our colleagues at DRNA to build an index of  
11 abundance that can inform the Puerto Rico assessment. So that is  
12 a work in progress.

13  
14 So, a lot of things were said about SEDAR 91 yesterday and I feel  
15 compelled to respond. I was due to this agenda I was not able to  
16 respond yesterday. So, let's be clear. It is the policy and the  
17 practice of the Caribbean Fisheries Branch and the Southeast  
18 Fisheries Science Center to welcome peer review of everything we  
19 do.

20  
21 It is a fundamental part of the SEDAR process. I started in SEDAR  
22 4. Now we're talking about SEDAR 103. I wasn't, luckily, involved  
23 in all 99 of those, but I've been doing this a long time. It's  
24 always been part of the process, and it remains part of the  
25 process, and we welcome it. So, let's make no mistake about that.

26  
27 As far as 91 and the CIE review, full disclosure, I happened to be  
28 out of the country when those decisions were being made. However,  
29 I was asked is there a fundamental change in this assessment versus  
30 SEDAR 57 and SEDAR 57 Update and in fact it is not fundamentally  
31 changed. So, as it is essentially an update, it is not common  
32 practice to do have a CIE review of an update assessment.

33  
34 Now what I will also say is at the Science Center's initiative, we  
35 are going back and relooking at a decision by the data workshop  
36 panel, and several people in this room were part of that panel,  
37 and that panel decided that we're not going to go forward with the  
38 DRNA CPUE series. The Science Center has reconsidered that and  
39 we're now working with our colleagues from DRNA to have another  
40 look at that, see how we can incorporate those data, and it may be  
41 a fundamental data input to that assessment.

42  
43 The Council is welcome to ask further about why that CIE was  
44 canceled. My understanding, and Andy and council staff can correct  
45 me if I'm wrong, I think at that time there were some real concerns  
46 and real difficulties with getting contracts in place. I wasn't  
47 around when that was happening; I was out of the country. My part  
48 of it was, is this a fundamental change? My answer was no.

1  
2 It will now be a fundamental change because we were about to  
3 incorporate a new data stream. So, how we want to handle that is  
4 open for discussion. If we have concerns about the SSC and I think  
5 I heard some yesterday about being independent, and competent to  
6 make these reviews, if that's a problem we've got a bigger problem  
7 than SEDAR 91. Anyway, enough of that. Let's move on to the next,  
8 Next slide, please.

9  
10 So, let's talk about 103, and here's where I need some Council  
11 input. Next slide.

12  
13 So, just to go over the goals. We're going to review options for  
14 alternative approaches for providing scientific advice to you all,  
15 to the managers. The approaches are likely to differ among species  
16 or species groups; there's not going to be a one size fits all.  
17 People are coming in with a lot of different options and things  
18 they've been working on, and there's going to be a single answer.  
19 But what we want to have is an analytical approach that is  
20 recommended for every managed species in the region. So, that's my  
21 goal coming out of this.

22  
23 The organizing committee that put these terms of reference together  
24 are we had council staff. We had SSC. We had Science Center. We  
25 had people from CIMAS, and we had the SEDAR staff as well. Next  
26 slide.

27  
28 So here we're going to dive into the terms of reference. Next  
29 slide.

30  
31 So, this is broken up into two sections. So, SEDAR 103 is going to  
32 be a bit different than our standard approach to a stock  
33 assessment. It's kind of following the same general format, but  
34 it's going to differ in some significant ways.

35  
36 So, the first part we're calling the methods development, and we'll  
37 go through the terms of reference there, and then we're going to  
38 have an application of those methods. I think that'll become clear  
39 as we go through the terms of reference. So, the workshop's going  
40 to begin with a scoping webinar on October 7. These are all going  
41 to be public meetings, but it will be a webinar. And so, there'll  
42 be noticed in federal register and all of that.

43  
44 Then there'll be an in-person workshop on April 27<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>.  
45 Between that October meeting and the April meeting, we will have  
46 another series of webinars, again, public meetings. But we're going  
47 to dig into the kinds of work that people are doing, and see if we  
48 can come up with some recommendations for how we do stock

1 assessments and/or other approaches to provide management advice.

2  
3 We haven't worked out the entire timeline, so when this report  
4 will be done is not yet clear. It will be a slightly different  
5 timeline than you would normally see at, say, a data workshop  
6 report. But anyway, we want to have everything wrapped up by the  
7 end of the year. Next slide.

8  
9 So, here's the terms of reference. The first one, and you've heard  
10 about this before, review the Science Center data triage efforts  
11 for the U.S. Caribbean species and determine what types of  
12 alternative methods may be feasible for implementation. So, we're  
13 going to dig down into the available data, the kinds of really  
14 thorough review that my group is doing right now. Next slide.

15  
16 So, we'll take that, and then we'll examine some nontraditional  
17 approaches to single species assessments to provide information  
18 for consideration and management. Additionally, we'll consider  
19 novel ecosystem-based fishery management approaches that have not  
20 been applied in the U.S. Caribbean. Approaches to be evaluated  
21 might include, but not be limited to, ecosystem reference points,  
22 ecosystem productivity or biodiversity approaches, portfolio  
23 approach, and empirical management procedures. Next slide.

24  
25 For the species listed in the island-based FMPs, we're going to  
26 provide recommendations for specific analytical procedures for  
27 developing management advice that will meet legal mandates when  
28 using tools that are alternative or complementary to conventional  
29 stock assessment. So, the point here is we don't want to just talk  
30 about theoretical things we could do. We want to provide useful  
31 information for you all to manage the fisheries. Next slide.

32  
33 We'll also be providing research recommendations to advance  
34 development and implementation of other methods and necessary data  
35 collection that could be most easily applied in U.S. Caribbean.  
36 For example, or in other words, tools that are alternative or  
37 complementary to conventional stock assessments. So, we may find  
38 as we go along, "hey, if we had one more piece of data, there might  
39 be another analysis we could do." We can't do it now, so we want  
40 to bring those out and leave them as research recommendations, and  
41 then we'll prepare a report documenting the methods and analyses  
42 reviewed and the recommendations made by the panel. So, that's the  
43 terms of reference for the first part. So, I want to pause here if  
44 there are questions, concerns, edits for this first part because  
45 we're going to dive into the next phase.

46  
47 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**  
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?  
2

3 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah, thanks Kevin. Can we go back a slide? I  
4 guess it is maybe two slides back, you can leave it on this one.  
5 So, Kevin, first question, I assume one of the outcomes could be  
6 you can't come up with an analytical method or there's going to be  
7 so much with limitation of the data that we may not be able to  
8 actually establish an analytical method. Is that correct?  
9

10 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** That's right. So, what the main goal is, and I  
11 don't think I said it very well earlier, is 95% of our species are  
12 Tier 4. So, that's based primarily on some benchmark years of  
13 landings and some expert opinion. I think we can do better than  
14 that. I think we can inform those a little bit better.  
15

16 So, we've got ten to twelve years of an ACL. Even if we use a very  
17 basic data limited approach, what does that tell us about where  
18 that ACL is? You know, do we have an index of abundance that says,  
19 "hey, know what, everything's okay. That ACL looks pretty good."  
20 Or is there or is there size comp information that suggests, "yeah,  
21 maybe we want to rethink that ACL, whether it's up or down."  
22

23 So, this isn't necessarily going to take those Tier 4 species and  
24 move them up into tier three, but it may better inform them where  
25 they sit at Tier 4 or at least give us some confidence. And you're  
26 right, Andy, there may be some that we can't do anything with. And  
27 so, that's where some ecosystem approaches might come in, to kind  
28 of scoop those species up and provide some advice in that way.  
29

30 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** All right, thanks for that. And then you and I  
31 have talked briefly about this. One of the concerns I have is not  
32 only developing the management advice, but us being able to  
33 actually implement and monitor and execute on that management  
34 advice. Is that part of the terms of reference as well that you  
35 haven't gotten to or is that a component of maybe this one that we  
36 should further flesh out?  
37

38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I think maybe we need to flesh that out because I  
39 don't think it's-- the group that's going to be assembled for this  
40 and we're working on the list of people who ought to be involved  
41 or who we think ought to be involved, it's not going to be a bunch  
42 of managers. It's going to be a bunch of analytical types. But I  
43 do think that we need to figure out, as a region, how do we use  
44 this information in management. So, not only do we want to provide  
45 you the information you need, but then what do you do? What's are  
46 your decision tools going to be? So, I do think that should happen  
47 in parallel or pick up at some stage of this process.  
48

1 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** And then, just maybe one suggestion then could  
2 be to modify this to say for developing, implementing, and  
3 monitoring management advice. Would that cover the sufficient--  
4

5 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. I don't know if we have a way to copy this  
6 and add those words on a different slide. I mean, what you're  
7 looking at here is a PDF.  
8

9 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Okay. We can come back to a motion maybe later  
10 or something that documents that. Thanks.  
11

## 12 **SEFSC UPDATE-PART 2**

13

14 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Any other questions or comments about this  
15 first part? If not, we can move on to the next phase. The yep.  
16 This one.  
17

18 Okay. So now, after the workshop, the in-person workshop in April,  
19 we'll move on to this method of application. So, we've made some  
20 decisions about which species we want to try with different kinds  
21 of analyses. So, the terms of reference here are: apply approach  
22 is recommended at the model development workshop to some or all of  
23 the species listed in the island-based FMPs. We're using some or  
24 all because as Andy noted, there may be a few that we don't really  
25 have any data that we can do much with them.  
26

27 So, we didn't want to say all of the species. We wanted to make  
28 sure that we didn't fail to meet a term of reference if the data  
29 are insufficient for something. But I'm pretty optimistic we're  
30 going to be able to wrap up most of the species in one way or  
31 another. Second term is review and recommend analytical approaches  
32 to ensure that the results are scientifically sound, and following  
33 the review and consent of the SSC, will provide information useful  
34 for management advice. I keep harping on this because I'm very  
35 insistent that what we do, that what comes out of this is going to  
36 be useful and not an academic exercise. Next slide.  
37

38 Provide recommendations to guide future SEDAR assessments in the  
39 U.S. Caribbean. Provide recommendations to further the development  
40 of analytical methods and necessary data collection that could be  
41 most easily applied to the U. S. Caribbean. In other words, tools  
42 that are alternative or complementary to conventional stock  
43 assessment. This looks very like a tour that was in the first  
44 section, only this is focused on the analytical methods and what  
45 necessary data may be-- of the ones that we tried are there  
46 additional recommendations. Next slide.  
47

48 And finally, we're going to write a report because that's one of

1 the things that SEDAR does. And we want to document this. So,  
2 prepare a report documenting the application of recommended  
3 approaches to species listed in the island-based FMPs. Evaluate  
4 and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used given  
5 the available data. So, those are all the terms of reference. I'm  
6 happy to adjust them as this group thinks would be helpful.

7  
8 We could come back at the end of this presentation and tinker with  
9 it if that's what you'd like to do. We could put up a different  
10 slide that we can edit, however you want to approach it.

11  
12 Just keep going and we'll come back. Alright. Next slide, please.

13  
14 So, let's talk about some of the work that the Science Center is  
15 doing. Much of it is in collaboration with our partners down here.  
16 So, I think you've all heard about the oral history project that  
17 Brent Stoffel and-- now I'm blanking on names. Sorry about that,  
18 Suzana. --Suzana Blake are working on.

19  
20 So, I think Brent presented at the last Council meeting. The next  
21 round is to do oral histories, interviews in Saint Croix. That  
22 will happen in September. Suzana will then come down to Puerto  
23 Rico. I don't think the dates are set for that, but it will be  
24 sometime this year, to collect additional oral histories.

25  
26 The Saint Thomas oral histories are now in what's called the Voices  
27 Database, and I can get you a link to that if you're interested.  
28 And also, some existing Puerto Rico histories will be added to  
29 that Voices Database.

30  
31 The team is writing a paper that discusses the use of oral  
32 histories as a means of incorporating local ecological knowledge  
33 into fisheries management. They're examining perceived and  
34 experienced changes in the marine environment, particularly  
35 regarding the sargassum inundations. And they're interviewing  
36 Saint Croix fishermen in September, not only for the oral  
37 histories, but also to get the history of lobster fishing in Saint  
38 Croix. Next slide.

39  
40 So, there have also been some workshops, involving stakeholders  
41 discussing queen conch and spiny lobster, looking to identifying  
42 the main environmental and socioeconomic factors affecting lobster  
43 and conch fisheries. Looking to understand changes in the ecology,  
44 biology, economy, and commerce of lobster and conch. Understanding  
45 the annual fishing practices and routines and reliance on other  
46 species throughout the year. So how does the fishery operate, in  
47 other words, over the course of the year. Understanding overall  
48 management preferences and management objectives for lobster and

1 conch fishery. So, these are stakeholder workshops. Some of you  
2 may have participated in those. This is Mandy Karnauskas and Juan  
3 Agar. Next slide.

4  
5 Strategic planning, next slide.

6  
7 A number of you were involved in this. I just don't want to go  
8 through all the words on here, but you'll see that our objective  
9 was to collaboratively identify data improvements and strategies  
10 to enhance stock assessment and fisheries management advice for  
11 the region. There were 53 short-term projects total. So, short-  
12 term for us means it's not going to take five years or ten years,  
13 but it might take a year or two. 37 of those have been completed,  
14 10 are in progress, and six remain.

15  
16 You could see that link there that will take you to more  
17 information. I'm a little concerned about time, so we'll keep  
18 going. But I will say that strategic planning really guides the  
19 way the Caribbean Fisheries Branch operates.

20  
21 So, I want to highlight two of the working groups. One is called  
22 the Toolbox Working Group, and that's meant to support the  
23 management bodies in the region by determining appropriate  
24 alternative methods and approaches to informing management. That  
25 sounds awful lot like SEDAR 103, and in fact, much of SEDAR 103 is  
26 coming out of the work of this Toolbox Working Group. So, we've  
27 got SSC members on there, we've got Science Center, we've got a  
28 number of partners who are involved in that working group. Next  
29 slide.

30  
31 Then there's what's called the Governance Working Group. This one  
32 is really to define the needs and mechanisms for establishing  
33 funding governance. So even when we can get some money it is often  
34 difficult to move it down to the people down here who are doing  
35 the work. That is a challenge. So, one of the things we're doing  
36 is creating these conceptual models of how the current funding  
37 flow works, and I'll show you an example on the next slide. But  
38 what we want to do is map out. You can see how the Council gets  
39 money, how does CIMAS get money, because so much of our work  
40 involves those folks that are CIMAS affiliates, and we also fund  
41 students through CIMAS. There's a number of things that we want to  
42 map out. So, Next slide, please.

43  
44 And this is what it looks like. So, this is the CRP money and some  
45 of you have been involved in this. So, this involves working with  
46 folks in the industry and they could be commercial fishers, they  
47 could be recreational fishers for-hire, they could be people who  
48 own pescaderías, they can be all kinds of groups, but they have to

1 be involved in the industry and you can see it can be a fairly  
2 complicated process.

3  
4 Those red x's are what we call pain points, and the idea is to map  
5 out the process and where do we run into problems. This is only  
6 just that we haven't completely filled this one out because as  
7 anybody who's tried to get CRP money can tell you, this should be  
8 filled with red x's. So, once we identify the worst pain points,  
9 then we want to figure out, "well, how do we solve them or how do  
10 we reduce that level of pain and agony to try and get it through  
11 the system." So, that's where we're at with that. Next slide.

12  
13 Let's quickly go through some data and analytical improvements.

14  
15 We talked about the data triage process. Here it is sort of mapped  
16 out. In the past we went very methodically through these steps,  
17 and we would drop species along the way as they had insufficient  
18 data. Now we want to know, okay, maybe there's not a lot of  
19 commercial landings, but do we have recreational landings? Maybe  
20 there's not fishery dependent abundance data, but maybe there's  
21 fishery independent data. We have got to have life history for a  
22 lot of the things we do. Is there a life history? Do we need to  
23 drop back and maybe try some other kind of metric? So, several  
24 folks in the Caribbean Fisheries Branch are working very diligently  
25 on this. Next slide.

26  
27 And that will be used to inform SEDAR 103 as I mentioned earlier.  
28 So, some other analytical improvements. All the fishers here are  
29 familiar with the trip interview program. That is the port sampling  
30 that is getting length and species composition of the catch. It's  
31 a very complicated long-term dataset. It needed a lot of work to  
32 make sure we got rid of some errors and improve the data quality  
33 and accuracy and how we actually analyze those data, so that  
34 project is complete.

35  
36 We had a CIMAS affiliate who is working on WECAFC data  
37 provisioning, and recall, WECAFC isn't just the Caribbean, it goes  
38 from the East Coast of the Mainland U.S. all the way down to  
39 Brazil. So, that involves a lot of datasets from The U.S. That can  
40 be provided to WECAFC. So, that's been a long-term project.  
41 However, funding was not renewed in FY25. So, we're going to have  
42 a real hard time supporting WECAFC moving forward, especially in  
43 the data provisioning side.

44  
45 In SEDAR 91, we did a lot of outlier analysis. This was part of  
46 the data workshop, and that was a collaboration between DRNA and  
47 Science Center. I think there's more work to do there because we're  
48 focused on spiny lobster, but we got a lot of species. So, there's

1 always ways to improve these big data sets. Oh, and I would say  
2 that it has ACL implications. When you take out some outliers,  
3 that's going to change your landings, right? Next slide.

4  
5 So also, there's the Puerto Rico correction factors. We're working  
6 again with DRNA to try and modernize, in the sense that we want it  
7 automated, and that's also coming out of SEDAR 91. Also, if you go  
8 through and you make some corrections to the correction factors,  
9 that's going to have ACL implications as well, at least the  
10 monitoring of them.

11  
12 And also, and this has a big impact in the Virgin Islands, species  
13 and gears that were on the catch reporting forms. Those have  
14 changed a lot over the years as any one of the fishermen can tell  
15 you, and that has implications for ACLs. Was it on the form species  
16 X or was it not? Was it on the form and then it was taken off? Lot  
17 of changes over time, so we're trying to get a good history of  
18 that and its effects on ACLs. Next slide.

19  
20 The form changes in Puerto Rico have been less dramatic over time,  
21 but there have been a few, and we'll investigate those as well.  
22 So, some of the recommendations are systematic review of trip level  
23 landing outliers across all the islands. It's not just a Puerto  
24 Rico issue we want to look at. We want to do the same thing in the  
25 Virgin Islands. We also want to do the systematic review of the  
26 commercial landings' correction factors.

27  
28 Resolve database incompatibilities and calculate the correction  
29 factors by year and coast in an automated way, and a systematic  
30 review of those catch reports as I was talking about. And then, of  
31 course, the Council's prerogative, but in light of all of that  
32 work, it might be a good idea to have a look at the ACLs as a  
33 result of all of this work. Next slide.

34  
35 Okay. A couple other things that I want to tell you about, that  
36 are not Caribbean specific but are initiatives at the Science  
37 Center that the Caribbean will benefit from. One is what we're  
38 calling our Morphometric Database, really morphometric  
39 conversions. So, we need these kinds of things like length and  
40 weights and fork length to total length and that kind of thing.  
41 We're building a database of those that's primarily coming from  
42 the published literature or whatever was used in a SEDAR.

43  
44 Building the actual database, which I'm not a database person, but  
45 it turns out that's a challenge as it might not surprise you. That  
46 part is complete. These are funded by external money, external to  
47 the Science Center anyway. And we're in phase two now which is to  
48 develop a decision tool to identify what we're calling Recommended

1 Equation. So, a lot of that has to do with sample size and where  
2 were the data taken and collected and all those kinds of things.

3  
4 It's not saying you must use this, but it is flagging what we're  
5 calling "recommended" based on that decision tool that we're  
6 developing. So, we're trying to incorporate across the board in  
7 the data or in the published literature, rather, to incorporate  
8 that data into the database. Next slide.

9  
10 And this one may be of interest to our SERO colleagues and our  
11 council staff colleagues which is a management history database.  
12 So, this began a number of years ago and to have a complete and  
13 accurate time series of fishery management actions. These are  
14 federal actions that are necessary to do stock assessments. What  
15 I found years ago was we would get management histories, and they  
16 were filled with errors. So, we wrote a proposal and got it funded  
17 and little did we know what we were stepping into, but it turns  
18 out that we built the database, and those management actions are  
19 now up to date as of today.

20  
21 They're complete and up to date as of this moment. That work was  
22 completed by some of our CIMAS affiliates that were hired who  
23 worked on this for a number of years. In fact, that's how we hired  
24 Rachel Banton, who you all know. But it was completed by SERO staff  
25 and others. So, a big thanks to you all who worked on that. And  
26 this is not just for the Caribbean, it includes all of the  
27 Southeast. It doesn't have HMS because that is its own special  
28 challenge, their management history. Next slide.

29  
30 Okay. So, let's talk about some fishery independent projects. Next  
31 slide.

32  
33 These of the first batch, we'll talk about some collaborative  
34 projects with partners here in the region.

35  
36 So, a couple that we have ongoing are fishery independent lobster  
37 trap survey. This is in Puerto Rico and is in collaboration with  
38 commercial fishers and a local scientific consulting firm. We're  
39 now in our second year of sampling. This is to develop an index of  
40 recruitment to that fishery. This is a huge gap in our knowledge  
41 of the population dynamics of spiny lobster.

42  
43 We're also collecting life history samples in Puerto Rico. Some of  
44 those samples have been sent to Panama City, some to the University  
45 of South Carolina in Aiken. In fact, Jesús Rivera used some of  
46 these parrotfish samples, and some of those, I believe, were used  
47 in SEDAR 84, but I do think it was incorporated into his  
48 dissertation, all the parrotfish. Jesús could tell you more about

1 that, but we did supply them those samples to him. Next slide.  
2  
3 Couple of other ongoing projects. I've mentioned, I think  
4 yesterday, this Puerto Rico recreational port sampling with Grisel  
5 Rodríguez and her staff. It began fully in 2024, and it is ongoing.  
6 The focus right now is on the vessel mode. We'll try and figure  
7 out how to sample the shore-based fishers if we can get some  
8 additional funding support. Always a challenge.  
9  
10 In the Virgin Islands working with Sennai and his team. Primarily,  
11 they've been working on field testing electronic measuring system  
12 but they're getting people out into the field as they're bringing  
13 more port samplers on board. And there, we're not necessarily  
14 focused just on the recreational fishery like we are here in Puerto  
15 Rico. We're going across all sectors of fishery. Next slide.  
16  
17 So, I've mentioned before, I think this deep-water snapper survey  
18 it's a combination of hook and line and video survey. That is also  
19 in cooperation with Puerto Rico Fishers and a local consulting  
20 firm. We got two years of sampling that were limited to the depths  
21 of 450 to 50 meters and then we got some additional money and we're  
22 able to move-- I don't know why I'm saying we. I don't have anything  
23 to do with this. This is Kate Overly who's doing all this work. -  
24 -but additional years, moved that survey up. The shallow step was  
25 20 meters, so it now overlaps with the diver survey, the NCRMP  
26 diver survey. Next slide.  
27  
28 Which is this survey right here. It's conducted every two years in  
29 the U.S. Caribbean. On the off years, they do the Florida Keys.  
30 Sampling is happening, this year. I don't know if it's completed  
31 yet. I think they still have work to do. They may even be in the  
32 field right now. This goes from 0 to 30 meters.  
33  
34 A few years they had, I think, three years of data which were  
35 incorporated into some other SEDARs. They did depths of 50 meters.  
36 And right now, we're working on other ones, but right now this is  
37 the only long-term fishery independent survey that has supplied  
38 abundance indices for stock assessments. Others are coming online,  
39 but this is the one that we've used successfully so far. Next  
40 slide.  
41  
42 So, we've talked a little bit about this queen conch surveys. This  
43 is a fishery independent diver survey. This is Jennifer Doerr who's  
44 doing this with others. I'm not certain if there are regional  
45 partners involved. I assume there are. Anyway, these population  
46 surveys are in their last years. She had three years of funding.  
47 In 2023, they were diving in Saint Thomas/Saint John, '24 with  
48 Saint Croix and they're planning for September in Puerto Rico, and

1 they are doing it in conjunction with SEAMAP-C.

2  
3 They had a delay in the funding and so they had planned on being  
4 out there before September, but that's when they're going now.  
5 They've also been doing sampling for a genetic connectivity study  
6 where they're sequencing and bioinformatic analysis of samples  
7 from the Florida Keys, Dry Tortugas, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico,  
8 which that's nearly complete. And then, they're collecting  
9 additional samples, and you can see here it is everywhere from  
10 British Virgin Islands to Tobago and Belize, and Bermuda. So,  
11 they're all over the Greater Caribbean region. Next slide.

12  
13 So, these are some projects that were begun, and additional work  
14 is contingent upon continued funding. I mentioned Derek was hired  
15 through CIMAS. So, we have hired that research associate to  
16 coordinate fishery independent sampling. We were also working on  
17 a project to incorporate AI and machine learning to improve fishery  
18 independent queen conch surveys.

19  
20 Basically, what this is a prototype camera system that you pull  
21 behind a small boat. It's a small system. You can man handle it  
22 over the side of the of the boat. We've got the prototype built,  
23 and that's when funding was pulled. So, the field testing and the  
24 AI development is all dependent upon additional funding. And the  
25 idea here is you pull this behind the boat, you can cover a whole  
26 bunch of area, and the AI is going to say that's a conch, that's  
27 a rock, and that's the plan.

28  
29 Yes, sir.

### 30 31 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

32  
33 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Let's go back to the previous slide.

34  
35 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay?

36  
37 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** You see you're doing a-- there's a queen  
38 conch survey being done in Saint Thomas. Right? Well, my question  
39 is yesterday when one of the slides was brought up and I questioned  
40 why conch was mentioned that it was endangered, basically, that  
41 there was a no take in Saint Thomas, why are we studying the conch  
42 Saint Thomas?

43  
44 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, it's not my survey, and I'm not involved, but  
45 I'll give you my guess. That is that you still have to do a survey  
46 if there's any conch at all. You have got to quantify the  
47 population so that you know what kind of shape it's in. So, whether  
48 there's a handful or there's a million, you want to quantify that.

1  
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I understand what you're saying, but it's  
3 like there's a no take on it. Right? So even if the population is  
4 good or not, it doesn't really make a difference because there's  
5 no take on it. For you to-- my thing is this. In a way, we're  
6 wasting time monitoring something that we have a no take on. That's  
7 what I think.

8  
9 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Tony. We are conducting these  
10 surveys as well as part of-- We're conducting these surveys as  
11 part of also our ESA listing determination. So, it's listed as  
12 threatened. Right? What we want to obviously know is information  
13 about the health status and abundance of our U.S. domestically  
14 managed populations of conch.

15  
16 Even though there's no take in Saint Thomas at this time, right,  
17 it's helpful information to know about how the population is doing,  
18 how that compares to previous surveys, and gives us a Caribbean  
19 wide, a U.S. Caribbean wide basis for looking at the overall  
20 population health.

21  
22 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. What's the depth of water that you  
23 guys are looking at these conchs in? Because are you guys just  
24 studying them in the EEZ, or are you studying them in territorial  
25 waters too?

26  
27 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, my understanding of this is, the way they're  
28 doing it, they're doing it in conjunction. I don't know about any  
29 of these in particular, but I've-- oh, you've got it, Sennai?

30  
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, there are two sets of surveys being done. DPNR  
32 does a territorial survey within territorial waters out to 90 feet.  
33 And then there's a group of divers from NOAA that have come down  
34 to do another survey that they're doing, and they focus on the  
35 deeper waters out to a 120.

36  
37 Now what Kevin is talking about here is identifying other ways of  
38 targeting conch in waters using AI and other approaches that would  
39 allow us to cover more ground and go in deeper areas. To answer  
40 your first question, conch is not closed completely in Saint Thomas  
41 Waters. It is for the commercial, but there is some recreational  
42 harvest that still occurs both in national park waters and in  
43 territorial waters. So, that is some take that is occurring of a  
44 managed species.

45  
46 In addition, once it's put on a management plan where there's a  
47 rebuilding plan, there is a requirement to actually monitor the  
48 population because otherwise you will not know when it reaches a

1 level where you could change the actual rules associated with it  
2 and take it off of any sort of listing. So, I think those are the  
3 those would be the reasons as to why.

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela, do you still have something? Okay.

6  
7 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Let's move on. Next slide.

8  
9 I talked about this So a little bit. So, these are other projects  
10 that we've lost to funding cuts. I mentioned the lobster recruit  
11 survey. That was the lobster trap study that's happening in Puerto  
12 Rico. That's ongoing. We still have funding for that, but the move  
13 to the Virgin Islands to have the same kind of survey, we lost to  
14 funding cuts. And the same for that hook and line survey that goes  
15 from 450 to 20 meters, we lost that to funding cuts. So, we don't  
16 have those two fishery independent surveys in the Virgin Islands  
17 that we'd hope to get started. They continue in Puerto Rico because  
18 they're funded out of a different source that remains, at least  
19 this year. Next slide.

20  
21 And that's it. So, thanks everybody. I think we want to go back  
22 and talk about the terms of reference because I do need an up or  
23 down, or edits, as the Council sees fit. But I think, yeah, we  
24 want to-- I think it was number three that we were talking about.  
25 I don't know if you can edit that.

26  
27 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Liajay Rivera, for the record. We can put it  
28 either in the motions document or if you give me a minute, I can  
29 open it in a PDF, which is a little bit more difficult to write  
30 on. However you guys want.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think I got a question somewhere in the chat,  
33 Cristina.

34  
35 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Ricardo Lugo. Question. Is the  
36 Puerto Rico queen survey island wide? And number two, how many  
37 states use correction factors?

38  
39 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I assume that the queen conch survey is island  
40 wide for Puerto Rico. I know that because they're getting a late  
41 start, it's going to be not as extensive as they would like. But  
42 I don't have any of the real details. But we can ask Jennifer.  
43 When I asked her for some talking points yesterday, she was working  
44 on the survey design. So, she should know pretty soon all they're  
45 going to survey.

46  
47 To my knowledge, well, I know that Puerto Rico has those correction  
48 factors. Virgin Islands does not. I don't know if any other state

1 in the Southeast use correction factors, but I could be wrong.  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance.  
4  
5 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Vance Vicente, SSC. Kevin, you mentioned  
6 the cooperative research program, and I am a reviewer of their  
7 proposals, and I was told that it was not funded for next year.  
8  
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Well, that's distressing because we rely on that  
10 for a lot of things. Now it could be-- so there's two versions of  
11 that. There's an internal to NOAA one, and then there's the  
12 external funding. And it could be that you were a reviewer for the  
13 externally funded ones, so we'll have to wait and see how that  
14 stands up to internal, you know, what that remains.  
15  
16 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** It's a crucial program for me. It  
17 integrates the fishers with science in a way that no other program  
18 does.  
19  
20 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** It is. Yeah. And it's the best way that I can think  
21 of to get work done on the water.  
22  
23 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you.  
24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?  
26  
27 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. A question  
28 about a correction factor. How often is it updated? The reason why  
29 I say so because I know Puerto Rico has been working diligently to  
30 enhance better reporting.  
31  
32 If you do have better reporting and the correction factor is not  
33 changed, that can cause the landing numbers to be way higher than  
34 they are actually supposed to be. So, that's the question I got  
35 out there. How is that evaluated? to correct for that.  
36  
37 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. I'm going to defer to the DRNA folks because  
38 it's their program. But I can offer my thoughts as well, but I'll  
39 defer to Ricardo.  
40  
41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yeah. Thank you for the question. As far as  
42 I know, we have a correction factor globally for all these species.  
43 What I would like to know is how different it will be if we do a  
44 correction factor for each species that we have enough data for.  
45 I don't know if that will give us a resource that will be higher  
46 or lower. As you said, it could be low also lower. I don't know  
47 that. We don't know that.  
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos? Carlos?  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But the correction factor, we established  
6 this in the beginning when we started the program. The whole idea  
7 was to look at the escapement count data from the fisher port  
8 agent. That information was kept only for Puerto Rico.  
9  
10 For the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, in order to be able to  
11 compare the data, we sent the raw data, table three, no correction  
12 factor whatsoever. So, in one particular year, you may have a  
13 correction factor of, let's say, about 3% because the port agents-  
14 - And the way that we did that was, let's say I sent a port agent  
15 to Guayama, Puerto Rico, two ports. Unbeknownst to him, I will  
16 send also a data collector that he didn't know, or she didn't know  
17 was a data collector person. And that person would sit there the  
18 whole day asking everybody, "What have you got there?" So, he  
19 measured every fish, every species as much as possible or group of  
20 species.  
21  
22 That was what we called the correction factor. We didn't use it  
23 for fishery management. We used it for administration purposes in  
24 order to pay for the people who are doing that and also to have an  
25 estimate of escapement. So, the correction factor is applied by  
26 region to all the species. But the analysis made by the center is  
27 applied, let's say, for example, the lobster. So, they have the  
28 raw data that we send and also, they may have somebody looking at  
29 the correction factor to set the difference there.  
30  
31 So, back to Julian. In some cases, Julian, you're right. In some  
32 cases, if we have a correction factor and it's included in the  
33 analysis, you may see a landing higher than the actual landings.  
34 In some cases, and usually most of the cases, the landing is higher  
35 than what is reported. Because I have people sitting at the DAP  
36 Puerto Rico telling me that they only report 50% of what they  
37 catch, and they're so happy about it. But what happened with that  
38 is then the ACL will be based on the 50%. So, when you look at the  
39 total landings, you were above that landing level, and you will be  
40 penalized with the accountable measures.  
41  
42 But anyway, that's more or less, if you have more information,  
43 Daniel can send you a copy of whatever they do at this time as we  
44 speak. Thank you, Mr. Chair.  
45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?  
47  
48 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Follow-up. I looked at the raw numbers of the

1 lobsters yesterday. I use that as an example. When I looked at  
2 what was actually presented, it's, like, over 150,000 pounds to  
3 250,000 pounds higher in some cases. And that's why I asked the  
4 question, because I know with the lobster and the deep-water  
5 snappers the Puerto Rico fishermen have been working diligently to  
6 try to get better reporting in those two areas. So, that's why I  
7 asked the question because when I see raw numbers and I see where  
8 the expansion factor comes in and it drives it, that's why I asked  
9 the question, well, how does the expansion factor change?

10  
11 Okay. Ricardo says right now he think it's 75, not 50, but that  
12 really would drive it higher, or it could drive it lower. So, I  
13 know it was a-- and Vance, you could correct me if I'm wrong. Last  
14 year, when we had the SSC meeting, there was a heavy discussion at  
15 the table about the whole expansion factor process and when last  
16 has it been evaluated.

17  
18 Now it could be good. It could be bad, but I'm just bringing it up  
19 as something that I think should be looked at. Because it's only  
20 used here. You know? I'm not looking for it to be used in the  
21 Virgin Islands, but I'm concerned for my fishers, through talking  
22 with them, that it can drive it where it affects them and drive  
23 them into accountability measure. So, I'm just throwing it out  
24 there. Thank you.

25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. And I believe that's a good point that we  
27 should allow the laboratory in Puerto Rico to take a look at it  
28 and consult with the Center. And then, by the December meeting, we  
29 will be able to then have a clearer idea.

30  
31 By the way, that correction factor-- we are recording, but I don't  
32 care. In some cases, that was pushed because of politics. When I  
33 was the director of the fishery research firm, the secretary of  
34 Puerto Rico said, "well, the industry of agriculture has increased  
35 3% this month." Then they would call me to say that the fishery  
36 had increased a 3% this month. No, to hell with you, I'm not going  
37 to fabricate the numbers.

38  
39 The whole point is that we have to be mindful and careful about  
40 this correction factor. In order for you to have a validated  
41 correction factor, you have to hire people to sit down under the  
42 tree and check everybody is coming in and out. And even that won't  
43 give you-- you won't be able to get the actual number for the  
44 species. You know, these groupers, these snappers, you need a  
45 biologist next to you to be able to tell them apart.

46  
47 For some-- well, it's a long story, but I remember one guy, he  
48 described a different new species of parrotfish. And they were all

1 the same. Juveniles, females, and males are the same darn animal.  
2 And we found that problem when collecting the fishery data. And  
3 that's why we rely mostly on the fisher's knowledge so they can  
4 tell us this is this and this is that.

5  
6 So, Ricardo, I don't know if you can use liaison funds for that  
7 between here and December and you will be able then to give us a  
8 report, "okay, this is where we are with the correction factors.'

9  
10 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you for that. I think Kevin wanted to  
11 say something.

12  
13 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah, thank you. So, to respond directly. Julian,  
14 the correction factors are updated every year. There's a survey  
15 that's run every year. So, that's one thing.

16  
17 Also, recall from the recommendations and some of the work that's  
18 being done we're absolutely working. My group is working with  
19 Ricardo's group to address the very things you're concerned about.  
20 And as Ricardo mentioned, we want to start looking at things and  
21 we can start with lobster directly to get a species-specific  
22 correction factor, right? Because one of the things that I've heard  
23 from the lobster fishers is that they report at a different rate  
24 than the fishery as a whole. And if that's true, then a general  
25 correction factor is going to blow that up.

26  
27 Now if they've always done that, that doesn't matter. Right?  
28 Because then you're still working with the same currency. But if  
29 they've ramped up, as you're saying, if they've ramped up their  
30 completeness of reporting, that change is going to mess them up.  
31 That's a problem. So, that's what we need to look at. And that was  
32 one of the recommendations.

33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

35  
36 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Kevin answered what I wanted to ask.  
37 But, yes, Julian, we did discuss this in the last meeting. I  
38 remember that one of the SSC members, Reni García particularly,  
39 vehemently pointed that out, that we need to really look at that  
40 much better.

41  
42 I would also like to have Daniel Matos opinion on this.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Daniel?

45  
46 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Okay. Well, Miguel explained it very good  
47 and Ricardo too. We do the correction factor to estimate the  
48 underreports. So, we send people to every fishing center. The

1 people there, they observe all the landings for the day, and we  
2 have this data. Then, we compare that with the data we receive via  
3 the trip tickets.

4  
5 So, we collect the species and the weight for the day, and we  
6 compare that. Then we estimate the underreports. Okay? So  
7 basically, we do that to estimate the underreports. Any question?  
8 Thank you.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

11  
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Daniel, it's not the underreporting necessarily.  
13 The escapement of reporting from the point of view of the liaison  
14 officer-- I mean, not the liaison officer but the fisheries port  
15 agent. So, we have two.

16  
17 But now that you're standing there, do you still send the  
18 information, as collected, to the Center, or do you send the  
19 information plus the correction factor, both, so they can analyze  
20 it?

21  
22 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Oh, we send the raw data. So, they receive  
23 the raw data and also, we send them the correction factor or  
24 expansion factor.

25  
26 Right now, NOAA fishery is developed the Caribbean Commercial  
27 Landings, and in this application or this software there is a  
28 platform where we are able to input or enter all the correction  
29 factor data. So, we have both databases, the raw data and we also  
30 send the correction factor to them.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel, go ahead.

33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** To Kevin. Kevin, what is the timeline for the  
35 analysis that you just mentioned regarding the correction factor  
36 for the lobster? Will it be this year, next year?

37  
38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I think that's something that Ricardo and I  
39 have to negotiate and figure out what kind of staff time we can  
40 devote to that and that sort of thing. I would like to do it sooner  
41 rather than later, for sure. But I don't want to commit to a date  
42 until Ricardo and I figure that out.

43  
44 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** We are behind the schedule with the  
45 correction factor because now we have two databases. The electronic  
46 reporting trip ticket and the paper trip ticket. So, NOAA fisheries  
47 is working to merge both the databases.

48

1 In our last meeting with Kim Johnson, we think we are very close  
2 to have the merge completely very, very soon. So, we are very happy  
3 for that.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

6

7 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the  
8 record. I just want to make a comment to give some information  
9 about what Daniel is saying, how it works daily in our fish  
10 markets.

11

12 So, practically, in the administration area, receive the  
13 fishermen. We make a ticket for each fisherman and when the  
14 personnel from the DRNA gets there, they compare it. They spend  
15 the day there not only measuring and checking the catch of the  
16 day, but they also compare and check the information from our  
17 books. So, once they receive the report from the fishermen, they  
18 compare if that day they reported what was really taken there to  
19 the fish market.

20

21 So, it works different for the U.S.V.I. because I know that they  
22 are more independent there. But in Puerto Rico most of the  
23 fishermen-a sell directly to a fish market or stakeholder. Usually,  
24 they visit us weekly, and they take this information to the lab  
25 and then they can make those correction factor.

26

27 I have to say, at least in the West Side, where I work, they make  
28 a great job. I have to say, Luis Daniel, the one that usually  
29 visits us, he has a great relation with all the fish markets there,  
30 and he's practically opened doors over there to take the real  
31 information.

32

33 It's not the same in other areas where some stakeholder or fish  
34 markets are not as open to receive them. I know it's hard work  
35 sometime, but they are doing their best, and I can have that.  
36 Thanks.

37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more question for Kevin? Okay. We have a  
39 motion up there. Andy?

40

41 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. I'll look to Kevin for some help, but I am  
42 suggesting that after "developing management advice," we say--  
43 analytical procedure for developing management advice, "that can  
44 be implemented." So, starting with that yeah. Okay. Yeah.

45

46 Let's change it for-- so, delete that. Yep. "Developing management  
47 advice that can be implemented and effectively monitored to best  
48 meet--" Well, yeah, you can delete "will meet" "--legal mandates."

1 Delete "meet." Yeah. Should I take out "effectively?"  
2  
3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Guess the thing that-- Yeah. I think this  
4 language is fine. I guess, is it capturing the notion that the  
5 Council has to come to grips with how to use the advice? Because  
6 I think that's the parallel process that needs to happen.  
7  
8 Let's say we come in and we've got an index of abundance relative  
9 to-- and we can help-- This team that's going to be doing this  
10 work can help guide some of this, but we have to come to some  
11 mechanism for the Council to use the information. Because we're  
12 not going to come in, in many cases, we're not going to come in  
13 with an OFL. There's not going to be an MSY or an MSY proxy. So,  
14 what do you do with that information that doesn't get you to that?  
15 Right?  
16  
17 Whether it needs to be in the terms of reference or if it needs to  
18 be a separate process that the Council undergoes is up to you all.  
19 But I think that's the process that we need to figure out.  
20  
21 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, Kevin, what if we said here "that can be  
22 used and implemented by the Council and effectively monitored to  
23 best meet legal mandates."  
24  
25 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I think that captures it without being too  
26 prescriptive.  
27  
28 And I'd also like to point out to the to the Council that I ended  
29 my talk on time, and all these valuable discussions are what's  
30 overrunning. I just want that on the record.  
31  
32 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** After "implemented," let's put "by the  
33 Council."  
34  
35 So, that's my motion. Can I get a second?  
36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So--  
38  
39 **SENNAI HABTES:** I got it. Second. Sennai Habtes.  
40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the *motion reads, for the species*  
42 *listed in the island-based FMPs provide recommendations of*  
43 *specific analytical procedures for developing management advice*  
44 *that can be used and implemented by the Council and effectively*  
45 *monitored to best meet legal mandates when using tools that are*  
46 *alternative or complementary to conventional stock assessments.*  
47 Motion by Andy, seconded by Sennai Habtes. So, all in favor, say  
48 aye.

1  
2 **GROUP:** Aye.  
3  
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? *Hearing none, motion*  
5 *carries.*  
6  
7 Kevin?  
8  
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Just a procedural question. So, this needs to go  
10 to SEDAR. Does that come from the Council? I think that's the  
11 proper thing. It doesn't need to come from me. This is now yours.  
12 You've now taken ownership of this document. You've okayed it and  
13 made, I think, an important adjustment. So, maybe it ought to-- I  
14 don't know, Carlos, if it comes from you or council staff or  
15 whatever's appropriate to go to SEDAR staff.  
16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.  
18  
19 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Mr. Chair, Liajay Rivera, for the record.  
20 So, what follows is to-- sorry. Audio problems. What follows is  
21 for the terms of reference of SEDAR 103, a decision for approval,  
22 and then it's going to be forwarded to SEDAR. So, that's what will  
23 proceed. So, you will need to approve the TORs  
24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I approve. Okay. Kevin?  
26  
27 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, do we need does that need to be another motion?  
28 That the TORs, as a total, are approved? Is that what I just heard?  
29  
30 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I think that's the cleanest approach.  
31 I'll make another *motion to approve the SEDAR 103 terms of*  
32 *reference as amended.*  
33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We need a second.  
35  
36 **SENNAI HABTES:** Seconded.  
37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion reads to approve the SEDAR 103  
39 terms of reference as amended. Motion by Andy Strelcheck, Seconded  
40 by Sennai Habter. All in favor, say "aye."  
41  
42 **GROUP:** Aye.  
43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? *Hearing none, motion*  
45 *carries.*  
46  
47 So, next on the agenda, we have the Inflation Reduction Act. That  
48 would be Martha Prada.

1  
2 **INFLATION REDUCTION ACT (IRA) FUNDED PROJECTS UPDATE—MARTHA**  
3 **PRADA, IRA COORDINATOR**  
4

5 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Hi. Good morning. Thank you all for being here.  
6 It's my pleasure to provide you with another update of how the  
7 Council is implementing different proposals under the IRA  
8 initiative.  
9

10 So, let's start with my presentation. My last update was at the  
11 previous Council meeting presenting the data on the updates up to  
12 April 15<sup>th</sup>. So now I'm moving on to presenting what has been  
13 happening since then up to July 31<sup>st</sup>. Next.  
14

15 So, as you can see, this is a global summary of the progress on  
16 the technical aspects as well as the financial aspects of the  
17 contracts that have been signed with the Council in relation to  
18 implement six different projects.  
19

20 So, right now, we went from 18% reported last April to 26% in the  
21 technical aspects. We are also making progress in the financial  
22 aspects from 16% up to 20%. So how is this integrated through all  
23 the different projects? This table summarizes more or less what  
24 the total grant is for different projects, approximately the  
25 percentage advance in the technical aspects as well as the  
26 financial aspects.  
27

28 So, new in this report is that we were finally able to sign the  
29 contract with DPNR in the U.S. Virgin Islands and now that contract  
30 is about to start. They are fixing the administrative procedures  
31 because this is a new way to conduct things and contracting with  
32 them. So, that requires specific adjustments.  
33

34 I'm going to talk about the different projects and present to you  
35 a brief summary of the activities that are being conducted on the  
36 different projects.  
37

38 So, let's start with the one that is under the leadership of Dr.  
39 Álida Ortiz. This project is about the education of extreme events  
40 and how that can be better understood throughout the fishing  
41 community and with the schoolteachers. So, right now, the storybook  
42 is comprised of three main chapters. Text for the three main  
43 chapters have been completed in a first draft. Experts drafted  
44 that. They went through the evaluation review on the technical  
45 aspects to verify that the language used is simple and good enough  
46 to explain perhaps some complex processes in relatively simple  
47 words.  
48

1 Then, the next phase is the completion of illustration and graphic  
2 design that is attractive. So, the first chapter is completed with  
3 that. The artist is working on the second chapter. Perhaps in the  
4 next two or three weeks, all three chapters will be completed.

5  
6 The team also decided to add additional sections to the storybook.  
7 Very interesting they added a glossary and want to add a very  
8 important one with the tools. So, viewers of this storybook can  
9 look on the internet and will be invite them to be more interactive  
10 and look at specific videos, specific data portals, specific  
11 shares. Also, interviews and conversations with fishers within  
12 Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are being conducted. Some  
13 of the video clips are planned to be recorded and perhaps in the  
14 future we can have them in the second and final version of the  
15 storybook. We can have interactive videos with them.

16  
17 Right now, this is the plan. We are working on that and I'm very  
18 happy to see this project moving very good and fast. Next.

19  
20 So, another very interesting process and advance is from Dr. Wess  
21 Merten. He is studying the movements of dolphinfish. So, the  
22 project's aim is to at least deploy 30 satellite tags within Puerto  
23 Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Mid Atlantic in the U.S.  
24 So, right now, 30% of those tags have been deployed. The purchase  
25 of additional tags is being completed and so it's moving on.

26  
27 Some interesting results. Right now, this project has a lot of  
28 data, and it's starting with the analysis. Two things may be  
29 highlighted. One, is that we are very excited to see how the  
30 tagging, conventional tagging and satellite tagging are being with  
31 high recapture rate. So, this is good because it demonstrates how  
32 the connectivity is actually happening, and we have the data.

33  
34 Indeed, in one of the individuals that was marked at the beginning  
35 of this year, off of La Parguera, was recently recorded around the  
36 offshores of the Mississippi River. So, that is more or less 2,000  
37 nautical miles in 114 days. So, this movement and migration is  
38 very impressive. Still, data is being collected. It's recording  
39 depth and additional environmental information comprised of sea  
40 surface temperature and perhaps other issues that can affect  
41 dolphinfish migration, such as sargassum for instance.

42  
43 So, very interesting to see this, but also a little bit concerning  
44 because it indicates the high recapture rate that species have,  
45 giving them a relatively high fishing pressure. So those are two  
46 aspects to consider in the future as we collect data. Very  
47 interesting.

48

1 Another significant preliminary result is that the project has  
2 been able to demonstrate that one dolphinfish that was tagged and  
3 released off of Rhode Island was recaptured in Cape Canaveral  
4 indicating that the fish moved and returned to the area more or  
5 less when they leave. So, it's a very interesting because it is  
6 what he's calling the first return migrant. So, it's been theorized  
7 that this was happening, but now we have the data to prove it.

8  
9 It's also interesting to see that the fish grew. At the beginning  
10 when it was tagged, it was 18 inched in fork length, and when he  
11 was recaptured in measure 34 inches. So, it is interesting to start  
12 providing data from the field and that this project is allowing  
13 for this kind of analysis. It's early in the process, but we've  
14 already started looking at our results.

15  
16 Another project is about conducting climate vulnerability  
17 analysis. That is being done under the leadership of Dr. Chelsea  
18 Harms-Tuohy.

19  
20 This project has been a long process in trying to select what will  
21 be the final species, where they're being analyzed, how  
22 environmental changes affects, or the vulnerability affects them  
23 through their life cycles. And so, 24 species have been consulted  
24 with fishers, with experts, with some scientists, with people that  
25 participate in this initial exercise. And so, they have the 24  
26 species selected and include fish invertebrates of different  
27 importance. All of them were selected to specific criteria.

28  
29 An additional person was hired to support the literature search  
30 for information that can be used to detect the vulnerability for  
31 these species. Then, an in-person workshop was set to analyze the  
32 situation in Puerto Rico and has now been agreed to meet in  
33 November this year. There will be another one in The U.S. Virgin  
34 Island next year.

35  
36 So, let's move to another project. This project is also really  
37 interesting and is providing a preliminary process. We haven't  
38 done the analysis yet, but the way the data is being collected it  
39 is proving that, together, fishers and scientists do good things.  
40 Together they were able to adapt the field service protocols.  
41 Together they were able to better understand how the habitat  
42 changes through time and that can affect the recruitment of the  
43 queen conch and the nassau grouper, which are the two main species  
44 selected for this project.

45  
46 Data is being collected. Sensors have been there to collect data  
47 on sea surface temperature and other environmental information.  
48 And then, the field surveys were adapted. Right now, that's taking

1 place, so it's moving along very well. And so far, the inclusion  
2 of local ecological knowledge, has proven highly important. So,  
3 this project-- the previous project is under the leadership of Dr.  
4 Michelle Schärer and Dr. Héctor Ruiz and also with the  
5 participation of Dr. Rich Appeldoorn.

6  
7 This project has been under the leadership Bob Glazer and Alejandro  
8 Acosta from GCFI in addition to a scientific team that they hired  
9 for the project. It is expected to develop climate change scenarios  
10 for the red hind and for the spiny lobster in Puerto Rico and the  
11 U.S. Virgin Islands.

12  
13 So, in the previous update, they were talking about how they gather  
14 information to select the factors that are going to be studied and  
15 then the dimensions they are working on. Through this period, the  
16 main progress was on how to include the social information into  
17 the other scientific analysis. So, they are validating some of the  
18 socioeconomical data that is outside and are working on defining  
19 three different scenarios. One, a positive scenario where in the  
20 future environmental conditions improve; a negative scenario,  
21 like, what would happen if the opposite happened; and then, what  
22 would happen if nothing happened. So, those scenarios are currently  
23 being done.

24  
25 And so, this is the last project that we are working on. This is  
26 the one that has not actually started. They are still on the  
27 administrative phase of the implementation of the project. But the  
28 preparation on how the project will move, I guess, is more or less  
29 decided. So, it's a matter of concluding the administrative issues  
30 and then moving quickly on completing the activities that are  
31 considered under this project. Those are related to completing the  
32 Ecosystem Fisheries Management Plan. It has taken a while with the  
33 Council under the leadership of Dr. Sennai Habtes. But through  
34 this project, that will be able to be completed.

35  
36 Most importantly, the creation of a special interactive online  
37 platform for connecting what the different institutions,  
38 organizations are doing towards that implementation and planning  
39 and providing information. So, it's a kind of hub, an interactive  
40 platform that is being projected and that is based on the very  
41 interactive participation. So, a series of workshops to secure the  
42 inclusion of different perspectives are also included when this  
43 project starts implementation.

44  
45 So, in general, I guess I prepared this because last time you asked  
46 me what were the barriers or things that can be highlighted. So,  
47 I prepared this slide, and I think it's very good.

1 So, in green are the things that we feel very positive, very nice  
2 about and all this effort that so many people are conducting right  
3 now is being reflected and is starting to look very promising.  
4 Perhaps by the December meeting, some of the actual resources could  
5 be presented because at that time, the majority of the project we  
6 have will have their first years of implementation. Remember that  
7 these projects are planned to be completed in two and a half years  
8 more or less.

9  
10 So, the ones in the red are the more challenging things that we  
11 are having. I'd like to mention that the loss of support from the  
12 Science Center, particularly for the CEFI team, has proven,  
13 particularly for the project that is developing the climate change  
14 scenarios, very highly concerning. They are looking for options.  
15 So, losing the computational capacity for conducting the modeling  
16 that is required to do two species, three different islands, and  
17 at least three scenarios with so many datasets. It demands a  
18 specific, not just scientific support, but also computational  
19 support. So, its initial plans will now need to be adjusted, and  
20 we are looking for options, help, recommendations. If that is  
21 possible to see how we can overcome this limitation?

22  
23 Sometimes the--

24  
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Martha, have you been able to identify  
26 alternatives for the first one?

27  
28 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Well, right now, they are looking at it, but they  
29 haven't secured one. So, they are looking for options. And so, I  
30 think bringing this point to this table, it might help us in  
31 identifying possible sources where we can start looking for  
32 support. But right now, we are in the process.

33  
34 The next one is particularly for the dolphinfish project that  
35 requires ahead of time planning to go offshore. Those environmental  
36 conditions can change suddenly or become very dangerous to be  
37 offshore. And that is an implication not just for the logistics,  
38 but in particular for the financial, because it is planned for a  
39 trip that it will cost more or less x amount. Then, you have to  
40 have a last time flight, and last time changes and expand another  
41 day waiting for good condition.

42  
43 So, that is not a limitation, but it's a thing that...it is what  
44 it is. So, it's just to raise the attention that he is integrating  
45 recommendations from fishers, he's looking at the predictions for  
46 weather and everything, and despite everything, conditions at sea  
47 can change suddenly. Maybe this is an indication that these extreme  
48 events are perhaps happening at a faster rate than we are able to

1 register.

2  
3 And then, some administrative issues can be time consuming and  
4 that delays the implementation of a project.

5  
6 So, one last thing that I forgot to mention in my green text here  
7 is that thanks Cristina and the team that is working with the  
8 Council, now in the Council's web page there is a special page for  
9 our initiative. So, you can see it on there, Advancing Sustainable  
10 Fisheries. If you go to that window, that window will present the  
11 projects, will connect to the links of the implementers, will  
12 present additional information as well.

13  
14 We are developing bulletins. Those bulletins will start sharing  
15 with the open public things that are being developed through these  
16 IRA initiatives in a way that is attractive, that is easy to follow  
17 and keep the attention of everybody.

18  
19 So, that's all that I have to say for now. Thank you for your  
20 attention. If you have any question, I'm happy to answer if I can.

21  
22 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any question for Martha? Vanessa?

25  
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Vanessa Ramírez, for the  
27 record. Thank you, Martha, and all the staff that are working on  
28 these projects. Also, for the updates. I think these projects are  
29 very important, especially for our fishermen and coastal  
30 communities. I think that point you brought, especially with the  
31 challenges that you have, I know all the people that are in this  
32 room, and especially the Council, are supporting your efforts.

33  
34 We will keep an eye on this, and I hope that sometime between here  
35 and December, we have better information about how we can help you  
36 with those challenges. Thanks.

37  
38 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Thank you.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Martha.

41  
42 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Okay. Thank you.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next, we have, the Ecosystem-Based Fisheries  
45 Management TAP, Sennai.

46  
47 **ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL**  
48 **(EBFM TAP) UPDATE—SENNAI HABTES, CHAIR**

1  
2 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Morning all. Just a short verbal  
3 update. I don't have a presentation because I'm too busy working  
4 on the stuff for the EBFM TAP, trying to get things done.

5  
6 Mainly, at present, we're in the process, as Martha said, of doing  
7 the administrative process to get a contract set up for the  
8 subaward, with DPNR so that we can administrate the award. Once  
9 that's finished, I think we can go ahead and get the workshops  
10 going.

11  
12 In the interim, what I've been doing is working on the data  
13 management component for that. We have identified vendors that can  
14 help us build the systems, and they're in the process of setting  
15 those things up. In addition to that, you'll hear a little bit  
16 more after this presentation from Mandy regarding the ecosystem  
17 services report, which I believe is completed.

18  
19 So, our sub-working group is working on taking that information  
20 and putting it into a format so it can be into the fisheries  
21 ecosystem plan. The same is happening, with the completed risk  
22 assessment framework that was done by our contractor Lee Fletcher  
23 earlier this year. So, that was compiled. It's being reviewed by  
24 the sub-working group for risk assessment within the EBFM TAP. And  
25 our hope is that those two components along with the other three  
26 components from the outline that I presented last will be completed  
27 by the end of the year, and we should have a draft fisheries  
28 ecosystem plan that'll be undergoing review by the EBFM TAP, for  
29 hopeful presentation to the SSC and then the Council some point  
30 next year.

31  
32  
33 So, that's all I've got. If you have any questions, I'm happy to  
34 answer.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions for Sennai? There are none. Okay.  
37 Thank you, Sennai.

38  
39 Next, we have, the Ecosystem Status Report, Mandy Karnauskas,  
40 Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

41  
42 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Good morning, everyone. Can you hear me okay?

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Yes.

45  
46 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Okay. I am sharing my screen. Can you see it,  
47 okay?

48

1 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We see it okay, but it looks very  
2 little. I am looking here to see if it is on my end.

3  
4 **ECOSYSTEM STATUS REPORT—MANDY KARNAUSKAS—SEFSC, NOAA FISHERIES**

5  
6 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Okay. Yeah. I have three different screens. If  
7 you want to try and pull it up on your end, I think that's fine.  
8 Let me try and fix this.

9  
10 I'm sorry. It's just I have three screens, and it pulls up the--  
11 Let's just go with that. I think that's easier. Okay. Thanks.

12  
13 Alright. Well, thank you for the opportunity to present this  
14 morning. I'm sorry I couldn't join y'all in person. I'm just going  
15 to give a brief overview on the Caribbean ecosystem status report  
16 and note that I gave a detailed presentation on that content of  
17 the report to the EBFM Technical Advisory Panel last year. So,  
18 this is just going to be a high-level overview for you.

19  
20 So, moving right into the next slide. The report has been published  
21 and we have NOAA technical memo static versions as well as an  
22 online web version that's a little bit more interactive and you  
23 can access the report. There's links there. And then looking at  
24 the green box on the left there, I just wanted to draw your  
25 attention to the organization of the report.

26  
27 So, we have two sections that deal with the indicators, which I'll  
28 talk about in a second. And then we have a synthesis section as  
29 well as research recommendations and acknowledgments. You can move  
30 on.

31  
32 So, the indicator suite is organized into two sections. There are  
33 two types of indicators. There are indicators that are tracking  
34 progress on fishery management objectives. So, these objectives  
35 were pulled from the island-based fishery management plans. So,  
36 things like food production and stock sustainability and  
37 protection of ecosystems, trophic integrity, engagement and  
38 participation. So, those sets of indicators are tracking progress  
39 toward those objectives. And then we have a separate set of  
40 indicators that are tracking risks to meeting fishery management  
41 objectives. So, what are external shocks in the environment or the  
42 economy that might limit fishery managers abilities to meet the  
43 objectives effectively? Next slide, please.

44  
45 And I just wanted to mention that we've been taking, made some  
46 great strides using the OpenScapes framework, which is an open-  
47 source approach to science. So, all of the underlying processes in  
48 the report and the pieces out of the report are available on

1 GitHub. It's an open online framework.  
2  
3 All the pieces have been published. They're transparent. All the  
4 code and the data are reproducible with the exception of  
5 confidential data. Of course, we're not putting confidential data  
6 online. But we've created this new automated workflow that's going  
7 to allow us to update the report on an annual basis. We're very  
8 excited about that.  
9  
10 Essentially, the code on GitHub that serves to access the data  
11 directly from the data source, usually. It will calculate the  
12 indicator or visualize the indicator, integrate the text and then  
13 publish the report. So, most of the data sources, I won't go  
14 through these in detail, but just to give you an idea of where the  
15 code is pulling data from.  
16  
17 So, most of these are automated. So, data sources in the darker  
18 blue are data sources where we're able to just pull the data  
19 directly from the source using an API. Essentially, with a click  
20 of a button we can update the report for an additional year of  
21 data. There are a few data sources in the lighter blue where we  
22 don't have a fully automated workflow but it's a semi-automated  
23 workflow. So, we're very excited to be able to provide this  
24 information on a yearly basis to the Council. Next slide.  
25  
26 Okay. And then, if you look within the indicator section you'll  
27 see the various indicators, usually a time series, and then we've  
28 got these little dots and arrows on the right side of the plots  
29 which tell you a little bit about recent trends, whether or not  
30 the trends are below average or the indicator value is above or  
31 below average and decreasing or increasing in trend in the last  
32 five years. And then there's, of course, supporting text in the  
33 report to talk about the recent trends and why these are going on.  
34 Next slide.  
35  
36 Okay, so I'm just going to go over, in a very high level, some of  
37 the main findings from the report. So, for the whole U.S.  
38 Caribbean, what we've seen is that there are various risk  
39 indicators showing some increasing stressors to the system and  
40 there's been a number of major disturbances in the last decade and  
41 that there's more volatility in that indicator. The ecosystem is  
42 changing more rapidly in the last few years than it was in the  
43 past.  
44  
45 We also saw notable impacts from the 2017 hurricane season as well  
46 as pandemic disturbances. This was on the social and economic  
47 indicators. But these disturbances also carried through to the  
48 fishing activity. So, we see the impacts of these disturbances on

1 the fishing activity and manifesting in the fishery dependent  
2 indicators as well.

3  
4 I will note that there are some potential confounding factors with  
5 changes in reporting. So, for example, moving to the ShellCatch,  
6 the e-Reporting in Puerto Rico around 2020, that could be  
7 confounded with impacts from the pandemic, for example. So, there  
8 is some disentangling to be done with the reporting artifacts.  
9 That's just as a caveat. And then next slide moving into sort of  
10 an island-based look.

11  
12 I'll go through these sorts of five categories of indicators. So,  
13 for Puerto Rico, we saw that ocean temperatures and coral bleaching  
14 are increasing and they're well above average in recent years. We  
15 see coral cover decreasing and we see Puerto Rico impacted by the  
16 2017 hurricanes and pandemic to the lesser extent. In terms of the  
17 economy, the human population is below average since 2017, but  
18 it's now stabilized. Tourism has more or less increased back to  
19 pre-pandemic levels. The gross domestic product is above average,  
20 and employment is decreasing.

21  
22 In terms of fishing practices, we see the commercial efforts stable  
23 overall. There is an increasing percentage of diving trips and a  
24 decreasing percentage of trips using net and trap gear. In terms  
25 of the landings, we see an increasing dependence on the demersal  
26 species and the maximum length in the demersal catch is stable.

27  
28 We see landings of lobster increasing. Conch landings are well  
29 below average but have stabilized. And there's more deep-water  
30 snappers, yellowtail snapper and red hind in the landings. There's  
31 fewer large parrotfish and large grouper in the landings. The  
32 revenue dependence on lobster has been slightly increasing. And we  
33 also see an increase in inequality of revenues.

34  
35 And then finally, looking at fishery independent data, the  
36 community level response. We do see commercial finfish density  
37 increasing and there's a select suite indicator species that we've  
38 chosen, and these are all stable and we actually see queen  
39 triggerfish and red hind abundance above average in recent years.

40  
41 Moving on to Saint Thomas/Saint John. Stressors are very similar.  
42 Ocean temperatures, coral bleaching increasing and above average  
43 and coral cover decreasing. On Saint Thomas/Saint John, saw that  
44 the 2017 hurricanes seem to have created a major disturbance. The  
45 human population in the U.S.V.I. is gradually declining, and some  
46 aspects of tourism have not yet recovered back to pre-pandemic  
47 levels. The GDP is increasing and an unemployment decreasing.

48

1 In terms of the fishing practices, effort has been stable in recent  
2 years, although there was a slight drop in the 2017-2018 fishing  
3 year. And there's no trend in gear type use in Saint Thomas/Saint  
4 John.

5  
6 In the landings, we see the maximum length in the demersal catch  
7 is increasing so that indicates that fishermen are targeting larger  
8 bodied species basically. There's lesser targeting of small  
9 species like queen trigger, angelfish and grunt and there's more  
10 targeting of red hind, yellowtail snapper and blue runner. We see  
11 the that the landings of lobster are increasing, and finfish  
12 landings are well below average. Actually, the revenue dependence  
13 on lobster has doubled in the past decade.

14  
15 And then, finally we see commercial fish density and slope the  
16 size spectrum increasing in the fishery independent data that also  
17 indicates that there's larger bodied fish presence or abundance of  
18 larger bodied fish is increasing, and the abundance of indicator  
19 species is stable. We see yellowtail snapper abundance increasing  
20 and well above average.

21  
22 And then lastly, Saint Croix. Very similar pattern in terms of the  
23 stressors, although we see a slightly bigger impact with the  
24 pandemic in the Saint Croix, which differs from Saint John and  
25 Saint Thomas. The economy is based on the U.S.V.I., so that's the  
26 same as the previous slide.

27  
28 Fishing practices in Saint Croix. The effort's been stable in  
29 recent years, but there was a drop in the 2018-2019 fishing year.  
30 There's been an increasing percentage of diving trips, and the use  
31 of nets and traps is below average and also decreasing. In terms  
32 of the landings, we see increasing dependence on pelagics and  
33 increasing revenue from tunas and mackerels over time. The maximum  
34 length of the demersal in the catches increasing, similar to the  
35 other islands. Finfish landings are well below average.

36  
37 There's also been a shift from targeting small parrotfishes to  
38 larger bodied parrotfishes, and there's been a decrease in  
39 inequality in revenues. And then finally, we see the commercial  
40 fish density and the slope of the size spectrum increasing and the  
41 abundance of stoplight parrotfish is well below average, but the  
42 other species are either stable or increasing in terms of that  
43 indicator species suite. Next slide, please.

44  
45 So, now I'll move briefly into how the report can be used by  
46 management. You can flip to the next slide.

47  
48 So again, the most direct way to use this report, given that the

1 indicators are tied to the management goals stated in the Island-  
2 Based Fishery Management Plans, we can use these indicators to  
3 assess progress towards management goals. Again, they're tracking  
4 things like socioeconomic health, equality, ecosystem services.  
5 And so, this would allow fisheries managers to look at the  
6 indicators and get a sense for whether or not management is having  
7 the desired effect. Moving to the next slide.

8  
9 We can also use the indicators to assess the risk in the fishery  
10 system and as Sennai mentioned, you know, there's a framework that  
11 Lee Fletcher has proposed which I know is undergoing review by the  
12 EBFM TAP. But just a couple examples of how other Councils have  
13 used ESR indicators to assess risk.

14  
15 The example on the left is from the Eastern Bering Sea. So, in the  
16 North Pacific they tie specific indicators to certain stocks and  
17 then the annual catch limits can be increased or decreased based  
18 on the level of risk that is apparent in the indicators. And then,  
19 on the right, there's an example from the Mid Atlantic Fishery  
20 Management Council where they use ESR indicators to do sort of a  
21 rapid risk assessment at an ecosystem scale and this is used to  
22 prioritize issues that need to be addressed. I think that's more  
23 along the lines of what the EBFM TAP is sort of thinking for the  
24 risk assessment for the Caribbean. Next slide.

25  
26 Another way to use the indicators is that they can reveal important  
27 drivers in the fishery system. So, here's an example from the U.S.  
28 South Atlantic bight. If you look on the right, these are  
29 recruitment deviations for nine fish species, demersal fish  
30 species in the South Atlantic. So basically, looking at indicator  
31 stock productivity. In the green are summer spawning species and  
32 in the red are winter spawner species.

33  
34 What we observed in that region is that there's been this sort of  
35 wholesale decline in productivity for all of the winter spawning  
36 species, which led us to think that there's probably some  
37 underlying ecosystems change if we're seeing coincident change  
38 among multiple species. And so, looking at the ecosystem status  
39 report, we saw that there are a number of indicators relating to  
40 productivity, primary productivity that were also changing around  
41 the same timeframe as the recruitment was declining. So, we're  
42 able to kind of piece this together and there's still some ongoing  
43 research to understand the exact dynamics of what's going on. But  
44 again, the ESR allows you to sort of put those sorts of hypotheses  
45 together for future research. Next slide.

46  
47 Okay, and then another way to use the indicators is to understand  
48 the overall ecosystem conditions. Putting the indicators together

1 in sort of a synthesis allows you to get a quick snapshot for  
2 things like the rate of change. So, this is actually a figure  
3 that's included in the synthesis section. This is a traffic light  
4 plot. So, what we have are all of the indicators in the report,  
5 categorized into these four different categories. And then they're  
6 color coded in terms of if they're below average in red or above  
7 average in blue.

8  
9 And then, there's a statistical method, a principal components  
10 analysis that sort of puts the indicators that have more similar  
11 trends next to each other. So, what you can see if you kind of  
12 squint is that in that 2017 to 2021 timeframe, which is where, of  
13 course, we have the hurricanes and the pandemic, you can see a lot  
14 of things changing from blue to red very quickly. And so, that's,  
15 again, where I talked about some of that increasing volatility.  
16 So, this was a period of big ecosystem change and you can see how  
17 that change echoes across the various components of the ecosystem.

18  
19 So, there's a couple other types of synthesis plots that we've  
20 included in the report. And again, those can be used to understand  
21 through the overall backdrop against which managers are trying to  
22 make management decisions. And then, I think one more slide.

23  
24 And then lastly, the ESR is a great way to elevate local knowledge  
25 in management. I wanted to point out that the risk indicators that  
26 we selected were largely based on the conceptual modeling exercise  
27 that was done some years ago. And so, basically, we're taking these  
28 indicators for quantifying concerns from the fishing industry and  
29 putting numbers to those concerns. So, things like pollution and  
30 coral bleaching and sargassum, which have come up in conversation,  
31 we're now able to actually quantify those concerns and by doing so  
32 take a better look at how much of an impact these processes are  
33 having on the larger ecosystem and the fisheries. And then one  
34 more slide.

35  
36 So, next steps, the report is done. Again, we'll be doing annual  
37 updates to the report as planned. We are working on an executive  
38 summary, and we'd like to produce, like, an easily digestible  
39 summary of indicator trends. I'm interested in hearing feedback  
40 from the Council in terms of what would be most useful or what  
41 you'd like to see, if there's any sort of particular products you'd  
42 like to see.

43  
44 I mentioned the annual updates that is pending, no additional loss  
45 of staff. We did lose some staff who were kind of critical in some  
46 of this work, but we do have a few staff left and we think that  
47 with that capacity we will be able to provide the annual updates,  
48 but if we lose those staff, we'll be in trouble.

1  
2 Report again is automated and modular. We welcome ideas for new  
3 indicators to be included. It's very easy to make updates on the  
4 annual update process. If we have additional time, some research  
5 that I'd like to see, we do need some further analysis of fishery  
6 independent data to disentangle those artifacts of misreporting.  
7 So, again, many of the indicators that are in this report are based  
8 on the Caribbean commercial logbook and landings database. And so,  
9 of course any sort of misreporting can cause some of the indicators  
10 to have trends that they wouldn't otherwise if they didn't have  
11 the misreporting. Some of that needs to be disentangled.

12  
13 And then we're also actively working to expand the suite of social  
14 indicators. We'd like to be able to present a broader suite of  
15 those social indicators to better capture what's going on in the  
16 social and economic environment.

17  
18 I think I just have one last acknowledgment slide. Thanks for  
19 everyone who contributed this. It was definitely a big team effort,  
20 and if there's time, I can take any questions. Thank you.

21  
22 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Mandy. Andy?

25  
26 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Hey, Mandy, Andy Strelcheck. Appreciate the  
27 report and update and look forward to digging into it further.  
28 Curious from the standpoint of, kind of, comparing the variables  
29 to an average condition? How does that, especially for things that  
30 relate to management by the Caribbean Council, how do you factor  
31 in essentially changes management to that? Are you essentially  
32 just using, kind of, the period of time for your average and  
33 comparing it against previous, you know, or average conditions,  
34 both positive and negative?

35  
36 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Yeah. Thanks, Andy, for the question. I'm not  
37 sure I fully understood. We have a time series, and then we look  
38 at the window over the last five years to look at, like, recent  
39 trends. So, I'm not sure if you're-- the full time series would be  
40 kind of the average, and then we're comparing the recent change.

41  
42 The five years is kind of arbitrary. It's just been used in many  
43 ecosystem status reports. That can definitely be changed if a  
44 different time window is of interest. But the indicator plots  
45 there, are showing the last five years versus the full time series.  
46 I'm not sure if that answers your question.

47  
48 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah, I mean, that's helpful. I was thinking,

1 for example, when we implemented annual catch limits, right,  
2 there's a transition in terms of the authorized amount of harvest  
3 kind of pre-imposed to annual catch limits, that, at least for  
4 management, that would be more of a distinction in terms of shifts  
5 or changes above or below an average.

6  
7 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Yeah. We do see a lot of decreasing reporting  
8 once the ACLs are put into place. So, in the early twenty tens,  
9 you see a lot of decreasing reporting. That's likely related to  
10 the implementation of the ACLs. And we do discuss that in the  
11 report. So, that is one of the artifacts that I mentioned when  
12 we're looking at the Caribbean landings data that you have to take  
13 into account that there's probably been some changes in the  
14 reporting over time.

15  
16 So that is discussed in the report, in some of the text.

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin.

19  
20 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. Kevin McCarthy. Hey, Mandy. Nice  
21 presentation. It's more of a comment than a question.

22  
23 I'm really looking forward to seeing how this kind of work gets  
24 tied into SEDAR 103. I think everything's very timely. So, thanks  
25 for the presentation.

26  
27 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Thank you, Kevin. I'm looking forward to that as  
28 well.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other questions or comments for Mandy? María?

31  
32 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi, Mandy. Thank you. This is María López. You  
33 were asking for suggestions or things that will be helpful for  
34 management. I think the summary that you provided, I think it's  
35 slides seven, eight, and nine. The summary for each one of the  
36 islands.

37  
38 You said that you were going to be-- the plan is to make some  
39 updates annually, I think having that kind of information will be  
40 very useful to include in the amendments and the actions that we  
41 are preparing for the Council.

42  
43 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Okay. Thank you, María. That's very helpful.  
44 Other regions have done that sort of summary, then they have some  
45 sort of graphics and sometimes even an interactive graphic. So,  
46 those are things that we're exploring.

47  
48 But thanks for that feedback. That's helpful.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?  
3  
4 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Mandy, Graciela here. So, we have, you  
5 know, apparently in 2025, now, the highest inundation of sargassum  
6 that is being reported. We have a little bit of information on  
7 fish kills that I had not seen before. We're trying to get people  
8 to when they record videos to show us what fish species are being  
9 killed by the sargassum. But it appears that it's mostly the  
10 sardines and herrings. You know, close to shore species that are  
11 used for bait and that kind of thing.  
12  
13 Are we thinking about doing something between this amount of  
14 sargassum and estimating the biomass that we lose every time we  
15 have these events?  
16  
17 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Thanks, Graciela. I hadn't thought about that,  
18 but that strikes me as sort of a red tide type of problem, which,  
19 of course, we've been working in the Gulf on trying to estimate  
20 biomass losses due to red tide and harmful algal blooms. When we  
21 started doing that was when it became very apparent that, in the  
22 stock assessment process, we needed to account for that excess  
23 source of mortality, right?  
24  
25 When we had our red grouper assessment, we saw this huge decline  
26 in catch per unit effort and abundance indices from 2005 to 2006,  
27 and it was apparent that wasn't caused by fishing.  
28  
29 So, I'm not sure if we would want to go down that road without,  
30 you know, a clear use for the information. Right? but it's  
31 certainly something that we could consider doing. Yeah.  
32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Mandy? No. Okay. Thank  
34 you, Mandy.  
35  
36 **MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Thank you very much.  
37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next, we have Vance Vicente SSC.  
39  
40 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. I thought that we were going to  
41 have a little break, but that's okay. I'll go ahead.  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Let's do that because-- let's do a quick  
44 break.  
45  
46 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you.  
47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Ten minutes.

1  
2 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)  
3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to get started again. We have Vance  
5 Vicente with the SSC report.  
6

7 **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE (SSC) UPDATE—VANCE VICENTE,**  
8 **CHAIR**  
9

10 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Good morning, everybody. I'm Vance  
11 Vicente, Chairman of the Scientific and Statistical Committee.  
12 Thank you for inviting me to the Caribbean Fisher Management  
13 Council, 187<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council meeting. Most  
14 of my talk, in fact, all of it related to my participation in the  
15 SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean Yellowtail Snapper and Stoplight  
16 Parrotfish Stock Assessment Review Workshop.  
17

18 This review workshop took place between July 15<sup>th</sup> and July 18<sup>th</sup> of  
19 2025 at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, U.S.A. I also want to acknowledge  
20 that in this meeting Julian had an excellent participation in the  
21 meeting. There were also other members from the Council, and those  
22 were Graciela García-Moliner and Reni García, which was one of the  
23 review panel members, and myself. I don't know if I missed anybody  
24 else there. All the others-- many of the others were present in  
25 the webinar. Oh, and Elizabeth. Right. Thank you.  
26

27 So, first, I mean, it's always good to revise what's the purpose  
28 of SEDAR and what does SEDAR consist of. Well, the template of  
29 SEDAR is the following. It consists of three workshops and follows  
30 five steps. The first step is the data workshop during which  
31 fisheries dependent and fisheries independent monitoring and life  
32 history data of a fish stock are reviewed and compiled. The second  
33 workshop is the assessment process which utilizes the data that  
34 gets synthesized during the first data workshop.  
35

36 The third step is the review workshop, which is the one I tried to  
37 summarize the best I could, which is the subject of this report,  
38 during which independent experts review the input data, the  
39 assessment methods, in other words, models, assessments, stock  
40 models that are used, and the assessment products, like what do we  
41 do with all these models that I'm going to try to explain. Fourth.  
42 The fourth step of SEDAR is the final completed assessment, which  
43 includes the reports of all the three aforementioned stages and of  
44 all supporting documentation. Finally, or fifth, the fifth step is  
45 the completed assessment report, which is then forwarded to the  
46 Council, the Scientific and Statistics Committee of the Caribbean  
47 Fishery Management Council for certification as appropriate for  
48 management and development of specific management recommendations.

1  
2 The slides that I'm going to be using are a little bit saturated,  
3 so I'm going to go over them. The reason why I put up as much  
4 information as possible is so that the SSC members have a source  
5 of this meeting in a summarized way for the next SSC meeting when  
6 I suppose that we're going to be discussing the final report.

7  
8 The following components of the SEDAR 84 consisted of a review  
9 panel, which consisted of six panel members, two from the Council  
10 and SSC members, and four from other institutions, U.S. Virgin  
11 Islands, Elizabeth, MSU, IFC, and COV.

12  
13 The analytic team is the second team, consisted of two members,  
14 both from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center of the National  
15 Marine Fisheries Service. There were four appointed observers,  
16 three from the Caribbean Fishery Management Council District  
17 Advisory Panel of Saint Croix, U.S.V.I., and one from the CFMC  
18 District Advisory Panel of Saint Thomas/Saint John, U.S. Virgin  
19 Islands. There were also additional observers. There were 14  
20 additional observers which included, among others, three from  
21 NOAA, two from the Regional Office from SERO, two from the Science  
22 Centers at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center, two staff  
23 members, one from SEDAR and one from the CFMC, and one workshop  
24 observer from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center [inaudible].

25  
26 What were the species in questions? Well, there were two species.  
27 The yellowtail snapper, *ocyrurus chrysurus*, and the stoplight  
28 parrotfish, *sparisoma viride*. The Caribbean yellowtail snapper is  
29 interesting. The snapper stock has been addressed in two previous  
30 SEDAR stock assessment processes. That is SEDAR 8 and in SEDAR 46.

31  
32 In addition, in the latter, in the SEDAR 46, the stoplight  
33 parrotfish stock was also previously assessed. Both of these taxa,  
34 at present, are classified as reef fish unit, fishery management  
35 units, and managed on their respective island-based fishery  
36 management program as data limited species.

37  
38 What about these species? Well, these species are very contrasting.  
39 One, for example, they differ in their life history  
40 characteristics. The yellowtail snapper is dioecious. That means  
41 they have separate sexes, male and females, while the stoplight  
42 parrotfish is a protandrous sequential hermaphrodite, and  
43 therefore with three sexes.

44  
45 Their feeding habits, their behavior and their ecological  
46 functions differ. The yellowtail snapper is carnivorous and preys  
47 on the water column, on small fish and squids as well as on benthic  
48 reefing vertebrates such as decapod crustaceans, that is shrimps,

1 stomatopods, crabs.

2  
3 The spotlight parrotfish on the other hand is a macroalgal grazer,  
4 herbivorous, and feeds almost exclusively on algae. On large and  
5 sparse turfs of algae growing over dead corals and endolithic algae  
6 which live within the coral skeleton. And they both have similar,  
7 biographic distribution. That's just to give you a little bit of  
8 biological background on these two species.

9  
10 In the process, there were four different stock assessment models  
11 used. Model one, model two, model three, and model four. On the  
12 right of each model, model one was applied to the Saint Croix,  
13 stoplight parrotfish, and Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail  
14 snapper and the Puerto Rico yellowtail snapper. And for the Puerto  
15 Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper, which data was  
16 combined. Model two was used for Saint Croix, Saint Thomas/Saint  
17 John, Puerto Rico. And for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John,  
18 yellowtail snapper stock. Model three for Saint Thomas/Saint John,  
19 and two for Puerto Rico. And model four for Puerto Rico, which was  
20 a test model to test for convergence.

21  
22 For each model, among other parameters, which I will list in the  
23 next slide, the key spawning potential ratio, SPR, plots are  
24 provided with specific horizontal red lines indicating the MSY  
25 proxy of 40% of SPR. The next slide.

26  
27 The population parameters plotted for each model were 15. These  
28 models are very complex, and they take into consideration a lot of  
29 variables which are very confusing for non-modelers and non-  
30 mathematicians like myself. So, that's the list.

31  
32 Size at age; observe and expected landing; size selectivity; SPR;  
33 SPR phase; SPR ratio; length fit aggregated across time; length  
34 fit; mean length, NCRMP for the National Coral Reef Monitoring  
35 Program; recruitment deviations; unfishes ratio; fishing  
36 mortality; parameters; length composition; and the index of the  
37 NCRMP, index of abundance of the National Coral Reef Monitoring  
38 Program.

39  
40 The whole SEDAR process is based on terms of references. There  
41 were eight terms of reference which the panel followed in order to  
42 conduct the model analysis. Under the SEDAR 84 Caribbean yellowtail  
43 snapper and stoplight parrotfish section V, a review workshop the  
44 review panel reported, report, submitted, responded to the eight  
45 mandated terms of reference. I mean, are the legal things that  
46 need to be addressed during the SEDAR process.

47  
48 Terms of reference one, essentially what it does, it evaluates the

1 data from the data workshop. How good is the data? How well does  
2 it apply to assess the stock of the species in question?

3  
4 For Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Puerto Rico Yellowtail Snapper,  
5 the panel recommended that for the Yellowtail Snapper model, the  
6 stock unit should have been explored further and needs to reflect  
7 the biology of the species and its dynamics. So, that was one of  
8 the criticisms. The panel also believed that the time series for  
9 Saint Thomas and Saint John fisheries is too short for this  
10 species. And the reason for that is that the longevity, the life  
11 expectancy for a species that is twenty to thirty years, using a  
12 time series of twelve years, the panel believes that it's not  
13 enough. In Puerto Rico, decision to drop the initial NCRMP survey  
14 time series was thought to be premature.

15  
16 Uncertainties were acknowledged, such as too short of a time series  
17 in the landing efforts. Two, difficulty in quantifying fishers  
18 catch per unit effort. Three, distrust in the landing report data.  
19 Four, limited samples of fisheries dependent of the trip interview  
20 program, length composition data. Five, incomplete data sets, in  
21 other words, not capturing the juvenile trends. And six, uncertain  
22 connectivity.

23  
24 Other uncertainties were not acknowledged, such as the  
25 uncertainties in the NCRMP seasonality and the limitations of the  
26 NCRMP in capturing indices of abundance for the larger yellowtail  
27 snapper or the juvenile parrotfish. However, on the other hand,  
28 the panel did agree that based on the model requirements, the best  
29 available data used was appropriately applied.

30  
31 Regarding the evaluation of data for the Saint Croix stoplight  
32 parrotfish, the panel did not agree that the data was reliable.  
33 Because again, due to the short time series for the parrotfish to  
34 support the assessment approach and findings. Furthermore, the  
35 panel is concerned about the very limited trip interview program  
36 length composition data and there was an overall distrust in the  
37 catch report data.

38  
39 The panel also believed that there are biases associated with the  
40 index data used by the NCRMP program, potentially missing seasonal  
41 or environmental changes in the parrotfish abundance. Remember,  
42 for Saint Croix only the stoplight parrotfish stock was addressed,  
43 not the yellowtail snapper. Okay. The NCRMP methodology certainly  
44 misses a significant portion of young of the year stoplight  
45 parrotfish. Next slide.

46  
47 The evaluation of the data for the Saint Thomas/Saint John  
48 Yellowtail Snapper, the panel believed that the input data series

1 for the Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper is unreliable  
2 as well as insufficient to support the assessment approach and  
3 findings. The reason for this disagreement is that the historic  
4 landing data used is only twelve years in a fish that lives for  
5 twenty to thirty years. In addition, the panel believes that the  
6 fisheries independent index data used for the model includes the  
7 seasonality NCRMP data collection, two weeks in August every two  
8 years, which potentially misses the seasonal or environmental  
9 changes in the yellowtail abundance and misses larger older fish  
10 that are found in highest abundance.

11  
12 The panel believes that the DCRNP, the District Coral Reef  
13 Monitoring Program data is helpful in capturing this subset, but  
14 the DCRMP time series and sample size was also considered to be  
15 too small.

16  
17 The evaluation of the data for the Puerto Rico yellowtail snapper.  
18 The panel believes that the input series for the Puerto Rico  
19 yellowtail snapper is unreliable and insufficient to support the  
20 assessment approach and findings. The reasoning behind this  
21 disagreement is, one, that there is no recreational data available  
22 in Puerto Rico, and the NCRMP methodology misses larger older fish  
23 among other reasons.

24  
25 In the next slide, TOR two. The terms of reference two is to  
26 evaluate, not the data now, but the methods used to assess the  
27 stock, taking into account the available data. The panel agreed  
28 that the stock synthesis three, SS3, was correctly applied for all  
29 three stock assessments, Saint Croix's stoplight parrotfish, Saint  
30 Thomas/Saint John's yellowtail, and Puerto Rico yellowtail  
31 snapper.

32  
33 The configurations and assumptions of the models, for example,  
34 fixed versus estimated parameters which options were selected  
35 within SS3 were not all documented in the assessment workshop  
36 report. For all three assessments, there were a few changes in the  
37 configuration and inputs of the SS3 during the review workshop.  
38 The evaluation of the methods utilized for the stock assessment of  
39 the Saint Croix stoplight parrotfish. The panel believes, one, the  
40 standard deviation around the estimate of fishing mortality were  
41 really high, indicating that the model was not able to estimate  
42 fishing mortality well. This could either be an indication of model  
43 misspecifications or data quality issue. Third, there was also a  
44 very poor convergence of FMSY in both models runs.

45  
46 The panel also believe that the method used for the Saint  
47 Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper, they believe that the dome  
48 shaped selectivity for the two fisheries independent surveys,

1 NCRMP and DCRMP, was questioned as this assumption has strong  
2 implications for the representation of large fish in the population  
3 and the fishery.

4  
5 After the review workshop, again, for Saint Thomas/Saint John  
6 yellowtail snapper, it remained unclear if other model  
7 configurations were correctly specified based on the diagnostics  
8 or issues were related to data quality. See more details in TOR  
9 four. Similar issues to those observed with the Saint Croix  
10 stoplight parrotfish model were evident for this model as well,  
11 including high uncertainty around fishing mortality again and  
12 recruitment estimates and the poor convergence of the FMSY. Next  
13 slide.

14  
15 The evaluation of the methods used for the Puerto Rico yellowtail  
16 snapper. Well, the review panel raised concerns about the use of  
17 dome shaped selectivity for the NCRMP survey and the choice of the  
18 age 26 plus as the plus group. After the review workshop, it  
19 remained unclear if other model configurations were correctly  
20 specified based on the diagnostics.

21  
22 Three, there was high uncertainty around the fishing mortality and  
23 the recruit estimates. There was also high uncertainty around  
24 fishing mortality and recruitment estimates and poor convergence  
25 of FMSY. Next slide.

26  
27 Alright. The evaluation of the method used for Saint Croix  
28 stoplight parrotfish. Again, the review panel was concerned about  
29 the short time series, commercial catch and length composition,  
30 index of abundance. While SS3 is a flexible and powerful stock  
31 assessment model, its performance depends on having sufficient  
32 data to inform the model. In this case, data appears insufficient  
33 to support the model complexity. Additionally, only five years of  
34 survey index were available.

35  
36 The SS3 is still, ultimately, an age-structure model that converts  
37 length to ages, which this assessment does not have enough  
38 information or data for. That was a major criticism. Also, the  
39 workshop also shows how sensitive the model outputs were to the  
40 tradeoff of fits between the commercial catch and the fishery  
41 independent index numbers and estimation of growth parameters. The  
42 two model runs also show opposite signals in overfishing and  
43 overfished status.

44  
45 The evaluation of the data for Saint Thomas and Saint John  
46 yellowtail snapper. The review panel was concerned again about the  
47 short time series and the data appears insufficient to support the  
48 complexity of the model, of the SS3 model. In other words, the

1 data was found to be not sufficient enough for them to produce a  
2 final assessment model.

3  
4 The method used for the Puerto Rico yellowtail snappers indicates  
5 that either the model was not configured correctly or the SS3 model  
6 is still too complex given the data quality. Sensitivity analysis  
7 conducted during the review workshop showed how sensitivity model  
8 outputs were to the tradeoff of fits between the commercial catch  
9 and the NCRMP plus NCRMP La Parguera survey, which was the longest  
10 time series. Given that it is unclear if the model is sensitive  
11 because of model misspecifications or data quality issues and  
12 considering the sufficient length of data, it remains uncertain if  
13 the model used, the SS3 model, is the appropriate model for this  
14 assessment.

15  
16 SEDAR 84, Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper and the Puerto  
17 Rico Yellowtail Snapper. The question, is it likely the stock is  
18 overfished? What information helps you reach this conclusion about  
19 the Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper and the Puerto Rico  
20 yellowtail snapper? Unknown. The results are too sensitive to model  
21 assumptions to allow for a conclusion about this topic.

22  
23 Second question, is it likely that stock is undergoing overfishing?  
24 What information helps you reach this conclusion? Unknown. The  
25 results are too sensitive to model assumptions to allow for  
26 conclusion about this topic.

27  
28 Terms of reference four is to comment on the degree to which  
29 methods used to evaluate uncertainty reflect and capture the  
30 significant sources of uncertainty in the population, data  
31 sources, and assessment methods. One, stock synthesis, SS3,  
32 include a set of standard approaches to investigate uncertainties.  
33 These tools were applied to the assessment and a standard set of  
34 diagnostics was used to evaluate model stability for the three  
35 stocks. These diagnostics include checks for convergence,  
36 correlation analysis, variance evaluation, jitter analysis,  
37 residual analysis, retrospective analysis, and likelihood  
38 profiles.

39  
40 Additionally, sensitivity runs were conducted. Many of them, by  
41 the way. The base models from the AW were changed during the review  
42 workshop due to some mistakes detected in the configurations. The  
43 new base model and sensitivity runs are documented in annex one.  
44 Note that these full set of diagnostics were not updated for the  
45 new base model agreed upon during the review workshop.

46  
47 Uncertainty regarding the stoplight parrotfish. Well, in summary,  
48 because I'm not going to read all the small letters because, first,

1 I cannot read them myself. So. But In summary, while appropriate  
2 diagnostics and sensitivity runs were conducted, the combination  
3 of model instability and interacting uncertainties made it  
4 difficult to confidently attribute outcomes to specific sources.  
5 This makes it difficult to reach clear conclusions due to the  
6 various sources of uncertainty. Further investigation of model  
7 assumptions, alternative parameterizations, and potential data  
8 conflicts is necessary.

9  
10 Regarding uncertainties with the Puerto Rico yellowtail snapper.  
11 Again, in summary, the combination of model instability and  
12 interacting uncertainties made it difficult to confidently  
13 attribute outcomes to specific sources. As a result, drawing clear  
14 conclusions remains challenging. To address this, improvements in  
15 data quality, increased data collection, extension of the time  
16 series and combining this stock with Saint John/Saint Thomas data  
17 are recommended. Next slide.

18  
19 Uncertainty regarding the combined Saint Thomas/Saint John, with  
20 the Puerto Rico yellowtail snapper. One, due to uncertainties in  
21 the model structure, the recognition that the stocks from PR and  
22 Saint Thomas/Saint John are part of a larger population. This was  
23 criticized, like, why were we looking at it, it should be the same  
24 stock in two different locations when they're all part of the same  
25 stock. The short time series available for the stock is Saint  
26 John/Saint Thomas and looking into the survey indices that peaked  
27 in 2012.

28  
29 The review panel recommended to build a combined model using data  
30 from both Puerto Rico and Saint Thomas/Saint John. Efforts were  
31 initiated, presented, and discussed during the review workshop.  
32 While the first combined models did not converge, a second attempt  
33 successfully converged and provided a basis for further research.

34  
35 Terms of reference five are the recommendations. First, for Saint  
36 Croix stoplight parrotfish. Population structure studies could be  
37 conducted through genetics, tagging, fish larvae, otolith  
38 microchemistry, or modeling. Second, to consider increasing the  
39 time series with data available back in time.

40  
41 Three, to increase the sample size of the length composition. Four,  
42 to continue the efforts and explore alternative survey sampling  
43 designs. Five, reevaluate the assumptions using the models of  
44 steepness and SR. Six, alternative method for estimating  
45 mortality. And seven, to improve the otolith samples and try to  
46 convert length composition into ages, which what this SS3 model is  
47 used for.

48

1 The recommendation for Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Puerto Rico  
2 yellowtail snapper. The recommendations are the following. One,  
3 further investigate the population structure of these two stocks.  
4 Two, alternative methods for estimating, again, mortality. Three,  
5 increased sample size for commercial length compositions. Four, to  
6 collect data from the recreational fleet in Puerto Rico. Five,  
7 models were very sensitive to growth and length at age. It is  
8 recommended to increase otolith readings and try to produce age  
9 length keys for some years to try to feed the model.

10  
11 TOR six. Terms of reference six. Provide guidance on the key  
12 improvements in data or modeling approaches that should be  
13 considered when scheduling the next assessment. U.S. Caribbean's  
14 stoplight parrotfish, that's Saint Croix. One, to consider  
15 increasing the time series. Two, to consider the use of data  
16 limited methods to provide advice.

17  
18 For the yellowtail snapper. Include the two area/unit model  
19 recommendation. And two, model-based survey estimated, explore  
20 spatial temporal models that could combine the National Coral Reef  
21 Monitoring Program indices from both islands.

22  
23 TOR seven. Provide recommendations on possible ways to improve the  
24 SEDAR process. That was not addressed, at least not in the report.  
25 And TOR eight prepared a peer review summary summarizing the  
26 panel's overall discussions and recommendations.

27  
28 This is just a table showing what the different models, model one,  
29 two, and three, and four, and what parameters were use for each of  
30 these models. I'm not going to go into details, first, because I  
31 don't understand it. I included just a few of the plots to show  
32 you how diverged the results are using two different models with  
33 same data. For example, here in figure one, we show the depletion  
34 level, that is the fraction of unfished spawning output, estimated  
35 by the base run model, one, and the sensitivity run model two on  
36 the right. You can use as reference of the FSPR of 0.4, which is  
37 the management target, and look at the variability, the differences  
38 in the results by using two different models.

39  
40 Again, we see a similar pattern in differences. In the spawning  
41 potential ratio, SPR estimated by the base run on the left and the  
42 sensitivity run on the right. On the third figure, we show the  
43 depletion level, fraction of unfished spawning output, estimated  
44 by the base run on the left and the sensitivity run on the right.

45  
46 Overall, the combination of model sensitivity to assumptions, data  
47 conflicts, and uncertain historical trends limits the assessment's  
48 utility for informing robust, science-based management measures.

1  
2 That that's all I have with regards to SEDAR 84. Yeah. That's the  
3 last slide, I was building up on that a little more. But--  
4  
5  
6 For the next SSC meeting, well, again, I believe that we have to  
7 discuss-- it's up to the to the Council --the SEDAR 84. No? There's  
8 a no on that. The SEDAR 91 SSC? Yes! Okay.  
9  
10 And just a note on the species matrix ecosystem components that  
11 was being discussed earlier. I mean, like Sennai said, we've done  
12 this before, several times. One, we spent a lot of time during SSC  
13 meetings, as well as a meeting that we had at the Southeast  
14 Fisheries Science Center establishing the vulnerability of each of  
15 the species, each of the FMUs that we managed in the Caribbean.  
16 And that was based on life history characteristics, whether the  
17 species was a stenotopic, or eurytopic regarding changes in  
18 temperature, salinity, pH, and other parameters that we use.  
19  
20 I don't know. We should really look back into that to see how much  
21 of that information is going to be useful to reevaluate the status  
22 of the stocks and the fishery management plans now. But there is  
23 there's a lot of information on that.  
24  
25 And regarding to specifying which species fall under criteria,  
26 three, four, five. I mean, there are some ecological accepted  
27 concepts. For example, I suggest that we just apply the keystone  
28 species concept of Robert T. Paine, but that's in regard to the  
29 importance of a species on the ecosystem. And as an example, this  
30 is a species, any taxon does not necessarily have to be abundant  
31 in order to exert major changes in the structure and function of  
32 the ecosystem. Okay. And one example of this that we know of is  
33 the diadema, that a certain population density is beneficial in  
34 preventing the dominance of macroalgae over other components,  
35 coral reef, corals, sponges, etcetera, at certain intermediate  
36 density levels. That was an example for invertebrates.  
37  
38 And then, as an example for a fish, well, several of the sparisoma  
39 species. Okay. Depending on the species, because, for example, you  
40 have the bucktooth parrotfish, sparisoma radians, which is a  
41 grazer, but it fits very lightly on the seagrass leaves, and they  
42 leave some very specific half lunar scars on it. But then, the  
43 others such as sparisoma viride, which is the subject, one of the  
44 species used for this stock assessment, they can very well, at  
45 certain densities, act as a keystone predator. In other words, by  
46 preventing algal growth to outcompete other major components of  
47 the ecosystem.  
48

1 And also, other criteria can be used where that species that is  
2 being evaluated, you know, produces bioherm habitats, the  
3 functions, ecological functions like stabilization of  
4 unconsolidated substrates, ability to adapt to climate changes,  
5 primary production. And a lot of these have been addressed in the  
6 past.

7  
8 What I suggest regarding this topic is that we look back at our  
9 data and what conclusions have we come up regarding whether a  
10 species can be or is an ecosystem component or needs to be added  
11 to the ecosystem component column. A species can be in various  
12 column on the criteria, like, one, two, or three. But to make sure  
13 that we use these ecological functions to make the proper decision  
14 regarding whether a species is or how important it is as an  
15 ecosystem component.

16  
17 I think I've talked enough. So, if you have any questions on the  
18 model, Kevin, will be very happy to answer the question. [laughter]

19  
20 Kevin, go ahead.

#### 21 22 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

23  
24 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks, Vance, for that good summary of the  
25 review process. A lot of the conclusions of the panel, we don't  
26 disagree with. I'm having a hard time using the term "instability."  
27 Adyan and I were chatting back and forth here, and I agree with  
28 what she's saying here. The models are very sensitive to initial  
29 conditions which a lot of that has to be assumptions, right, given  
30 the length of time of the time series. Instability is not the same  
31 thing as sensitive to inputs or lacking convergence. In other  
32 words, not able to arrive at estimates for various parameters.  
33 Instability in my mind implies other things.

34  
35 We talked about this a little bit at the workshop and the way some  
36 of the panel was using that term, and the way I think of that term,  
37 but it's their review. They get to write whatever they want, so we  
38 can agree to disagree on the use of that term. I don't disagree  
39 that the results are very sensitive to assumptions. And a lot of  
40 that is, you know, the data limited nature of this. So, I'm not  
41 surprised by a lot of this.

42  
43 Now we haven't seen the reports yet, so we haven't had a chance to  
44 go through it and I suspect there'll be plenty of things that we  
45 can build upon coming out of their recommendations. And so, the  
46 reason when you were talking about the next SSC meeting, I think  
47 what I'm suggesting is that we wrap up SEDAR 91 for the Virgin  
48 Islands. We then move on to, at a future date, a future SSC meeting,

1 we move on to SEDAR 91 spiny lobster for Puerto Rico given the  
2 analysis we're going to work with DRNA staff with, because that,  
3 I would think, the spiny lobster assessment takes precedent over  
4 this one.

5  
6 Certainly, there are fishers who are interested in SEDAR 84 as  
7 well. But given sort of the value and the landing levels that spiny  
8 lobster represents, that would be my recommendation. And then we  
9 did come out of it, and we'll see even more when we see the reports  
10 of recommendations for moving forward. I don't disagree with a lot  
11 of these, you know, this first-time hearing of some of the  
12 recommendations.

13  
14 You know, these may be, given the data limitations, more  
15 appropriate species for SEDAR 103 where we're looking at some  
16 alternatives. Right? Especially in the Virgin Islands where we've  
17 got that shorter time series, and that shorter time series is  
18 driven by species specific landings only going back to 2012. And  
19 that's a real problem for models.

20  
21 Anyway, I we could talk about this all day, but I'll spare you.  
22 But thanks for the debrief.

23  
24 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

27  
28 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Two comments. One, I was struck by some  
29 of the model results that were shared. So, first, thank you, Vance,  
30 for the, you know, very detailed briefing with regard to the  
31 review. I think it was very helpful.

32  
33 I think my takeaway is not all models are created equal. Right?  
34 And so, some models are better than others. All are wrong. Right?  
35 There were certainly some things in there that definitely didn't  
36 look right with regard to spawning potential ratio trends. You  
37 don't see these knife edge changes, right, in some of the  
38 sensitivity runs that would be realistic in the first place. Right?

39  
40 And so, I don't know enough about the details of the assessment,  
41 but I think that's something that Kevin and team obviously are  
42 much more familiar with, and it'll be something that'll be  
43 important for the review going forward with the SSC to consider  
44 any sort of changes there.

45  
46 My comment is really with your last bullet on this slide, and my  
47 recommendation is the SSC hold off on discussing the species matrix  
48 and the fishery management unit changes.

1  
2 I don't decidedly disagree with your concepts and what you're  
3 laying out there, but I think it's important that this Council  
4 further develops the amendment, and then you're able to provide  
5 input and refine and react to that information. So, I'll talk to  
6 Miguel and others, but that's my recommendation is not to get too  
7 far out ahead of the process right now where it stands.

8  
9 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. Thank you, Andy.

10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

12  
13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. Excellent  
14 presentation, Vance. I was there with you along with the rest of  
15 the group. It was a very intense week. Three solid days of running  
16 models trying to make the model fit the data, and it was very  
17 stressful for everyone. Very, very stressful.

18  
19 But one thing I want to say is this shows the importance of this  
20 review with external people who actually don't know what's taking  
21 place. Like, the guy said on the last day, I don't remember his  
22 name, but he was the lead of the group. His last words were, "The  
23 biggest asset in the room was me as the fisher. The fishers must  
24 be used more when doing the entire process." He says, "Every  
25 species is not built to be fit in a model. There are other ways to  
26 get away from running the process without models." And I can see  
27 why he said so, because we spent three days, ten hours a day  
28 running models.

29  
30 I felt for Kevin and the team because they were left with a lot of  
31 homework every day. Trying to get the data to fit the model. But,  
32 you know, the outcome is these people see things that we don't  
33 see. They had a lot of questions, and I was able to answer a lot  
34 of the questions by communicating with the fishers in Puerto Rico  
35 and in Saint Croix.

36  
37 He had questions and they weren't in the room. I was the only one  
38 in the room. I could've spoken with Saint Thomas. I spoke with  
39 Sennai's team; I had questions. I called into his, well, texted  
40 into his office. The guy says, "Once you have my answer, raise  
41 your hand."

42  
43 I communicated with five fishers, including Carlos from Saint  
44 Croix, asking how many fishers do this, how many fishers-- and all  
45 of those answers was very helpful. That's the importance of us  
46 being involved. Spoke with Nelson. Nelson contacted the guy who  
47 got sick last minute that couldn't be at the meeting. I was able  
48 to get his answers.

1  
2 So out of the entire process, I find this review the most  
3 important. I sat on the lobster 57. We did that one in Florida  
4 also. I went there with vertigo. They used to walk me up to the  
5 table to answer the questions. But we did it. I had two other  
6 fishers. Gerson was there, and Velasquez was there at that meeting.

7  
8 So, I just wanted to put that there, you know. I think it was a  
9 long weekend. It was a very productive week, but it's really a lot  
10 to go through in a short period of time trying to get stuff to  
11 work.

12  
13 So, you know, I was thankful that I was able to be there as part  
14 of the process and look forward to continuing being part of the  
15 process. Thank you.

16  
17 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yep. One thing that I forgot to-- thank  
18 you, Julian. There was one comment, I think, was by the president  
19 of the panel, what was his name, Carlos? The Portuguese guy. Yeah.

20  
21 Yeah. He said, "Oh, by the way, you know, these models are not the  
22 only things that can be used to assess a stock. There are other  
23 ways of looking at a stock, like putting more effort into the  
24 collection of data, improving the quality of data, involving the  
25 fishers more on this aspect," which goes along with what Kevin was  
26 saying earlier this morning. You know they're changing the ways of  
27 us evaluating what the fishery status is. But, anyhow, that did  
28 come up in that meeting.

29  
30 Thank you.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Anything for Vance? Alright. Hearing none.  
33 What we're going to do is we're going to break for lunch, and then  
34 we'll be back at 01:30 and continue on with the OEAP.

35  
36 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 13, 2025.)

37  
38 - - -

39  
40 AUGUST 13, 2025

41  
42 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

43  
44 - - -

45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to get started again. Next on  
46 the agenda is the Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Report by  
47 the Chairperson, Jannette Ramos-García.

48

1           **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL (OEAP) REPORT—JANNETTE**  
2   **RAMOS GARCÍA, CHAIR**

3  
4   **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good afternoon, everyone. Today, I will  
5 share-- Cristina, the presentation, please.

6  
7 Today, I will share a report that highlights our recent activities,  
8 the projects we have underway and the priorities that will guide  
9 our work in the months ahead. Next slide, Cristina.

10  
11 I will begin with an overview of the Outreach Education Advisory  
12 Panel, recent activities and meetings. This will give you a picture  
13 of the work we have done and how we have continued our outreach  
14 and education efforts through partnerships and community  
15 engagement. Next slide.

16  
17 One of our key activities has been our participation in the MREP  
18 planning unit team meetings. As part of these efforts, we organized  
19 a small expo on lesser used fish species during the June 2025 MREP  
20 meeting. This event was co-hosted by Chef Loraine Arroyo and  
21 myself.

22  
23 Last year, Chef Arroyo completed the continuing education course  
24 on lesser used fish species for culinary professionals. A course  
25 made possible thanks to the collaboration between the CFMC, the  
26 Puerto Rico Sea Grant Program, and the University of Puerto Rico  
27 at Mayagüez. By connecting culinary expertise with fisheries  
28 education, we aim to promote the consumption of less used fish  
29 species, diversify consumer demand and relieve pressure on  
30 overfished stocks. Next slide.

31  
32 Another highlight was our work with children from the annual summer  
33 camp organized by Protectores de Cuencas in Guánica.

34  
35 We took them by boat, following all the safety protocols, to Los  
36 Pozos Beach in Cabo Rojo. Cabo Rojo is in the Southwest Coast of  
37 the island. Once there, they participated in educational talks  
38 about marine ecosystems, protected species, and the local history  
39 that shapes this coastal area. Hands on learning like this is a  
40 powerful tool. It inspires awareness, environmental awareness, and  
41 builds appreciation for marine resources in the generations that  
42 will inherit them. Next slide, Cristina.

43  
44 On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, we held our scheduled OEAP meeting. Beforehand,  
45 members and fisheries liaisons were asked to submit a list of needs  
46 from the fishing communities they represent. This allowed us to  
47 compile a broad and diverse set of concerns covering both urgent  
48 challenges and long-term priorities. Our discussion generated

1 strong ideas and clearly defined priorities that will guide our  
2 strategic actions in the months ahead.

3  
4 A table compiling all the ideas and proposed projects for the new  
5 year was created. I brought two printed copies with me in case  
6 anyone would like to review them. I have it here with me. Next  
7 slide.

8  
9 From this process came our recommendations. The development of  
10 educational materials, training sessions, and communication  
11 resources targeted to commercial and recreational fishers,  
12 educators, youth, and coastal community members across Puerto Rico  
13 and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These will be distributed through  
14 community organizations, regional workshops, school visits, CFMC  
15 events, and online platforms ensuring broad, meaningful, and  
16 lasting access. Next slide.

17  
18 Now, let's move into our ongoing projects. Initiatives that reflect  
19 our commitment to outreach and education. One project we are  
20 especially proud of is the 2026 calendar. This work will highlight  
21 the contributions of fishing families whose livelihoods depend on  
22 the sea. These are families who pass down fishing skills and  
23 knowledge through generations. As you can see in this photo, we  
24 have the son, the father and the grandfather. This family is from  
25 Puerto Real in Cabo Rojo.

26  
27 It will recognize not only their role in supplying fresh local  
28 seafood, but also their commitment to preserving coastal knowledge  
29 and sustaining a way of life that supports the cultural and  
30 economic well-being of our communities.

31  
32 We have another family in the calendar from the town of Ceiba in  
33 the East Coast of the island. Fishing has been their way of life  
34 for many years. The father cannot read or write, but he's a skilled  
35 and responsible fisherman and also an artisan. His wife cooks the  
36 fresh catch he brings to the restaurant in the fishing village.  
37 Their children also take part in the work. The son goes fishing  
38 and the daughter saves the fish. The grandmother helps in the  
39 kitchen. In this family, the son fishes with his father. It was  
40 encouraging to hear that they still use a traditional method from  
41 past generation, sinking the traps and later finding them by  
42 reading simple signs in nature.

43  
44 Another family you will see in the calendar is that of our dear  
45 Gerson Martínez from San Croix and his family. He's going to be  
46 there with his son and other members of the family. Next slide,  
47 Cristina.

48

1 This is a little presentation. This concludes my presentation. And  
2 now, another project. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

3  
4 The next slide, projects in process, is the book Bajo la Luna  
5 written by Tania Marrero Rodríguez and illustrated by Paco López  
6 Mujica. It's a collection of stories that invites children to  
7 explore the wonders beneath the seas and learn what we must do to  
8 protect marine life. It highlights the importance of respect and  
9 of learning to coexist with another species. Next slide.

10  
11 The fish catalog of Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I., Dr. Árida Ortiz  
12 is still working on it. It's a comprehensive reference book that  
13 documents the rich diversity of fish species in the region and is  
14 now in its final stage of development. Next slide.

15  
16 Questions? Next slide. Thanks. Thank you very much.

### 17 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

18  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Jannette. Questions or comments for  
21 Jannette?

22  
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Jannette, the book, the last one that Jannette  
24 presented is in collaboration with the fishers of the DAP, Saint  
25 Thomas/Saint John, San Croix, Puerto Rico. The fish book that Árida  
26 is putting together. The idea came from the group in Saint Thomas,  
27 which was to illustrate the species that are important to the  
28 commercial and recreational fishers with information that they  
29 would like to see in that book. Hopefully, we get the fundings and  
30 we will publish the calendar and those two books by 2025-2026.

31  
32 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you, Miguel.

33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Jannette? Thank you,  
35 Jannette.

36  
37 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you.

38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next we have Cristina Olán with the social  
40 network.

### 41 **CFMC SOCIAL NETWORKS REPORT – CRISTINA D. OLÁN MARTÍNEZ, CFMC**

42  
43  
44 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you. Good afternoon. Buenas  
45 tardes. Thank you for this opportunity to share and present what  
46 we have been doing with our social media platforms in the Council.

47  
48 I'm going to share some of the highlights in our social media.

1 Feel free, at the end, to ask me any questions, recommendations,  
2 or comments. Thank you.

3

4 We have, in terms of the social media platforms, we have Facebook,  
5 Instagram, X, LinkedIn, Threads, YouTube, Blue Sky, and ISSUU which  
6 you are using now for documents, for the meetings and also books,  
7 newsletters, and other documents that are related to the Council's  
8 mission. As usual, the content that we share is mostly focused on  
9 seasonal closures, local and federal regulations, meetings and  
10 workshops, outreach and education activities, marine species,  
11 shared content that we share from other agencies and organizations  
12 that are collaborating with the Council as well as the ones that  
13 are sharing content related to the Council's mission.  
14 Collaborative content, followers request, like people that write  
15 to us and ask questions, funding opportunities, bulletins, Big  
16 Fish Initiative, and also, of course, the DM and the inbox that we  
17 receive messages from people asking for materials, trying to  
18 clarify some doubts, or asking questions about the marine  
19 environment in general.

20

21 We have some examples of great collabs, shares, and mentions.  
22 Again, those are some examples, but there are many, many followers  
23 and people that are also contributing to spreading our message to  
24 our social media. One of the most successful collaborations is the  
25 one that we have with Big Fish Initiative which is focused on  
26 protecting the fish spawning aggregations in the wider Caribbean.

27

28 Also, this year, we had a collaborative post that we did with  
29 Puerto Rico Sea Grant and with the fishers from Puerto Real. We  
30 have also the example of Isla Mar and MerosPR in a collaborative  
31 post where Isla Mar used some of the information that was included  
32 in the Nassau grouper poster.

33

34 The Programa de Estadística de Pesca Recreativa Marina that we are  
35 continuing collaborating with to spreading their message and also  
36 ours. We have the 787 Fishing Charters by Captain Marcos Hanke. We  
37 showed some videos releasing mutton snapper during the close  
38 season.

39

40 Mentions. One that Coral PR did to us while Wilson was having an  
41 exhibition there in one of their activities. Costa Marine PR is a  
42 store that is closed still but will open soon. Miguel and Diana  
43 visited Costa Marine PR, and they also brought some materials this  
44 week. They brought the materials and did a reel also collaborating  
45 with us. The owner of Costa Marine was a participant at the MREP,  
46 Puerto Rico. Also, Chef Loraine Arroyo, doing MREP. Ritmicano,  
47 Elizo, who is also a Puerto Rico DAP member.

48

1 La Fresca PR is always sharing our posts, especially when we  
2 announce seasonal closures. Pescadores comerciales y el ambiente,  
3 which is a successful, long-time collaboration, too.  
4  
5 Some new collabs. We are posting collaboratively with Reef  
6 Responsible VI. And also, the most successful one was the one with  
7 Chispa. He's the owner of The Drop Fishing Charters. This was when  
8 we announced the new regulations regarding bag limits and size  
9 limits of the wahoo and dolphinfish.  
10  
11 Those are the posts, in English and Spanish. We always do our  
12 posting in English and Spanish, both languages. Again, those were  
13 only some examples, and we are totally grateful for all the  
14 continued support and collaboration from the followers.  
15  
16 WhatsApp. Wilson Santiago has a broadcast list that we use to send  
17 messages. Also, the broadcast list has been very successful for a  
18 long, long time. And also, Gerson Martínez has two chats, and they  
19 allowed us to post information there as well for the people in  
20 Saint Croix.  
21  
22 We have this new section that Martha already mentioned about the  
23 IRA projects, Advancing Sustainable Fisheries. It is on our  
24 website, and it includes a summary of the projects that are  
25 undergoing and also the newsletter of the projects, in English and  
26 Spanish too. Those are examples of the newsletter. CFMC Takes  
27 Action, CFMC Toma Acción.  
28  
29 Also, we do collaborative work with other Councils, with the U.S.  
30 Regional Fisher Management Councils. This is a document about  
31 developing effective motions which was prepared by the outreach  
32 and communications team from the U.S. Regional Fisher Management  
33 Councils.  
34  
35 We translated it to Spanish here in Puerto Rico. The person that  
36 was doing the layout, Nick Smillie from the South Atlantic Future  
37 Management Council, he also did the layout for the Spanish version.  
38 It is also included in our ISSUU, and it was announced in our  
39 social media platforms.  
40  
41 We also have the MREP. We have been collaborating with this  
42 wonderful program for years now. Also, specifically in terms of  
43 the social media, every time that we post something regarding MREP,  
44 it attracts a lot of people. That is because it is focused on  
45 fishers. It is focused on how fishers can become involved. It's  
46 from fishers to fishers. It's a great educational program to  
47 continue spreading the word and promoting the action. So, it is  
48 always very good when we share content regarding MREP. We also do

1 some collaborative announcements with MREP, MREP U.S.V.I., MREP  
2 Puerto Rico.

3  
4 In terms of activities, workshops that we announced, we have  
5 Salvapeje, Assist the Fish, which is the Saint Thomas version of  
6 Salvapeje, and PEPCO, El Programa de Educación para Pescadores  
7 Comerciales. Every time that we have these activities, because we  
8 have also an attendance list, we get information from fishers, and  
9 this information is included in the CFMC master list. So, now those  
10 fishers that are attending the workshops, they are also included  
11 in the master list, and they receive the emails. The emails from  
12 the CFMC.

13  
14 We also collaborated with MerosPR providing audiovisual support,  
15 providing copies of the descending device's newsletter. And also,  
16 it was a very good opportunity to share CFMC outreach and education  
17 materials.

18  
19 And again, it's not about myself or what I can do alone. It's a  
20 matter of people.

21  
22 So, I'm very thankful for all the people that help me to create  
23 this content, for all the support, all the followers. So, thanks  
24 to all the staff members, panel members, committee members,  
25 fishers, followers, scientists, managers, people in NOAA,  
26 collaborators, friends, among many other people for all the  
27 support, information, and ideas. Thank you very much.

#### 28 29 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Cristina.

32  
33 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** If you have any questions, I'm here. Or  
34 recommendations.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions? Yes. Vanessa?

37  
38 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Vanessa Ramírez. Cristina, I want to  
39 thank you and also Jannette, Wilson, Gerson, and all the guys that  
40 work in the staff for education programs.

41  
42 As always, I have to thank you personally because you're always in  
43 the hotspot with me in the different things that we do, especially  
44 in the West Coast. I want to also ask to my partners here that we  
45 need to support more education programs, and we need to put some  
46 money on that, especially for the things that they need to develop.  
47 It's the only way that the fishermen can get the information that  
48 we manage here.

1  
2 The first thing that they usually ask is how we communicate with  
3 them, and this group is making a great job with that. Thank you.  
4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?  
6  
7 **NELSON CRESPO:** One question to Cristina. How are you doing? I  
8 always think that you are in front of computer like an octopus,  
9 you know, pushing so many bottoms because I can't figure out how  
10 you do it, but thank you for that.  
11  
12 On the same lines as Cristina, thank you to all of you because you  
13 are doing an excellent job. I think it's appropriate because, like  
14 I said in the ad hoc meeting, it is necessary to provide more  
15 outreach and education because I think that is the future of the  
16 management. I think we need more outreach instead of more species  
17 under management. That is the key for the future. I think it's  
18 going to work better, and the fisherman like that. Thank you.  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
21  
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Cristina, thank you for your work. I know that  
23 you do a lot of things besides your personal things. She a teacher  
24 of a taekwondo or jujitsu.  
25  
26 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Taekwondo.  
27  
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** She worked with a farmer. Works with everybody  
29 and his brother. But according to your experience and based on the  
30 method that you have, besides WhatsApp, what is the most effective  
31 way of communicating through social media with the fishers?  
32  
33 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Through social media. Right now,  
34 WhatsApp is the first one, but Instagram. Instagram is growing a  
35 lot. They use Facebook and Instagram. We have a lot of other  
36 platforms that we use to reach other audiences, but the main ones  
37 are Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp.  
38  
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do you think that more fishers are coming into  
40 Instagram, communicating with us?  
41  
42 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** They're coming more to Instagram. Yeah.  
43 And in terms of all the Councils, regarding the numbers of  
44 followers, we are the first one on followers, and it's growing a  
45 lot. So, yeah.  
46  
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.  
48

1 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Thanks. And, again, thank you very much  
2 for all your support and, yeah, on this great opportunity of  
3 spreading the word.

4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** It is teamwork. We have good people.

6  
7 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Mhmm.

8  
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Anything further for Cristina? Thank you  
12 very much, Cristina.

13  
14 Before we continue on with the liaison reports, we want to give  
15 the opportunity. We have a representative here from the HMS group,  
16 Delisse Ortiz, and we have a concern from Crespo.

17  
18 **HMS - QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS WITH DELISSE ORTIZ**

19  
20 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Hi everybody. Like Miguel said, my name is  
21 Delisse Ortiz and I'm with the HMS management division and just  
22 kind of stop by to answer any questions concerning the management  
23 of Atlantic HMS.

24  
25 In yesterday's meeting, at the end, there was some comments made  
26 and request on increasing the limit for skipjack under the HMS  
27 Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit. There was a request, a  
28 letter that was sent by the fisherman from Aguadilla making this  
29 request in addition to being able to use Skipjack as bait as it's  
30 used a lot in the snapper fishery here in Puerto Rico.

31  
32 Our response was that there were other options that might  
33 facilitate the need to have a higher retention limit, such as the  
34 use of the general Atlantic Tunas-- Sorry. The Atlantic Tuna  
35 General Category Permit, which does not have a retention limit for  
36 tunas. The tricky part about that permit though is that instead of  
37 being able to catch and sell the product, like the Commercial  
38 Caribbean Small Boat Permit allows, when you have an Atlantic Tuna  
39 General Category Permit, you can only sell the tuna to a federally  
40 permitted dealer.

41  
42 So, that requires that you have an individual at shore that has a  
43 Federal Tuna Dealer Permit and buys your product. You can either  
44 sell to an individual or you can be the dealer yourself and remove  
45 the middleman. But that means that any reporting requirements, any  
46 requirements to have all the necessary permits fall on that  
47 individual. And the question at the end of our response was that  
48 would that solve some of these issues regarding upping the

1 retention limit.

2  
3 The reason the 10-tuna limit under the Commercial Caribbean Small  
4 Boat Permit was established back in 2013 was just based on public  
5 hearings and scoping that we did all through the island at the  
6 time. That's not to say that it can't be changed, but that was the  
7 reasoning and that was our response. I'm just wondering if there's  
8 any additional comments or request from this body.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

11  
12 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Delisse, for that info. I have another  
13 question, because commercial fishermen, after knowing about the  
14 Executive Order, they asked me about the possibility of allowing  
15 the catch and sale of marlin just like in Hawaii.

16  
17 Currently, this fishing is well regulated. Large numbers of them  
18 are no longer landed in fishing tournaments and there is a great  
19 abundance of these species. Now, the routine at the tournament is  
20 to catch and release most of the time. Also, there is what we might  
21 call a black market for these species and some restaurants buy it  
22 and offer it to the customers. Allowing the controlled capture and  
23 sale of this fish by the commercial fishermen could benefit the  
24 commercial sector and at the same time help to achieve the  
25 expectation of this Executive Order.

26  
27 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** So, what I'm hearing is that there's a request  
28 to allow for the sale of marlin in the island. Is that correct?

29  
30 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yes.

31  
32 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Obviously, that's not something that I can answer  
33 right now, but what I would encourage is for any request for  
34 changes to HMS regulations that the Council make a formal request  
35 to the division pertaining to various things that I've heard today,  
36 which is the increase in the retention limit for skipjack under  
37 the Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit, the ability to use  
38 skipjack as bait, and also to allow for the sale of marlin.

39  
40 **NELSON CRESPO:** Also, I have another comment because there is a gap  
41 that is not clear. Is it allowed for the commercial fishers to  
42 catch merlin by handline? I think in the regulation, there is a  
43 gap that is not clear because they talk about rod reel, but they  
44 never talk about handline for the commercial fishers.

45  
46 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** I would have to double check, but under our  
47 regulations, in terms of the gears allowed under the recreational  
48 fishery, it's usually rod and reel, and handline are the

1 recreational gears, but I would have to double check on that, and  
2 I can clarify that.

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?

5

6 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Wilson  
7 Santiago, for the record. With whom or where does the Council have  
8 to address or for-- because I know that for the Caribbean Small  
9 Boat Permit, in the past, they changed the bag limit for the  
10 swordfish from two to two eighteen. I haven't known any fisher  
11 that in one trip can get 18. So maybe it's the same process they  
12 can do.

13

14 And another thing, just thank you for everything, Delisse. Really.  
15 All these past months, I have been calling Delisse regarding  
16 fishers' renovation, and the HMS permit. Just yesterday, I sent  
17 Delisse 11 people from the Cataño Fishing Village, and they were  
18 attended.

19

20 She's always helping Puerto Rico Spanish speaker fishers.

21

22 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Thank you, Wilson. You know, I love helping my  
23 people out. That's what I'm here for.

24

25 So, with regards to who the request would go to, I would address  
26 it to Randy Blankenship and send it to the HMS Management  
27 Division's Office, and I can provide you, you know, the information  
28 of how you can send it.

29

30 And then, yeah, the same process with the-- The swordfish stemmed  
31 from we have several swordfish permits, and they all had different  
32 retention limits. So, it in part was to increase fishing  
33 opportunities, but also make all the retention limits consistent  
34 among permits. So, that was, you know, the intent of that. Not  
35 that we figured somebody with a vessel that's less than 45 would  
36 catch 18 swordfish, but that was some of the rationale background  
37 for that change. But that stemmed also from a request from  
38 fishermen and Councils. So, thank you.

39

40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

41

42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. To clarify. We sent a letter on behalf of  
43 the Council taking these points that have been discussed today.  
44 But remember, the Council cannot tell HMS, "You should do this and  
45 that." It's just that we submit to HMS the topics so they can  
46 evaluate that part. But just to clarify the point that Nelson made,  
47 you're talking about opening the sale of recreational caught fish  
48 or opening the sale and catch by commercial fishers or both?

1  
2 **NELSON CRESPO:** No. Sell and catch for commercial fishers.  
3  
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** By using handline and rod and reel  
5  
6 **NELSON CRESPO:** Handline and rod and reel. Yeah.  
7  
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.  
9  
10 **NELSON CRESPO:** Well, most of the time, the commercial fishers, you  
11 know, it's not common but we do encounter marlins when we are  
12 fishing. You know, maybe we are fishing for mahi, maybe we are  
13 fishing for deep-water snapper and the marlin is hanging around,  
14 and that is an opportunity to have bycatch that maybe we can have  
15 an income because not always the catch is good. Catching a marlin,  
16 maybe, if possible, we can implement a regulated catch and sale of  
17 marlin. We don't want a big quantity, maybe one per day or a few  
18 amounts per month.  
19  
20 Something because we don't target them; it's just like an  
21 occasional encounter. That is a good option, you know, to make  
22 some income.  
23  
24 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Yeah, like an incidental catch. Your question is  
25 of accidental catch.  
26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, but it is an incidental catch until you  
28 open it. Because before 1990, the reason why the marlin was closed  
29 is because it was caught by commercial fishers a lot.  
30  
31 Handline also had to be defined because the only handline fisherman  
32 I met was a guy from Saint John. The rest of what we call handline,  
33 they had the Coca Cola reel or the plastic one. So, okay, you have  
34 in the hand, but actually you're not using your hand. At that time,  
35 the recreational fishery, remember, was all the way from New  
36 England to Texas. They agreed to handline as long as it was  
37 handlined, not nothing else.  
38  
39 The reason for that is because we knew they were not-- you know,  
40 The Old Man and The Sea was out in the novel, but the very people--  
41  
42 The Chair, then with Graciela and myself, we need to put together  
43 a draft, and I would like to share that draft with Wilson and  
44 Nelson. Make sure that we capture what you intend to ask, and then  
45 we'll send it to, Blankenship with the signature of the Chair.  
46  
47 And it will be, "At this meeting, we had this topic discussed. I  
48 would like the HMS to consider possible actions, i.e., a quota for

1 marlin caught by commercial fishers" or "The quota of the  
2 swordfish," etcetera. And then when we get the reply, we will bring  
3 it back to the Council and discuss it. Hopefully, you can visit  
4 us.

5  
6 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** That's my hope too.

7  
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

11  
12 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, for the record. Thank you for  
13 the opportunity. I only have one concern, at this moment, about  
14 having more fishing pressure in these pelagic species. Those  
15 species like the marlin and the mahi-mahi and the tuna fishes are  
16 very, very important for the ecology of the oceanic big seabirds.

17  
18 The seabirds, the big ones, cannot feed. Their population cannot  
19 grow properly if they don't have the help of these big fishes. I  
20 just wanted to add that comment because to me it's very important  
21 and that doesn't happen in the territorial waters.

22  
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Ricardo, can you explain. You have a lot of  
24 experience on this. Can you explain in general terms why they need  
25 that help and how they help?

26  
27 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes, Miguel. Thanks for the opportunity.  
28 Specifically, the Sula species. The three Sula species that we  
29 have in the Caribbean, they can dive up to 60 feet down in the  
30 water, and they eat different kind of fishes.

31  
32 For example, the Sula sula, which is the smallest one, will eat  
33 mostly flying squids and flying fishes, both of small sizes. On  
34 the other hand, the big one, the Sula dactylatra, which is the  
35 masked booby, that one will eat the biggest flying fishes, and a  
36 small, for example, small mahi-mahi. Fishes of about 10 to 12  
37 inches will be part of the food of the big Sula dactylatra. That  
38 one is more vulnerable than the other two species.

39  
40 In the mid-size, we have the Sula leucogaster, which is the brown  
41 booby, also known as boba prieta. That one is more generalistic.  
42 That one may feed closer to the coast, and the amount of fish is  
43 huge. That one can eat small fish and medium sized fish. But  
44 without the help of the marlins and the mahi-mahi, which will be  
45 pushing the school of fishes upward, then the birds cannot go deep  
46 enough to catch those fishes. They can't get the fish if they don't  
47 have the help of those big animals we are trying to catch. Is that  
48 enough? Okay. Thank you.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Delisse? Yes, Anne?  
3  
4 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** I don't have a question, but if the Council is  
5 going to draft a letter to the HMS rep, I would recommend that we  
6 make a motion to do so.  
7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Recommend? I didn't get that.  
9  
10 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** A motion to do so.  
11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, somebody wants to make a motion for  
13 that letter?  
14  
15 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes, *the motion is going to be for the staff to*  
16 *prepare a letter presenting the points that we discussed today in*  
17 *this meeting.*  
18  
19 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think we need to be specific. What are the points?  
20 If we're going to vote on a motion where we're sending a letter to  
21 a different agency, essentially, we need to be very clear on what  
22 we're telling the staff to write. So, I would say let's specify  
23 those specific points.  
24  
25 I think we should have Nelson because he was the one that  
26 recommended that that's something we should do. Let's have him  
27 list out what the concerns were, and then we can revise the motion.  
28  
29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes, Nelson, the two points that you brought to  
30 the table, the skipjack and the marlin.  
31  
32 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you. Present a letter to evaluate the  
33 possibility to increase the bycatch of the skipjack in the small  
34 boat permits and evaluate the possibility to open the marlin  
35 fishery for commercial fishermen.  
36  
37 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Instead of bycatch, it should be bag limit.  
38  
39 **NELSON CRESPO:** To open the marlin fishery, one marlin per boat per  
40 day as a bycatch. Huh? No bycatch? Okay.  
41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, that's what we'll do. We'll continue  
43 with the agenda while Graciela assists Nelson in the preparation  
44 of the motion.  
45  
46 When it comes to the marlin, remember that recreational people can  
47 catch marlin and take it home at the 99-inch measurement. They  
48 just can't sell it, but what they're trying to do is get the

1 commercial sector to be able to get a 99-inch or bigger and sell  
2 it. For when you're preparing that letter, or that motion.

3  
4 So, while they hammer that out, we're going to continue with the  
5 liaison's reports. We're starting with Saint Croix, Liandry de la  
6 Cruz.

7  
8 **CFMC LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS**  
9 **ST. CROIX, USVI — LIANDRY DE LA CRUZ**

10  
11 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ QUIÑONES:** Morning. Afternoon. Sorry. My brain  
12 just woke up, so it's morning for me.

13  
14 So, as a lot of you guys know, my contract was renewed for the  
15 summer. I was in school for the last year. But while I was in  
16 school, I still had tons of calls from fishermen and rec fishers  
17 that needed help with just all kinds of things. And so, I kept  
18 pretty active and people like express interest that they really  
19 were waiting for me to come back. And when I came, I actually had  
20 an internship to work for another agency, but I really wanted to  
21 be back here. I'm not going to lie to you. It was for, like, Coral.  
22 I'm like, I'm really done with Coral. I'm not going to lie. But  
23 yeah.

24  
25 So yes. So, my contract is finishing this week. But it was fun. It  
26 was a very, very productive summer, and it's something that I'm  
27 going to do again. So, yes. Can I please get the first slide? Cool.

28  
29 So, in terms of the projects and tasks, when I came back, there  
30 was tons and tons to do. So, like, the bulk of what I was doing  
31 was definitely preparing fishers again for registration, samples  
32 and CCRs. That's not like exact numbers, but that's like the ones  
33 I was able to get before I left Saint Croix. A little over 50  
34 samples and a little over 200 CCR. And there's like a ton more and  
35 there were a ton of fishers that still wanted samples before I  
36 left as well.

37  
38 But I was able to get enough fishers ready so that when pre-  
39 registration and registration time came around that they were  
40 ready. Because, again, we have between 100 and some fishers. So,  
41 yeah, so a lot of people were very active as soon as they found  
42 out I was back, everyone was ready to get back into it, which I  
43 was glad about. They wanted to be ready to renew their licenses  
44 and just not miss the opportunity to do that while I was here.  
45 Yeah, I have pictures, but I didn't add it. This slide is small.

46  
47 So, another thing was MREP. I was at the ports all the time. I was  
48 talking to them all the time about everything. Not only MREP, but

1 about the descending device workshops. They expressed a lot of  
2 interest in wanting to go, wanting to be active, wanting to be a  
3 part of these events. They learn a lot from it, and they bring  
4 their families, they have a great time, and they talk to other  
5 fishes about it. So much so that when it came around again, there  
6 were even more people that had learned about it, that wanted to  
7 apply, that wanted to be a part of that. So, that was really great  
8 to see because even while I wasn't there, they were talking amongst  
9 themselves. And they were just ready for it by the next year. And  
10 younger fishers too that had known about it as well, because I got  
11 some of them involved before I had lived.

12  
13 Lionfish Derby. The Lionfish Derby was probably the first event  
14 that I did, community event that I did. It was rescheduled for  
15 later that same month because of weather issues, but we still had  
16 a great turnout. I think, if I'm not mistaken, don't quote me,  
17 like three, four groups. The majority of them being rec fishers,  
18 so for the past two years, there's been even more commercial  
19 fishers that have been joining. But this time, because of the  
20 change, it was rec fishers. But we were able to accumulate more  
21 than 500 pounds of lionfish that I had to weigh and measure the  
22 entire time.

23  
24 We did the ceremony, the award ceremony at same day and like, in  
25 the middle of all of it, we had a chef there cooking the lionfish  
26 at the same time. So, it was hectic, but it was fun. Everyone had  
27 a great time. It's something that even more people start to join  
28 as the years go by. Tons of families and kids were there. There  
29 was a lady selling jewelry there as well. There's only one lady on  
30 Saint Croix that she makes jewelry out of lionfish, and she's there  
31 all the time. And she does great work.

32  
33 We had the kid's handline tournament. That was the very last event  
34 that I did. It was amazing, and it's always put on by the Golden  
35 Hook Fish Club who's become really good, close friends to me and  
36 who has expressed a lot of interest in what we do as well and our  
37 presence at their events.

38  
39 Their target for this tournament was to have at least 50 kids,  
40 especially from minority locations. It wasn't something that was,  
41 how to say, put on their social medias and stuff like that. Like,  
42 it wasn't advocated too much until the very end so that they could  
43 make sure that they targeted specific locations where certain  
44 groups of kids could become involved in it. And we had a great  
45 turnout. We had tons of family there. I'm under the tree. I know  
46 it's hard to see, but I had other pictures, but this is like the  
47 picture I had with everyone together. But it was awesome. We had  
48 a great turnout.

1  
2 That was like the week before the descending device workshop. And  
3 I had brought the devices out. There were rec fishers there as  
4 well. Some of them had access to it. I brought the pamphlets that  
5 were made by the CFMC. So, I had already talked a good bit of them  
6 about it as well. And that's also where I talked to the Golden  
7 Hook Fish Club about helping me set up the workshop just so I made  
8 sure that they were there as well. But yeah, can I get the next  
9 slide?

10  
11 So yes, another thing I'm really proud about was the STEAM  
12 initiative. So, that is an initiative done by Kai Nielsen from  
13 V.I. EPSCoR, who's a really great friend of mine. He gets me very  
14 involved with all of the stuff that he is putting on because he  
15 does tons of events and things having to do with youth groups.

16  
17 So, his team initiative was put on like at the last minute, they  
18 asked him to put it on. It was the very last event. It was a week-  
19 long event at the library where tons of different youth groups on  
20 the islands like the Caribbean Centers for Boys and Girls, the  
21 Ocean Explorers, the Terrestrial Explorers, I mean Earth  
22 Explorers, they all came out and it was like kind of like a field  
23 day for them.

24  
25 There were tons of presenters, people that they could like talk to  
26 and learn from as the day went by. I was put in a room with smaller  
27 kids, with a small group of kids, and then I was moved to a room  
28 with tons more kids, and I was able to interact with more than a  
29 100 kids a day. The reason why I saw how much they were learning  
30 was because once I moved over, then I had to re-teach everything  
31 that I had taught the smaller group.

32  
33 The first thing I started was with asking them questions and  
34 talking to them about what I had just taught them, and they were  
35 teaching their friends. Like, they were talking about everything.  
36 Because I didn't only talk about the reef responsible program, I  
37 talked about everything to do with the reef fish balance, with  
38 conch, with fishermen, what they do. I talked about what you guys  
39 do. These are little kids, and they just remembered everything.  
40 They were just regurgitating it. It was awesome to see.

41  
42 Videos of it were taken and pictures and it was posted on Facebook.  
43 It was posted on the Saint Croix Times. It was a great, great,  
44 great event. Yeah, and I gave all the coloring books and stuff; it  
45 was cool. They went back, some of their families were present, and  
46 the last thing that we did on the last day was present certificates  
47 to the older kids because they were the ones that hosted the entire  
48 event, which is really great to see as well.

1  
2 I was a lot more active on the social media channels on WhatsApp.  
3 We mentioned two WhatsApp groups that Gerson manages, and I was  
4 added to an extra two with, like, little groups made by the  
5 fishermen themselves. So, also in those other groups, I post all  
6 the information. I make sure that I reach as much people as  
7 possible. So, every time I did post stuff, people would call me,  
8 people would text me, and they were very active, and they made  
9 sure they understood what was happening always, which is awesome.

10  
11 And the, one of the last things I worked on as well was assisting  
12 with the new fisher family calendar. I thought I was late. They  
13 said I wasn't late, so we're just going to go with that. I have  
14 friends that are photographers, and I brought them out. We did  
15 like little shoots, so we either caught them right at the ports or  
16 I set it up with whatever they had on hands, rods, boats, whatever.

17  
18 And I did about three families and I did them selling their catch,  
19 dealing with their catch, fishing with their families, things like  
20 that. I worked with Jannette. I also interviewed them so that their  
21 responses and their experiences in the fishery could be included  
22 in the calendar. It was great. They were very, very, involved.  
23 They really worked with me on that. So, I was really happy about  
24 that, and I got it in. And they look great. So, yes. Can I get the  
25 next one?

26  
27 So, yeah, those are some of the pictures. That's from the first  
28 day of the STEAM initiative. You can't see, but I'm holding a conch  
29 shell. I even taught them how fishermen take out the conch from  
30 the shell as well. It's something they were talking about, like  
31 they understood what I was saying, which I didn't think they would,  
32 but they did. And those were the older groups that we certified,  
33 and I acted as a representative for DPNR.

34  
35 We shake their hands. We made them feel appreciated for all the  
36 work that they did with us, and it was awesome. Those were some of  
37 the pictures that I took. Those are like, how's it said, blooper  
38 pictures, but I thought it was cute. Okay. You can move on.

39  
40 Awesome. So, the last thing is a descending device workshop. I  
41 planned this in like two weeks, maybe a week and a half, but I did  
42 it and it was awesome. I had about, when I like rechecked the  
43 numbers, it was 25 commercial fishers. It was one rec fisher, two  
44 helpers. I was sad because I wanted a lot more recreational  
45 fishers, but the Golden Hook Fish Club expressed that they also  
46 wanted these workshops at their tournaments so that they could  
47 have a bigger exposure to the devices themselves.

48

1 They were asking questions, they were active. The location was  
2 right next to a bar, so they liked that. But it was fun. That's  
3 not even counting the other attendees, which family members, loved  
4 ones, wives and kids that they were also, which obviously they're  
5 also training to be fishermen and stuff like that. So, it was a  
6 really great turnout and it's something that they keep asking more  
7 about.

8  
9 You know, afterwards, they were asking me questions about it. They  
10 were asking if they could bring other people so they could also  
11 have the device, on their vessels as well and stuff like that. So,  
12 it went pretty great.

13  
14 My hope for the future really is that we have more events like  
15 that. Events like MREP events like the workshops, because I took  
16 the opportunity to also talk about that, about the CFMC to add on  
17 you guys' social medias on my slides as well. I made like an extra  
18 little, tiny presentation. I just talked to them about the  
19 importance of staying informed because that's something that they  
20 really don't know. They know about DPNR, they know about Fish and  
21 Wildlife, but they don't know a lot about what you guys do and  
22 what part you guys play in their livelihoods. It is some that they  
23 were interested in, it was something that they took note of,  
24 definitely.

25  
26 These events bring them together because the biggest thing for  
27 real is that they want consistency. That's one of the reasons why  
28 they were really glad I was back because they have somebody to  
29 talk to constantly even if it's at seven in the morning, which is  
30 amazing.

31  
32 But yeah, more materials, which we're definitely working on for  
33 Reef Responsible and for Marine Education. I've been saving up on  
34 my materials just to make sure I had them at the events, but it's  
35 something that we do need. People have been asking me about the  
36 grouper guides, about the lobster gauges, stuff like that. They  
37 really enjoy it, and it's handy for them to have it on board.

38  
39 And more direct interaction with the general community. Like, the  
40 general community events, not just like fishery events. Because  
41 the community also asks a lot of questions and they like to know  
42 about what's going on as well, which is cool. Thank you. Any  
43 question? Any comments, concerns?

44

#### 45 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

46

47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian and then somebody else on the chat.  
48 Julian?

1  
2 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. So, Liandry,  
3 excellent job once again. Before I make a couple of my comments,  
4 I want to ask a question. All what you did there, how long did it  
5 take you to do? Because I know you've been in school in Saint  
6 Thomas. So approximately, all that you covered there, in what time  
7 period did you cover that?

8  
9 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ QUIÑONES:** Like, two and a half months. Two  
10 and a half months.

11  
12 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Excellent. So, that's why I wanted everybody to  
13 hear. So, all that you saw that she just presented right there,  
14 she went, and she saved Saint Croix for their registration. She  
15 went over there and helped them to get the port sampling done,  
16 helped the guys get the CCR, make sure they were turned in, make  
17 sure the guys were in compliance. And, you know, kudos to you  
18 because I know in that short period of time, that's a lot to  
19 accomplish.

20  
21 The group of people that you have surrounding you there, that  
22 attend your events, is great. I know we had a conversation here  
23 yesterday. We had one today. I really hope that she's here and  
24 considering on her break to fly back over to Saint Croix and do  
25 the descending device for the Game Fish Club Tournament. And that's  
26 powerful, you know, to take your time, personal time and go over  
27 there and do that. That's excellent.

28  
29 Then, also, she's going to take on the task of interviewing a  
30 couple families for the calendar, for the CFMC calendar in Saint  
31 Thomas, and she actually spoke with Joshua Quetell because he has  
32 a fishing family. He has kids, his wife, all engaged in fishing.  
33 So, I just want to say a special thank you for extending that and  
34 being so involved in our fishery. Thank you.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** On the chat.

37  
38 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** It's me, Cristina Olán, for the record.  
39 Thank you. Thank you, Liandry, for all the great work that you do.  
40 Especially, thank you, and Eva María, for all the content that you  
41 produce for social media during the descending device workshop,  
42 and sharing it with us, with the CFMC.

43  
44 So, thanks for that because if I'm not there personally, I need  
45 people to do that. I'm so grateful to have you onboard and  
46 providing that content. And, again, si necesitas algo, if you need  
47 anything else from us, as always, feel free to contact, to write,  
48 to make a phone call. I truly appreciate what you're doing. Thanks.

1  
2 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ QUIÑONES:** Thank you.

3  
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anything else for Liandry?

5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, she's finished this week, so I hope that we  
7 get her back next summer.

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Liandry.

10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, we have the motion. Yeah. Ms.  
12 Delisse Ortiz is going to help us with the key phrases. So, yeah.  
13 Because, that way it will be easier for HMS to respond.

14  
15 **CONT. HMS - QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS WITH DELISSE ORTIZ**

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, before we move on to Nicole Greaux's  
18 presentation, we're going to bring that motion up on the screen.

19  
20 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** So, I guess one question that I have, and this  
21 is mostly for clarity. So, the retention limit for the HMS  
22 Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit is for all the groups of  
23 tunas that we have under that permit. It's not solely for Skipjack.  
24 So, it's 10 in total per vessel per day tunas that you're allowed  
25 to catch, and those tunas include all the ones that we manage  
26 except for bluefin tuna. So, that's skipjack, albacore, big eye,  
27 and yellowfin.

28  
29 So, one of the questions that comes up immediately is that increase  
30 in the retention limit, like, create a separate skipjack retention  
31 limit or just increase the overall total retention limit that  
32 includes all the tunas. So, that would be one thing that I would  
33 give some thought.

34  
35 **NELSON CRESPO:** Separate. The main intention is to increase the bag  
36 limit for skipjack. That is the complaint that the fishers bring  
37 to me.

38  
39 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Right. But there's not a separate retention limit  
40 for skipjack. It's all the species together.

41  
42 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Wilson Santiago here. Yes. My  
43 recommendation is lifting the yellowfin tuna, the albacore, maybe,  
44 like, 5 or 10. Like, five, for example. Five bag limit. And the  
45 skipjack which they're asking to use them as bait.

46  
47 You know? They can sell it too but increase the bag limit for the  
48 skipjack. And the other the other one, like, put a different bag

1 limit. My recommendation.  
2  
3 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** So, what I'm hearing you is that you want to  
4 keep. Let's just say, keep the 10, the existing 10 tuna limit for  
5 all other tunas except skipjack. Have a separate bag limit for  
6 skipjack with a limit of you said five? I mean, sorry, like, 15 to  
7 20, so higher than the--  
8  
9 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Nelson, what you think?  
10  
11 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** So, that's just, you know, I'm not-- Right, I'm  
12 just encouraging you to think to be specific--  
13  
14 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** That exactly what I was saying and  
15 thinking. Yeah.  
16  
17 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** --about, one, if it's a separate skipjack  
18 retention limit that you want, and also if there's a specific  
19 maximum, a range. You know, I think the more specific you can be  
20 in terms of what the needs of the fishery are, the better it is  
21 for us to research and take into consideration the request.  
22  
23 **NELSON CRESPO:** For skipjack, at least, no less than 25. Because  
24 that is the average when we find the school. We catch between  
25 twenty, thirty, 40 when we find the school, but then we never find  
26 it again maybe in a few weeks. So, that allows the fisher, you  
27 know, to catch as much as they can to keep fishing the deep-water  
28 snappers.  
29  
30 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Also, something to consider. You know, if, say,  
31 using skipjack is off the question, and you can get the retention  
32 limit, but not using skipjack, I mean, cutting it up on the vessel  
33 as it is not permitted right now. Would it still work to have an  
34 increased limit or is the limit only for tuna that can be used as  
35 bait on the same vessel.  
36  
37 You know? Say I'm going out, I'm getting my 25 skipjacks that I  
38 can retain per vessel per day, and then I want to cut it up right  
39 there and then use it as bait. Is that what the fishery is asking,  
40 or are you asking for a retention limit and just then the ability  
41 to--  
42  
43 You know, I'm trying to separate the two issues. Trying to see if  
44 they're both together. If you only want the increasing retention  
45 limit if you can use it as bait, or if you still want a recreation  
46 limit if using it as bait, say, is not possible because of  
47 enforcement concerns, which is why it was established in the first  
48 place. Does that make sense?

1  
2 **NELSON CRESPO:** Right. Now, I got confused.  
3  
4 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** I'm probably making it more confusing.  
5  
6 **NELSON CRESPO:** So, the intention is, you know, the fishers got  
7 certain areas where we can go for tunas, and then we have  
8 encounters with the skipjacks. Or when we are on the way to fish  
9 deep-water snapper, we have encounters with schools of skipjack.  
10 We want to have the ability to catch as much as we can. I think  
11 twenty, twenty-five, you know. And keep our role to fish for the  
12 snappers. So, I mean, to be allowed to catch twenty, twenty-five  
13 skipjacks.  
14  
15 But on the other hand, when we are not fishing skipjacks, we bring  
16 skipjacks when we are going out to fish, but we don't bring that  
17 much. Maybe we bring five, ten. I remember the controversy when we  
18 talked a long time ago regarding if we are allowed to cut the tuna  
19 because we cannot put the whole tuna, you know, to catch snappers.  
20 No. That's what we've always done, since I can remember, when we  
21 fish, because we need to have the ability or the permission to cut  
22 the bait. You said that tuna is bait, the skipjack.  
23  
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, I propose to see the language of  
25 the-- you know, increase the bag limit to at least twenty, twenty-  
26 five? ¿Le puedes añadir eso, Liajay? "Increase the bag limit  
27 retention of skipjack (twenty - twenty-five.)"  
28  
29 Twenty - twenty-five.  
30  
31 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** And I would suggest adding, it's not really  
32 increasing the bag limit because we don't have a separate skipjack  
33 limit. So, it's creating a retention limit for skipjack and setting  
34 it at 20 to 25 in the Atlantic HMS Commercial Caribbean's Small  
35 Boat Permit.  
36  
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Le puedes dictar lo que dijiste a Liajay para que  
38 lo ponga ahí en vez de eso. Create--  
39  
40 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Create and set a retention limit for skipjack  
41 tunas in the Atlantic HMS CCSB permit. Or you can spell it out,  
42 Atlantic HMS Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit. We like to  
43 make permits names very long.  
44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Así está bien, Delisse?  
46  
47 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** It's HMS Commercial. The official name is HMS  
48 Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit. CCSB as in boat.

1  
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. That number one then would take care of  
3 that part?  
4  
5 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Yes.  
6  
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.  
8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Didn't you want to put a retention limit of 20  
10 or 25 skipjack.  
11  
12 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Yes. I suggest as it would be probably  
13 informative. "Create and set a retention limit of 20 to 25 skipjack  
14 tunas in the Atlantic HMS Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit."  
15  
16 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yep. I don't understand. That still isn't going to  
17 allow them to use it as bait. Right? Like, right now, the  
18 commercial requirements, if you have a Caribbean small boat, you  
19 cannot cut up a skipped jack tuna at sea.  
20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And that's what they want.  
22  
23 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Well, that's any vessel, actually. For any  
24 commercial vessel, the landing form is either round or it has to  
25 be eviscerated with the head cut off and at least one pectoral fin  
26 and the tail on.  
27  
28 **SENNAI HABTES:** And the tail.  
29  
30 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Right, Miguel? Again, I'm just making sure I got  
31 that right in my brain.  
32  
33 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** So, I believe the tail, it could be as long  
34 as the base is on, but you can cut off the fins of the tail and  
35 one pectoral. Correct?  
36  
37 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, if the justification of the increased bag limit  
38 is so that it can be used for bait, us simply requesting this and  
39 them considering it will not allow that to happen. Right? So, we  
40 really have to think about what we're requesting. If our purpose  
41 here is to justify the use of bait, and the whole purpose for the  
42 expanded bag limit is the use of bait, so they can use it at sea  
43 while they're doing snapper fishing, which is what Nelson just  
44 said.  
45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. No.  
47  
48 **SENNAI HABTES:** There would also need to be a requirement that they

1 could, you know, fillet or cut into pieces at sea.  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** What-- I think-- Yeah. But I think what--  
4  
5 **SENNAI HABTES:** Which that is changing a federal regulation. That  
6 has to be written into law because that's what this is.  
7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. But I think Nelson's comment yesterday  
9 was to also allow the sale of skipjack. Not only for bait, but to  
10 allow for the sale because in Puerto Rico it has become a--  
11  
12 **SENNAI HABTES:** You can sell skipjack if you have a commercial boat  
13 permit.  
14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** But you can only get 10.  
16  
17 **SENNAI HABTES:** Wait. What?  
18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** You can only get 10 tunas in the small boat  
20 permit. You can only get 10 tunas.  
21  
22 They want not only the 10 tunas, but they also want the 25  
23 skipjacks.  
24  
25 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, they want an increased bag limit.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** For the skipjacks.  
28  
29 **SENNAI HABTES:** For skipjacks. And the purpose to be able to sell  
30 more at a single time.  
31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** For sale and also, right, and also to use for  
33 bait.  
34  
35 **SENNAI HABTES:** Right. But then we would need to do something for  
36 the bait.  
37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. Right. Right.  
39  
40 **SENNAI HABTES:** Which we're not doing.  
41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. I don't understand how how--  
43  
44 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Right. That has to be a second. That would be  
45 number two, and then the marlin would be number three based on the  
46 information that I received today. Right? You said you wanted a  
47 separate-- create and set a retention limit of 20 to 25 skipjack  
48 tunas in the commercial small boat permit.

1  
2 Then the second is allow for skipjack tunas to be used for bait in  
3 the Atlantic HMS Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit.  
4  
5 And then the third one is the to allow the catching sell for  
6 commercial fishermen of one marlin per day per boat. Was it using  
7 rod and reel? Right?  
8  
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Handline and rod and reel.  
10  
11 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** And what? Rod and reel? Handline and Rod and  
12 reel.  
13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Is the Caribbean Small Boat Permit an HMS permit?  
15  
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Sí, es lo mismo.  
17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, it is. Okay.  
19  
20 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Sorry, Delisse. Liajay, for the record. Are  
21 we modifying the third point? I couldn't capture that.  
22  
23 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Okay. Just really quick about the marlin.  
24 And Delisse, correct me if I'm wrong. When the fishers got the  
25 Caribbean Small Boat Permit, they are not allowed to have another  
26 permit from HMS.  
27  
28 So, regarding the marlin, I recommend that in the letter we ask if  
29 the marlin can be added to the Caribbean's Small Boat Permit  
30 because if--  
31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. You don't tell that to HMS. Number  
33 two, what they're saying is to consider the possibility of allowing  
34 the catch of one Marlin in this area. The mechanism of how they do  
35 it is up to them. I can tell you what they're going to say to you  
36 when you get that letter to the office there.  
37  
38 But, anyway, Delisse, number three, is that okay for consideration  
39 by the HMS?  
40  
41 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** It says "to allow the catch and sell for  
42 commercial fishermen or fisher of one marlin per day per boat. And  
43 then I add the pertinent gears and permits under that.  
44  
45 No. Actually list them. Do not say what I just said. Like, if it's  
46 rod and reel, handline.  
47  
48 And, Nelson, I think you had specified earlier with Miguel,

1 regarding the marlin. When Miguel asked you who it was for.  
2

3 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yeah. That's my intention, how number three is set  
4 right now. But I have a question on number two because we have a  
5 great number of fishers that do not have the Caribbean Small Boat  
6 Permit, and it says allow the skipjack tuna to be used for bait in  
7 the Caribbean Small Boat Permit? What about the person, the deep-  
8 water snapper fisher who don't have the Caribbean Small Boat  
9 Permit? Are they allowed to use it as bait?

10

11 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Well, out of all the species, tunas are a  
12 different one, because we have jurisdiction to the shore. So, any  
13 person in Puerto Rico, in the Caribbean, the U.S.V.I. that wants  
14 to fish for tunas has to have an HMS Commercial Caribbean's Small  
15 Boat Permit. I mean, sorry, an Atlantic HMS permit for tunas,  
16 whether that's the Commercial Caribbean's Small Boat Permit or the  
17 Atlantic Tunas General Category Permit.

18

19 **NELSON CRESPO:** Does that mean, how it is stated, if the fishermen  
20 have the HMS permit, they are allowed to use, if that is approved,  
21 they're allowed to use the skipjack for bait. Correct?

22

23 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** That's what you want to add, you said?

24

25 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yeah.

26

27 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Not specifically the small boat permit, just an  
28 Atlantic HMS Tuna permit?

29

30 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yeah.

31

32 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** You can leave it more general and stay safe.

33

34 **NELSON CRESPO:** Because most of the fisherman, the deep-water  
35 snapper fisherman doesn't have the Caribbean Small Boat Permit.  
36 They most that they have is the HMS permit because they--

37

38 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Well, the Caribbean Small Boat Permit is an HMS  
39 permit. It's a commercial.

40

41 **NELSON CRESPO:** No. But I mean the HMS general.

42

43 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Oh, the general category. Gotcha. Okay. Yeah.  
44 So, I would suggest then if you want to keep it general, not  
45 specific to the Commercial Caribbean Small Boat Permit to say "to  
46 be used for bait in--

47

48 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** With any HMS permit?

1  
2 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Oh, "allow for skipjacks to be used for bait  
3 among HMS tuna permit holders." What? Oh, "to be used for bait"  
4 and then "among HMS tuna permit holders" and remove the rest. Your  
5 tunnel vision.  
6  
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** It is too late in the day. Vanessa?  
8  
9 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Estoy leyendo.  
10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.  
12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Is there any need to put a minimum size for  
14 marlin? Because I know there is a minimum size for marlin.  
15  
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. No. No.  
17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** There is.  
19  
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Dice Delisse que esto es suficiente para ellos  
21 tomar acción.  
22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ah, okay.  
24  
25 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** O sea que es solo para pedirle eso.  
26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Eso es para pedir eso. Si. Entonces tú tienes que  
28 decir que están de acuerdo con el language y que necesitamos un  
29 second.  
30  
31 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** ¿Y dónde están los Council aquí?  
32  
33 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** Liajay, I would specify, since this is coming  
34 from this region, for bait among Caribbean HMS tuna permit holders  
35 or HMS tuna permit holders in the Caribbean. Yeah. Okay.  
36  
37 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. Yes. Thank you  
38 with the help with the language. I think that this covers what we  
39 want to present on that letter. Do I need to read it? Or  
40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I'll read it.  
42  
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The Chair will read it for the record.  
44  
45 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay.  
46  
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** You need to say, "You move."  
48

1 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yeah. Please. So, move.  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we need a second. ¿Sabater, segundo para la  
4 moción? ¿quieres secundar la moción?  
5  
6 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** No, él va a votar que no.  
7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No? Okay.  
9  
10 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Nos faltan dos votantes.  
11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Since we don't have a second for the motion.  
13  
14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Pero es que la gente no esta aquí. No están ni  
15 siquiera en el salón.  
16  
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No están aquí porque no quieren votar.  
18  
19 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Pues entonces simplemente en el momento de votar  
20 dicen que no, pero no es levantarse de la mesa.  
21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. We're going to take a five-minute break.  
23  
24 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)  
25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We are all back. Two points. First, the  
27 Council doesn't tell HMS what to do. What we are doing here is  
28 requesting some action that they can consider.  
29  
30 If you follow Robert's Rules of Order, you can have a motion, then  
31 you can second that motion, or you can have a substitute motion,  
32 and you can split the question. And you can have one motion for  
33 the first two, then you can have a motion that you will present  
34 and second, and then you have a second motion which addresses item  
35 number three. And the same follows, you know, present a motion and  
36 second a motion. Is that something that you want to say?  
37  
38 If you don't want to take any action at this time, then you don't  
39 second the motion, the motion dies. The staff is offering to help  
40 Nelson to write directly to the HMS people with everything that  
41 you want on behalf of the Puerto Rico fishers. I can do that.  
42 Graciela and I can help you with that letter. And Delisse told me  
43 that, yes, we can do that.  
44  
45 So, I don't have any say here. I just wanted to tell the Robert's  
46 Rules and how we can do it. But, anyway enough said, you decide  
47 what you want to do.  
48

1 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Miguel, for the clarification.  
2  
3 I will want, then, to remove point number three and present the  
4 motion with only number one and number two.  
5  
6 Motion for staff to prepare-- yeah? "Motion for staff to prepare  
7 a letter to be signed by the CFMC Chair to request a revision of  
8 present HMS regulations to, number one, create and set a retention  
9 limit of 20 or 25 skipjack tunas in the Atlantic HMS Commercial  
10 Caribbean Small Boat Permit. And number two, allow for skipjack  
11 tunas to be used for bait among Caribbean HMS tuna permit holders.  
12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Do we have a second?  
14  
15 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, I second.  
16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? No discussion. Roll call  
18 vote. I'll start on my left with Sabater.  
19  
20 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.  
21  
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai, abstain.  
23  
24 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, I abstain.  
25  
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.  
27  
28 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, abstain.  
29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes. So, we have three  
31 abstentions. We have three yeses, three abstentions, motion  
32 carriers.  
33  
34 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** The motion did not carry. The motion fails.  
35 You have to have a majority. It has to be a majority of the council  
36 members that are present.  
37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, motion failed. So, next item in the  
39 agenda is Nick--. Oh, yeah. What are you going to do with the  
40 marlin?  
41  
42 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Just leave it out.  
43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. It's dead. So, the next person on the agenda  
45 for liaison reports is Nicole Greaux.  
46  
47 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I don't think Nicole is available anymore. I  
48 think she had to leave for an appointment. So, I'd go on to the

1 next one.

2

3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, then we have Wilson Santiago.

4

5

**PUERTO RICO — WILSON SANTIAGO**

6

7 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Wilson  
8 Santiago, for the record. Puerto Rico Fisheries Liaison.

9

10 This is my report from the activities I have been participating in  
11 as a liaison from mid-April to date. Next slide, Cristina, please.

12

13 So, for the outreach and education participation, we have been  
14 given the descending devices workshop in various fishing  
15 communities. We have a lot of good feedback, a lot of participants  
16 that have been going to the workshops. We gave the educational  
17 workshop for commercial fishers, the PEPCO program in Cataño. That  
18 workshop, we mixed it with the descending device workshop. So, it  
19 was the educational commercial workshop and the descending device  
20 workshop, and it was a pretty good workshop.

21

22 So, we continue delivering the Council's educational materials to  
23 fishers around the island. Right now, we are not doing that  
24 anymore. We are out of materials. So, that's another point we  
25 talked about in the OEAP meeting.

26

27 I participated in the MREP Puerto Rico workshop in June. Over  
28 there, we had a table of the descending device workshop too. Like  
29 Cristina said, we are participating with the educational table in  
30 the DNER Coral Week Symposium in Caguas. That day was very special.  
31 We attended a lot of kids, adults. I was writing with Cristina  
32 regarding-- because every person that went to the table was very  
33 aware of the QR code of the Council's social medias. So, I was  
34 talking with Cristina, and that day went up. Right? The-

35

36 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** [inaudible] and ISSUU also.

37

38 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Okay. that's good. So, we are attending  
39 calls from fishers with questions regarding Puerto Rico state and  
40 federal waters. All day, I'm attending calls, messages, listening  
41 to fishers, looking for answers to their questions about state  
42 waters, licenses process, and federal waters. Also, from the  
43 Council office, Kiara Matías addresses people, fishers, American  
44 fishers that come visit Puerto Rico or other fishers. They call  
45 over there with doubts, so they direct them to me, and we assist  
46 them too.

47

48 For the descending device workshop. The workshops given have been

1 seven workshops, in this past two, three months. Naguabo, Guayama,  
2 Cataño, Río Grande, Aguadilla, Rincón Dorado. For future locations  
3 we have already coordinated in Ceiba and in Puerto Real, Cabo Rojo.  
4 Just today, I spoke with Roberto Sabater, and he's willing to help  
5 me coordinate Club Nautical of San Juan and Cangrejo Club in  
6 Carolina. Right, Roberto? Carolina. Yeah.

7  
8 So, Club Náutico de Arecibo, Villa Pesquera de Culebra, and Vieques  
9 Island. I am waiting on my connection in those areas so they can  
10 meet with their members, the fisher members, so they can choose a  
11 date. What we did was, I just gave them a date, which I just adjust  
12 to whatever the need of the fishers is.

13  
14 In this workshop, I have the privilege to be with Nelson Crespo,  
15 DAP Chair. Our dynamic in each workshop has been better, really.  
16 We start presenting each other. And when I present Nelson, I  
17 present him as a DAP Chair. And in that part, Nelson, I know you're  
18 going to talk more about this in your report, but Nelson start  
19 talking about the process of the DAP, and we continue talking about  
20 the Council process. So, in past workshops, we have had a lot of  
21 attention and question about the process of the Council and the  
22 DAP, the SSC, the Outreach and Education panel.

23  
24 So, the participants have been very interested in the process. So,  
25 for that, I spoked to Cristina. In the OEAP meeting the-- what you  
26 presented about the process of the Council? yeah.

27  
28 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** [inaudible]

29  
30 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** So, yeah. To make a-- [inaudible]. Yeah.

31  
32 So, I requested Cristina so we can sit and make something  
33 explaining the DAP process and the Council process. So, we are we  
34 are going to be working on that.

35  
36 Okay. Fisher's interest and concern, like I said, interest in the  
37 DAP, OEAP, SSC, and Council process. On the charter's license  
38 process too. This past couple of months, federal law enforcement  
39 and state law enforcement, the rangers and FURA have been targeting  
40 illegal charters. So, a lot of my fishers, commercial fishers,  
41 have been calling me regarding the process of the charter license.  
42 Thanks to that, my partners in DNER and Caza y Pesca office, we  
43 are working together, and they made, like, a paper with the  
44 requirements that the charters need. Okay? So, we will make their  
45 lives easier for them.

46  
47 So, state and fishing license process and federal waters  
48 regulations proposed. Like, almost all this feedback, I got it in

1 the descending device workshop. In all my workshops, there are new  
2 talks, new invention, new comments from the fishers. So, I got all  
3 that feedback. Nelson and I were writing it down. So, next slide,  
4 please.

5  
6 So, my next steps. To continue with the descending device workshop,  
7 continue with the educational program, PEPCO. Also, on August 19,  
8 our next presentation, Helena Antoun is going to talk about the  
9 educational program for recreational fishers. So, August 19 we're  
10 going to meet with different stakeholders. Back in the day, Elena  
11 and I gave this workshop in two places and virtually. So, I am  
12 still waiting for the educational materials to be available to  
13 continue with the educational tables.

14  
15 And that will be all for my report. If you have any questions?  
16

### 17 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

20  
21 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Regarding the descending  
22 device, it's a rewarding experience. You know? Be at Fisherman  
23 Villages, Nautica clubs. The feedback we have from fishers, you  
24 know, is awesome. The way they get involved and the way they share  
25 their concerns is really impressive.

26  
27 I want to thank this Council for the opportunity to be with Wilson,  
28 you know, around the island, giving this workshop. I think this is  
29 the correct way to go, outreach and education. Maybe this Council  
30 should consider developing small workshops like this for other  
31 things or maybe improve this workshop, adding other things because  
32 the feedback we have from the fishers is huge, and all of them are  
33 good.

34  
35 Curiously, the community that asked for the descending device  
36 workshop, most of them are commercial fishermen. In the beginning,  
37 I thought the recreational was going to be the sector that was  
38 going to be more interested in this matter, but it surprised me  
39 really deeply. You know? Listening to the commercial fisher asking  
40 how to use this, how to build it, you know, it's really impressive  
41 and so rewarding. Thank you, Wilson.

42  
43 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Thank you, Nelson.

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further comments or questions for Wilson?  
46 Andy?

47  
48 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I just wanted to say thank you to both

1 the liaisons today who spoke about descending devices, the  
2 fishermen that are contributing to these workshops. It's, to me,  
3 awesome that you're being so proactive in advance of any sort of  
4 regulatory requirements and encouraging obviously that there's a  
5 lot of support and buy into this. So, I think one of the things  
6 that we'll want to work with you on is if/when this rule is finally  
7 approved and we'll be going into effect being able to communicate  
8 out to you on the requirements, making sure there's no questions  
9 or concerns, and if there are, how we can obviously work together  
10 to resolve those. So, we'll keep you posted as that rule is  
11 finalized.

12

13 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Thank you, Andy.

14

15 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Julian and Gerson also visited us during  
16 the workshop in Aguadilla.

17

18 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Ah, si.

19

20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Wilson. Next on the agenda is  
21 The Recreational Fisheries Engagement Outreach Initiative by  
22 Helena Antoun.

23

24 **RECREATIONAL FISHERIES ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH INITIATIVES -**  
25 **HELENA ANTOUN, NOAA FISHERIES**

26

27 **HELENA ANTOUN:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Helena Antoun.  
28 I am the Puerto Rico fishery liaison, and I work with the Protected  
29 Resources Division and NOAA Fisheries. I don't have a presentation.  
30 I'm just going to be giving a very quick update on what we're doing  
31 regarding our outreach and education efforts for recreational  
32 fishers.

33

34 Since it's been a while that I've talked about this, I thought it  
35 would be good to give a quick recap and bring everybody up speed.  
36 So, back in 2018, 2019, when I first started as fishery liaison,  
37 I met with DNER and one of the top priorities that was identified  
38 in terms of tasks that they wanted to work on was addressing  
39 recreational fisheries and the outreach and education gaps and a  
40 lot of compliance issues that they've been having in terms of  
41 recreational fisheries. So, I did some scoping meetings, met with  
42 some fishermen, met with the managers, and basically from the  
43 feedback that I got from folks was that there's definitely a need  
44 to reach out to the recreational fishers, provide them with the  
45 information, resources, contacts, and something very similar to  
46 what we did with PEPCO, which is the commercial fishers education  
47 program that Wilson runs.

48

1 So, I partnered up with Wilson. We got together, and we started to  
2 put together the program very similar to what PEPCO is and started  
3 to get all the pieces together and start giving our workshops. We  
4 did a pilot workshop back in 2020, and it went very well. This was  
5 in Arecibo. And then COVID hit, and so, we couldn't do any more  
6 in-person workshops. But then we transferred to virtual, and we  
7 did a few virtual workshops. They were okay. We didn't have a great  
8 participation, but it was something.

9  
10 But then finally in 2023 we kicked off again with our in-person  
11 workshops with fishermen, and we've had mixed results. So, in some  
12 cases, the workshops were very well attended. In some cases, not  
13 so much. One thing that Wilson and I learned very quickly is that  
14 engagement in the recreational fishing sector is very different to  
15 the commercial fishing sector, and we needed to reassess our  
16 strategy. So, this is where we are today.

17  
18 We are going to be having a meeting next week, August 19, and we'll  
19 be bringing together different partners in different areas and  
20 different agencies, state and federal, as well as a few  
21 recreational fishers that were identified by the DNER folks. And  
22 just sit down at the table and talk about what sort of outreach  
23 activities have been done, have a discussion on what has been  
24 working, what has not been working, lessons learned.

25  
26 The goal and purpose of this is several things. One, it's to try  
27 to avoid duplication of efforts, because there's a lot of things  
28 that are going on and a lot of us don't know what the other is  
29 doing. So, it will be good to try to reduce the duplication of  
30 efforts and also see how we can partner with each other and help  
31 each other and support each other. And also get the feedback from  
32 the recreational fishermen to see how we can reassess our strategy  
33 for engagement in this group.

34  
35 So, hopefully, I'll be able to report back sometime in the future  
36 and let you all know how that meeting went and any changes that  
37 have been implemented and hopefully give you guys an update on  
38 what we were able to accomplish. So, I don't know if there's any  
39 questions.

40  
41 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

44  
45 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Can I be invited to that meeting?

46  
47 **HELENA ANTOUN:** Of course. Of course. I'll get you the information.  
48 I'll send it to you.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Helena? Comments? Hearing  
3 none. Thank you, Helena.

4  
5 **HELENA ANTOUN:** You're welcome.

6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next, we have The District Advisory Panel Reports  
8 starting with Julian Magras, Saint Thomas District.

9  
10 **DISTRICT ADVISORY PANEL REPORTS**  
11 **ST. THOMAS, U.S.V.I. – JULIAN MAGRAS, CHAIR**

12  
13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record, I don't have a  
14 report, but just an update. We haven't had a meeting in a while,  
15 but my updates are I attended the Puerto Rico MREP workshop to see  
16 how that went, and it went excellent. It was great being part of  
17 that group and see how the Puerto Rico fishers, the fishers, put  
18 off that workshop, and it was excellent. Good experience. Met a  
19 lot of new people.

20  
21 I'm so happy that we have this program that's taking place  
22 throughout the U.S. It's not only in Puerto Rico and the U.S.  
23 Virgin Islands, but throughout the entire U.S. I sit in the  
24 national steering committee also. So, it's great to see that we  
25 continue to push to train the fishers in all different sectors.  
26 It's not only the commercial fishers, but recreational,  
27 commercial, charter, you name it. So, that's a great experience.

28  
29 Our workshop is coming up in September 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and October 1<sup>st</sup>  
30 in Saint Thomas this year. So right now, we are in the process of  
31 pulling that together. The only other meeting that I attended since  
32 the last meeting was what I spoke about earlier was the yellowtail  
33 and parrotfish SEDAR assessment. So, that's my report. Thank you.

34  
35 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Julian. Questions for Julian?

38  
39 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Julian in MREP, Puerto Rico.

40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nobody escapes Cristina. Next is Gerson  
42 Martínez, Saint Croix District.

43  
44 **ST. CROIX, U.S.V.I. – GERSON MARTÍNEZ, CHAIR**

45  
46 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good afternoon, everybody. Gerson Martínez, for  
47 the record. We didn't have any meetings.

1 Can you guys hear me? Let me get closer.

2  
3 We didn't have any meetings with the DAP committee, but I have  
4 some information for you guys. Due to the ability of having the  
5 two WhatsApp chats. It was-- Okay. Yo me muevo para allá. Can you  
6 hear me now? Okay, locutor, ahora me oye, ¿verdad? Bien.

7  
8 Good afternoon, everybody, again. Gerson Martínez, for the record.  
9 I don't have any report on the DAP meetings because we haven't  
10 met, but due to the ability of the two chats that I have, it was  
11 a great success that we invited some fishermen to the descending  
12 device. We had a good outcome of both commercial and recreational  
13 fishermen. With that said, in that chat I also have Fish and  
14 Wildlife and MREP. Through that ability, we have had a good outcome  
15 in people applying for the next MREP in Saint Thomas, which is  
16 going to happen at the end of September or October? Yes.

17  
18 So, we had a meeting last week. We had a good amount of Saint Croix  
19 fishermen and Saint Thomas fishermen that are interested in  
20 participating. It's a great honor to see both old and young people  
21 engaging in what we do here. It's very important that they know  
22 because sometimes they blame me for everything. One time a person  
23 asked me to step down and I had to explain to them that what I do  
24 here is not just looking out for my benefits, I look out for all  
25 my fisherman's ability to continue doing this in the future.

26  
27 So, by them participating in these meetings like MREP, they see  
28 what really happens in these meetings and how they can engage in  
29 coming to this meeting and participating even by just writing a  
30 little letter stating their concerns.

31  
32 So, this is my second attempt at WhatsApp. The first one was a  
33 disaster. I know a lot of you know what I'm talking about. Wilson  
34 showed me a way of having those chats again, but not giving the  
35 public the ability to do what they did to destroy the first one.  
36 But it's a learning process and it's good being able to communicate  
37 to others about what's going to happen in these future meetings or  
38 these future workshops. Let me see if I am not forgetting anything.

39  
40 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** MREP, Puerto Rico.

41  
42 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** We had one in Aguadilla a couple weeks ago where  
43 those pictures were taken. We also participated there in the  
44 descending device with these guys. There, they were mad at me  
45 because I was literally giving the fisherman too much information  
46 in how to make a working plan on the-- what was the species that  
47 they were using as the fish that was in trouble? I can't remember.  
48 It was a made-up name. But the fishermen were engaging, and some

1 of them were a little mad. Some of them were the passions that we  
2 get in these meetings. And they all felt a little bit of  
3 everything. And I'm grateful that Courtney has invited me to all  
4 these workshops and to interact with other cultures and other  
5 fishermen that involve themselves in different types of fishing.  
6 So, as I said before, don't have too much to say.

7  
8 And then, in these platforms, I have given Fish and Wildlife,  
9 Cristina, Ms. De La Cruz. I can't remember who else. I think I  
10 have it here. MREP, they have the ability, as admins, to carry out  
11 the agenda and let the general public know about these workshops.  
12 A lot of fishermen drop out because, either, they don't have the  
13 ability to communicate to others, they just receive information.  
14 But I think we have over 200 members in those two chats and a lot  
15 of outreach and education has been getting out there.

16  
17 Before I discovered this, it was on a one-to-one basis. I had to  
18 text all these fishermen one by one. So, the ones that don't get  
19 the information, tell them, "Why did you drop out of the chat,  
20 that's on you."

21  
22 One last thing. I would like to see, which I haven't seen during  
23 these two days, for the people who take the decisions, and I speak  
24 this from my heart, I would like to see you guys put yourself in  
25 our shoes. I know you guys have a mandate, and I know you guys  
26 have a job to do. But I respect very much everybody that takes the  
27 decisions here, and I know everybody has their own beliefs. But  
28 the fishermen are the ones that are out there bringing a fresh  
29 local catch of the day to our restaurants and to our general  
30 public.

31  
32 All of us are not monsters. We believe in conservation. We believe  
33 in being part of this decision making, and we would like a little  
34 more to be given to us. I know we don't do this to get rich. I was  
35 born to be a fisherman to bring seafood to people's tables. I know  
36 how to do a lot of things. I used to work in the refinery. I know  
37 how to operate heavy equipment, but my passion-- I want my children  
38 and my grandchildren to practice it too --is fishing.

39  
40 I give everybody here thanks for this opportunity to speak to you  
41 guys. I hope in the future, we can work together and continue doing  
42 this, protecting our resource, first and all, and then permitting  
43 us to continue doing what we do best. God bless you and thank you.

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Gerson. Any question or comment for  
46 Gerson? Hearing none. Nelson Crespo, Puerto Rico District.

47

1 **PUERTO RICO — NELSON CRESPO, CHAIR**

2  
3 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the past few months,  
4 Wilson and I have been offering the Salvapeje workshop for the  
5 Amendment 2 regulation proposed. The name of Salvapeje was given  
6 to the descending device by fishers at the MREP workshop two years  
7 ago. In addition to providing guidance and alternative on how to  
8 make it at home with materials available, during the last  
9 workshops, we took the opportunity to make a small turn, dedicating  
10 some time to teach the participant about the advisory panel and  
11 how they can address their concerns. This has sparked great  
12 interest among participants, and the call from associations,  
13 nautical clubs and individual fishermen to participate in the  
14 workshop has increased considerably.

15  
16 Among the issues they have brought to our attention is that many  
17 fishermen are concerned about the new wahoo and dorado regulation.  
18 Despite supporting them, they demand that the local government  
19 implement compatibility regulation of this matter. Otherwise,  
20 there will be no way for this regulation to work. Fishermen can  
21 claim that these species were caught in state waters and there  
22 will be no way to determine where they were caught, and nothing  
23 will happen. Other matters were under the statehood jurisdiction  
24 and Wilson had already submitted them to the DNER.

25  
26 I have also been receiving calls from fishermen regarding the issue  
27 of the traps in the Corona del Sur and in conjunction with several  
28 Fishing Association and Fishing Village in the northwest of the  
29 island. I have helped them channel their compliance to the Council  
30 and the DNER.

31  
32 I want to thank María and Dr. Schärer, for helping on the way that  
33 we have to build the letter and address the issues we want to put  
34 in the letter. And I also want to thank Dr. Ricardo López for  
35 welcoming me to his office and guiding me on this matter because  
36 the jurisdiction in Corona del Sur is shared between the federal  
37 and state governments.

38  
39 Also, I had the opportunity to attend the MREP meeting and I gave  
40 a presentation regarding the fishery management and effective  
41 participation for fishers. And on the last two MREP, especially  
42 the last one, I want to thank Vanessa and Wilson for the selections  
43 of the participants. That was the cream of the cream. The feedback  
44 from the fisherman, the selection you made, the engagement of the  
45 fisherman, you know, in all the process was really impressive.  
46 That mean that the MREP is working, and I think we have a lot of  
47 future with them.

1 So, this concludes my report. If you have any questions, more than  
2 welcome.

3  
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nelson. Questions, comments for  
5 Nelson? Hearing none. Next on the agenda is to revisit the CFMC  
6 priorities 2025-2026.

7  
8 **REVISIT CFMC PRIORITIES FOR 2025-2026**

9  
10 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** This is María. Cristina, I sent you-- Thank  
11 you. Give me one moment until they can put it in the-- Okay. You  
12 can go to the next slide.

13  
14 So, what we did in this slide is we updated the slide that we  
15 presented yesterday morning with the actions that we were going to  
16 be discussing during this meeting and adding some of the decisions,  
17 moving forward, that were decided by the Council. So, all of this  
18 is just going to be one slide. Everything it's in here. We can  
19 read it, go through it and let's discuss if there's anything that  
20 needs to be adjusted or needs some more clarification.

21  
22 So, the first item that is listed is actions to take when pelagic  
23 AMs are triggered. We are in the column in the middle, the yellow  
24 one, August Council meeting. We went through some options. The  
25 Council made a motion to create an IPT and to evaluate, consider  
26 development of some options for the Council's consideration to  
27 bring to the Council meeting in December based on the discussions  
28 that were conducted here with the Council on participants. So,  
29 that's what's going to happen in December. This is going to be a  
30 discussion.

31  
32 The next action that is listed. The second row, Revision of  
33 Accountability Measure for the Spiny Lobster in Puerto Rico. There  
34 was a discussion not only of the accountability measures, but other  
35 aspects of the management on the spiny lobster. There was an  
36 understanding that there was going to be some updates done to the  
37 SEDAR 91 for Puerto Rico to incorporate or to revise some  
38 additional data. Then after that, there was going to be a review  
39 by the SSC, which was supposed to be taking place in September for  
40 Puerto Rico, and for the other islands. However, Puerto Rico,  
41 that's going to happen later.

42  
43 But related to this particular action, to the accountability  
44 measures, things that are discussed or come up from that SEDAR 91  
45 are going to be also very relevant to the determination of what  
46 accountability measures, changes to the accountability measures  
47 can be taken for the spiny lobster. So, that's why that is included  
48 in there. There was a motion to develop an amendment that included

1 that AM modification. However, that amendment will possibly  
2 include also, whenever the SEDAR 91 is discussed and if there is  
3 a recommendation from the SSC that the assessment can provide  
4 management advice, then that will prompt an amendment to the FMP,  
5 the Puerto Rico FMP to get new reference points. So, all of this  
6 is to be determined. However, at the December meeting, we can  
7 continue the discussion based on, again, on the outcomes of the  
8 SEDAR 91 and all of the things that needs to be done for that.

9  
10 Then next, we talked about a matrix. That matrix reviews  
11 qualitative and quantitative information for stocks that are being  
12 managed under each one of the FMPs. The objective of this matrix  
13 is for the Council to consider and reevaluate those stocks for the  
14 need for conservation and management.

15  
16 That matrix was developed during the past months conducive to this  
17 meeting. The matrix was presented and there was guidance to move  
18 forward with an action, a motion to create an IPT and a development  
19 of options for the Council consideration at the December meeting.

20  
21 The next one is SEDAR 84, yellowtail snapper in Puerto Rico and  
22 Saint Thomas and Saint John and stoplight parrotfish in Saint  
23 Croix. There was, we heard from Vance Vicente, we heard a report  
24 on the review panel and an overview of that. They have an SSC  
25 review plan for November for all the islands that are included in  
26 that SEDAR 84. And based on the outcomes of that, there will be  
27 recommendations that are going to be discussed in the Caribbean  
28 Fishery Management Council meeting in December.

29  
30 If again, those recommendations are conducive to recommendations  
31 saying that this is good for management advice, then there would  
32 be an amendment. If that is not the case, then that second part  
33 that says potential amendment, is not going to happen.

34  
35 The last one in here is SEDAR 91, spiny lobster Puerto Rico, Saint  
36 Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix. We had an extensive discussion  
37 about SEDAR 91 and data and management of the spiny lobster in  
38 Puerto Rico. It was also a discussion that the SEDAR 91 for Saint  
39 Thomas/Saint John and Saint Croix, that review can move forward.  
40 The SSC is scheduled to review the SEDAR 91 for Saint Thomas/Saint  
41 John and Saint Croix in September. And it is expected that in the  
42 December meeting, there will be a discussion with recommendations  
43 to the Council. And then if it's appropriate for management advice,  
44 then the Council can work on a potential amendment to the U.S.  
45 Virgin Islands FMP, to each one of them, to incorporate this new  
46 management advice.

47  
48 So, the last thing, I don't have any other slide, but one another

1 thing that we wanted to bring to the attention of the Council at  
2 this point is that there was the response to the request for E.O.  
3 14276. Executive order 14276. The Council worked on a list of  
4 actions that they wanted to include in this response and that staff  
5 was going to be working at putting together a work plan with  
6 listing those actions and also listing some of the challenges that  
7 were discussed during the meeting.

8  
9 We also talked about if there was anything that wanted to or needed  
10 to be added. Or if there was interest from the Council to adding  
11 something else to this list before the meeting ended and that they  
12 can do that. At this time, we may want to ask the Council to  
13 consider making a motion to establish what's going to happen with  
14 this response in terms of list that was done yesterday in the next  
15 steps.

16  
17 Oh, and another thing that I would like to request the Council is  
18 to go through this list. Maybe we can go through and prioritize  
19 because there's a lot of things in here that staff has to work  
20 with. However, we understand that some of these actions are waiting  
21 for some other things to happen before we can move forward, but  
22 it's important for the Council to set the things that are more  
23 important for them, priorities. Thank you.

#### 24 25 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

28  
29 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks, Kevin McCarthy. So, María, question  
30 about the timing of these assessments.

31  
32 So, I think where we ended up was, yes, September SSC meeting for  
33 the Virgin Islands, SEDAR 91. I don't know that we have-- and then  
34 I think we're prioritizing finishing with some additional data  
35 examination with DRNA for SEDAR 91 Puerto Rico. We don't know when  
36 that's going to be completed. So, Ricardo and I are going to get  
37 together and figure out some timelines and staffing and that kind  
38 of stuff. So, I don't know what's going to happen in November.

39  
40 But what's likely not to happen is a review of SEDAR 84 and I  
41 thought there was general agreement that was the way forward. I  
42 have requested that we take some time in the September meeting  
43 with the SSC to discuss ways forward for 84 but not take any  
44 action. Essentially, get some feedback. They'll have had time to  
45 read the reports and all that kind of stuff. Give us some direction  
46 of where they would like to see things go. There are some options  
47 that will, no doubt, come out of the reports, which I haven't seen  
48 yet, from the review workshop. And then, we'll kind of figure out

1 some timelines, but I think that the priority, as I recall, was  
2 Puerto Rico spiny lobster.  
3  
4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Sounds good. Cristina, can you go back  
5 to the-- this is a PowerPoint, right? You can fix it? I think  
6 that's how I sent it to you. Oh, okay. So, we'll just adjust it  
7 right now. So, no problem. Also make sure that I capture  
8 everything, how it was, but I think this is an easy fix.  
9  
10 And then in the meantime, maybe-- well, you're already here. Okay.  
11 So, Kevin, will you say then, for SEDAR 84 in November, the SSC  
12 review, all that is not happening at this time?  
13  
14 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Correct. So, I don't know, from the Science Center  
15 perspective, if we need to have an SSC meeting. I think that we  
16 won't know that-- Ricardo and I will get together as soon as we  
17 can--  
18  
19 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** For SEDAR 84?  
20  
21 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** For anything.  
22  
23 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay.  
24  
25 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Because I don't know if we'll have Puerto Rico  
26 done. It it's all down to staffing. And I'm down an assessment  
27 biologist. So, that really slows us down.  
28  
29 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, Cristina, if you don't mind, deleting  
30 that text that you have highlighted right now. And then, next to  
31 it, it says "Discussion, Recommendations, potential Amendment."  
32 We're still-- this is TBD, right, at this point, for SEDAR. You  
33 will still discuss?  
34  
35 Sorry. Kevin, did you expect Council to be able to discuss anything  
36 about the SEDAR or that's--  
37  
38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** In December?  
39  
40 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Uh-huh.  
41  
42 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** The Virgin Islands, SEDAR 91, Spiny Lobster.  
43  
44 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, you can remove all of that as well.  
45 And then for SEDAR 91, just for the U.S. Virgin Islands in  
46 September stays the same. Correct?  
47  
48 SSC review?

1  
2 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Correct.  
3  
4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. And then If--  
5  
6 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** If I mentioned changing it, Graciela would kill me  
7 right now.  
8  
9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** That's fine. And then, for my clarification,  
10 then the December meeting under SEDAR 91, is that still  
11 appropriate? This says "Discussion, Recommendations, potential  
12 Amendment." This is for U.S. Virgin Islands.  
13  
14 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** For December, yes.  
15  
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Can you add, after the word amendment,  
17 can you add U.S.V.I. just to be clear? Okay. Anything else, Kevin?  
18  
19 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Not at this moment. Thank you.  
20  
21 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Thank you.  
22  
23 Alright. So, with that said, can we go back to the main points and  
24 with the response to E.O. 14276. And, again, if the Council would  
25 make a motion to move forward with the guidance that was provided  
26 yesterday.  
27  
28 Mr. Chair.  
29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, Andy?  
31  
32 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. While we're waiting on that, so a couple  
33 of thoughts. You asked about priorities. At least from my  
34 viewpoint, I would say the work on the framework to look at the  
35 species in the fishery management unit would be a top priority, as  
36 well as response to stock assessments that we actually have  
37 completed and ready to be responded to.  
38  
39 The way you presented it, María, you have all those kinds of broken  
40 out into separate amendments. And so, one of the things I think we  
41 could think about is whether or not we could combine some of those  
42 into, you know, a joint amendment that addresses multiple species,  
43 where it makes sense. We can, you know, adequately describe the  
44 goals and objectives consistently with one another. So, that's  
45 something we can work on.  
46  
47 And then I agree with the recommendation. Obviously, was some high-  
48 level input with regard to a letter that'll be sent to NOAA

1 Fisheries with regard to deregulatory actions. You know, the  
2 Fishery Service is not going to be the ones fully responsible for  
3 implementing all those deregulatory actions. So, the onus is on  
4 the Council, if you want to proceed to start looking at some of  
5 those. I think it's important that we build that into a work plan,  
6 but we haven't provided a lot of details, in terms of, specifically  
7 what we want to look at.

8  
9 So, that would really be, I think, the next step is if we're going  
10 to undergo some sort of review and start looking at some of our  
11 regulations, how we go about doing that, and then ultimately how  
12 we reconsider those regulations and management.

13  
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Andy, that will be included in the response to  
15 Washington for the September, somehow, that language.

16  
17 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, if you bring up the list that we had earlier  
18 in the week, that's what you would be providing, obviously, to  
19 Eugenio in terms of a work plan, as well as other ideas that might  
20 fall outside the Council's responsibilities. But obviously, there  
21 are things within your purview that you could work toward  
22 implementing. So, that's what we're essentially asking is, do you  
23 want to move forward with starting to put that in the queue to  
24 work on? And then we would start steps, obviously, to look at  
25 deregulatory actions that are under the control of this Council  
26 that would be part of an amendment to the fishery management plans  
27 going forward.

28  
29 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Cristina, would you be able to put on the  
30 screen the main points in response to the E.O. document? Thank  
31 you.

32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

34  
35 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** What's on the screen is what we discussed  
36 yesterday that would be part of the letter that Miguel and team  
37 sends the Fishery Service. Number one, we're working on, or, you  
38 know, are in progress. Number two, really is outside the scope of  
39 what we can do as a Council, with regard to imports. It looks like  
40 three, five, and six are items that this Council could work on, if  
41 we want to add those to the work plan. They don't have to be  
42 separate amendments. They can be all considered at once as in terms  
43 of like a deregulatory action.

44  
45 And then we could begin work on that based on, as time allows in  
46 our schedule and prioritize, you know, what we would want to  
47 consider more specifically with those items. So, I'm interested if  
48 the Council's agreeable to that, right. Then, I don't know, María,

1 are you asking for a motion or just direction at this point that  
2 would include this in the work plan?

3  
4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. So, Andy, what we would like is to have  
5 a motion that would guide staff to include the things that are  
6 included in here. And so, these are the items that will be  
7 included, basically, on that list or letter spreadsheet. If you  
8 think, like you mentioned, that there are some things in there  
9 that, like you said number three, number five, and number six,  
10 those are things that are under control of the Council and  
11 something that can be done. Then three, five and six will be  
12 something that we could add to the list of actions like you  
13 mentioned.

14  
15 And then, we can at the office figure out what would be the best  
16 way of doing that. Again, this is a plan that doesn't mean that it  
17 has to be something that needs to be done by now, because of course  
18 this is a very general list of items. Then, it will be nice if we  
19 had time to provide something more concrete at some point, but  
20 then the Council will need to prioritize that.

21  
22 So, yes, so I think three, five and six we can add to the slide  
23 that we had before. And then, number seven is something that the  
24 Council-- I think that motion did not pass. So, perhaps that is  
25 something that needs to be removed from here. Yeah? Removed. Andy?

26  
27 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. And I'm seeing this as, like, one item on  
28 the work plan that would encompass three, five, and six, at this  
29 stage. And then if that action grows to be very large, we could  
30 start splitting it up. I think the question would be timing for  
31 the work plan and staff capacity. Right?

32  
33 So, looking at you, Sarah, the Caribbean team, you know, is this  
34 something that we would want to prioritize for starting in April?  
35 Do we have some capacity to do it between now and December? I want  
36 to be realistic about our capacity.

37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sarah?

39  
40 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** This is Sarah. I think, probably what we would  
41 want to do is go back to the office and see what some of the other  
42 members that would end up being on that IPT, where this might fall  
43 within their priorities too, since they do the Gulf and the South  
44 Atlantic branches as well. But for us, yes, it would probably be  
45 one of the higher priorities, just for María and I, but we would  
46 need to check with the other staff, especially the economists.

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

1  
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We still have the question of what we're going to  
3 tell Eugenio in response to his memo. So, it seems that with the  
4 discussion we had, you know, general, let's say, language, for  
5 doctor and other work, that we can fill that table and send it.  
6 And then, as María said, when you go back to the office, you can  
7 look at what is needed to be done so we start the work plan. And  
8 that follows what Andy suggested, I believe.

9  
10 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** The way I view this is everything that's up on  
11 that list, with the exception of number seven because we voted  
12 against it today, would be part of the letter to Eugenio as well  
13 as, you know, some of the other notes we have at the bottom of  
14 that. But because some of that falls outside the scope of the work  
15 we do, we don't work on sharks here at the Caribbean Council, for  
16 example, or we don't work with the import program. Those are  
17 recommendations to the Fishery Service and other sections of the  
18 agency that would have to work on those deregulatory actions.

19  
20 Whereas the items that I mentioned, three, five, and six, we're  
21 here to assist you in trying to accomplish those, and that's why  
22 we're asking to prioritize them. And then, the question becomes  
23 the specifics of that. So, we will want to come back and say,  
24 "okay, well, what are the regulations that are not compatible  
25 between federal and state? Let's look at those and determine, you  
26 know, what changes we can make. Are there ways that we can carry  
27 over unused ACL and how would we go about doing that?" So, we would  
28 work through a more detailed process.

29  
30 I think this is very responsive to a lot of comments I've heard  
31 from the fishermen this week, right, and the concerns that they've  
32 had about we often regulate them, but we don't often alleviate  
33 regulations that we've imposed on them. And so, prioritizing this,  
34 I think, is good and important, and then we have to evaluate the  
35 need for those regulations against, you know, the lack of,  
36 essentially, meeting those regulations.

37  
38 So, if that makes sense.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, yeah, you want that as a motion?

41  
42 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** My suggestion is we not have a motion if the  
43 Council's agreeable that staff will take this as direction to begin  
44 working towards more information and options that could be brought  
45 back at a future Council meeting. We leave it then open ended.  
46 We'll work with you, Miguel, and team to prioritize that. I'm not  
47 seeing any opposition, so I just want to confirm that. And then,  
48 we can always officially kind of put it as a motion based on

1 bringing back some more details around how we could approach this.  
2 Does that work? Okay.

3

4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Are we all clear, Mr. Chairman?

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. What happens if down the road some other  
7 ideas come up? Could that still be presented in the future? Okay.  
8 That's fine. We're good with that, I think.

9

10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And, actually, Mr. Piñeiro was very clear on that,  
11 at the meeting of the CCC, that this is not the end of it. This is  
12 the beginning of it. So, they want to implement it. So, yes,  
13 officially, they are open for any additional significant change  
14 that are deemed necessary. They are open to include it.

15

16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Thank you, Cristina, and thank you,  
17 Liajay, for putting all this information on the screen. Okay.  
18 Thanks.

19

20 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Cristina Olán, for the record. I have  
21 a question. Can I share the updated presentation? Can I share it  
22 on the briefing book, the updated presentation? Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

23

24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So next on the agenda, we have The  
25 Enforcement Reports. We're going to start with Puerto Rico DNER.

26

#### 27 **ENFORCEMENT REPORTS**

28

29 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Good afternoon to all of you, and thanks  
30 for the opportunity. Today, to me, it's the first time that we  
31 have the DNER Commissioner connected through Zoom, and the DNER  
32 Secretary is also connected by YouTube. And for me, this is the  
33 first time, so it's something that I wanted to share with all of  
34 you.

35

36 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Ricardo, sorry to interrupt. I'm having  
37 a little bit of trouble with the presentation on PowerPoint that  
38 has the videos. Do you prefer that I share the one that is in a  
39 PDF? Liajay is telling me that she can help me on that. Thank you.

40

41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Pero no ven los videos. No, ella dijo que la  
42 van a ayudar.

43

44 So, you're going to get help for that, or you want me to decide?

45

46 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** I'm going to upload it.

47

48 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Alright.

1  
2 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Give me a minute.

3  
4 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thanks. Okay. Let's give them five minutes or  
5 something like that. Secretary Nelson is connected with video. So,  
6 we can see you.

7  
8 Thanks for being here. I mean, he's also the Subsecretary of DNER.  
9 He has two positions.

10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, if the Commissioner or the Secretary  
12 would like to say a few words, you're more than welcome. The floor  
13 is yours.

14  
15 **PUERTO RICO DNER**

16  
17 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Okay. We're back again.

18  
19 Again, thanks to the Subsecretary and Commissioner Nelson Cruz,  
20 Subcommissioner Edwin Rodríguez, and DNER ranger Yamiré Pérez, I  
21 was able to prepare this presentation for you today. As you can  
22 see on that small movie or clip, you can see over 40 lobsters that  
23 were seized not by a ranger, but by the commissioner.

24  
25 The commissioner stopped a vehicle in the road. He saw that the  
26 vehicle, it was like a pickup truck, was full of lobsters and had  
27 an Igloo cooler also. The cooler was also full of queen conch.  
28 When he stopped the driver, he found that some of the lobsters  
29 were too small. So, he sees all the lobsters and the queen conch,  
30 and now the person is in a process of interview to see what was  
31 going on. The person that was driving was not a fisherman. It was  
32 just a person that was transporting the lobsters and the queen  
33 conch. So, this is under investigation as we're talking. Next,  
34 please.

35  
36 This is usually the table that I provide you with in every meeting.  
37 In green, you can see Law 278, the Puerto Rico Fisheries Law, and  
38 Regulation 7949. You can see some numbers that I highlighted in  
39 yellow because those number are extremely high compared to any  
40 other presentation that I have given to you. We are talking about  
41 529 cases of Puerto Rico Water Navigation and Safety Act. 50 cases  
42 of the Regulation on Fisheries, and 210 cases of Regulations for  
43 Registration, Navigation, and Aquatic Safety in Puerto Rico.

44  
45 You are probably asking yourself why these numbers are so high  
46 this season. I asked myself that same question, but the answer is  
47 multifactorial. We have multiple factors. We have a new secretary  
48 with a new commissioner, both with new strategies. We also have a

1 vessel in each of the maritime unit, new vessels. For many years,  
2 we didn't have the opportunity to have that kind of equipment  
3 available. We also have many jet skis, vehicles, and DNER  
4 commissioner just said to me, via WhatsApp, to please consider  
5 that we have 300 Rangers now, and they will be available to work  
6 not only with the with wildlife and fisheries, but he wanted the  
7 rangers from wildlife also to be able to work with fisheries. So,  
8 so he has some suggestions at the end of my presentation. Please,  
9 next.

10  
11 You can see in this figure; I also highlighted the two laws that  
12 are more important for this Council. You can see that number, 50  
13 that is way, way larger than in previous presentations. I am  
14 comparing it there, for the same season two more years, and for  
15 the previous season and you can see the big difference. Please,  
16 next.

17  
18 In this slide, can see how DNER rangers, in company with the Coast  
19 Guard, are following some of the vessels to interact with the  
20 fisherman to see what what's going on. Right? In both clips, those  
21 are done in the EEZ, the Exclusive Economic Zone. So, it's over  
22 the nine miles. We have also worked with FURA and with Fish and  
23 Wildlife, with the Coast Guard, with NOAA, and they are trying to  
24 make a task force in Vieques in order to increase the surveillance  
25 in that zone, in that area.

26  
27 We have two new academies. That is also important to take into  
28 consideration. With two additional academies, we have more eyes,  
29 more people in the field trying to make the enforcement. We are  
30 talking also about having eight drones deployed, with a pilot and  
31 with thermal vision, which will be used not only for terrestrial  
32 purposes, but also in the water.

33  
34 DNER will be trying to get surveillance and evidence from those  
35 drones, that could be piloted, from the road to the coast. So, we  
36 don't have to be in the water in order to follow what's going on  
37 in the water, in the ocean. That is completely new to us. Please,  
38 next.

39  
40 We also have a new a new unit of rangers that will be undercover.  
41 They will be working in vehicles that are unmarked. We have two of  
42 those in Arecibo, two in Mayagüez, and two in Humacao.

43  
44 In this case, this intervention was with three persons. One was a  
45 female in the getaway car, and two were fishermen fishing on the  
46 coast when the rangers went closer to them. They didn't want to  
47 move out of the water, so they followed them until they had to.  
48 They were very tired. The commissioner was there personally. And

1 as you can see, they have lobsters that were ripped full of eggs,  
2 and that is illegal. So, everything was ceased.

3  
4 At the end, the two persons were not documented. They didn't have  
5 the documentation to be in Puerto Rico legally, so they were  
6 arrested. Please consider that they had 83 queen conchs and 10  
7 lobsters, and they were swimming from the coast. They were not in  
8 a boat. They were not going far, and they got so many lobsters in  
9 in a few times. Please, next.

10  
11 Okay. This was the first intervention that I talked about. 47  
12 lobsters, many of them very small, and a significant quantity of  
13 queen conch. When I talked about this with Vanessa, she explained  
14 to me that the amount you can see there is because the person was  
15 more like a dealer or transportation. He was collecting all these  
16 lobsters and queen conch from different fishermen and was  
17 transporting all of these animals to the restaurant. That's why  
18 you see such a big amount. Next.

19  
20 In this case, the fisherman was a commercial fisherman using nets.  
21 You can see how many snooks he caught. Obviously, he was very close  
22 to the river, and some of those snooks were too small to be legal.  
23 So, everything was ceased. You can see the net in the picture  
24 below, in the small picture below, as well as the other fishes he  
25 caught that were in the cooler. That was in Loiza. Please, next.

26  
27 This case was a rescue. So, DNER rangers are not only following  
28 criminals or people that might be criminals. In this case, they  
29 rescued a big turtle that went under a cave and got into that  
30 crevice. They had to pull it out and try to move it below the cave  
31 so that the turtle could go to the water again. That was Sergeant  
32 Toro from Cabo Rojo. He was off duty at that moment when he received  
33 the call. Without uniform, he just moved with the biologist and  
34 other rangers and immediately did the rescue near the lighthouse  
35 in Cabo Rojo. Please, next.

36  
37 Okay. As you can see in the left picture, that is the commissioner  
38 being careful with the person that was tired because of so much  
39 swimming for such a long time trying to avoid the rangers.

40  
41 In the bullets, you can see some of the words that the commissioner  
42 told me during this week. He has been writing and talking to me  
43 very often. That is not common. I feel an honor to be in this  
44 position. So, this morning, the commissioner expressed a strong  
45 interest in improving species identification capacity among DNER  
46 rangers, especially those from non-marine units. For example, the  
47 wildlife units. He wants all the rangers to be able, if they are  
48 close to the beach, if they are close to the coast, to be able to

1 identify the fish. He's asking if it is possible for NOAA or for  
2 the Council to try considering making an application or a computer  
3 program in order for them to easily identify the species,  
4 especially those that could be very confusing. He also explained  
5 to me that they already have the computers, all they would need is  
6 the program.

7  
8 Also, if we can provide them with additional materials, like,  
9 calipers and materials to measure the fish; they would love to  
10 have that in order to do better their job. So, support from NOAA  
11 will be instrumental in scaling these tools and ensure the  
12 effective consistent enforcement across all divisions. Next.

13  
14 On that small clip, you can see the turtle moving down the big  
15 rocks through the cave in order to get to the beach. I put that  
16 there because I found it nice to see.

17  
18 You can connect with us. You can see there our emails and our  
19 telephone numbers. And that is the end. If you have any question,  
20 I'm here.

#### 21 22 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

23  
24 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. Wilson Santiago, for the record.  
25 Ricardo, for the fish ID, I think the Council, Cristina and Miguel  
26 can correct me if I'm wrong. We are in the fish app. Right?

27  
28 Fish rules. It's an app that is called Fish Rules. The Council is  
29 in there, and it has all of the size limits and everything in the  
30 Caribbean. Also, we have the guidebooks that we made, too. I have  
31 been distributing them to a lot of rangers around the island and  
32 also the stickers that we made. Yeah.

33  
34 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Is that application ready to be used, and it  
35 can be used in a computer or in cellular?

36  
37 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Android cell phones.

38  
39 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Only cell phones?

40  
41 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** [inaudible]

42  
43 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Okay. Yeah. It can be used in computers  
44 and cell phones.

45  
46 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Okay. Yeah. I will like if--

47  
48 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Fish rules. I will send it to you.

1  
2 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** I would like if we can make a small meeting  
3 with the commissioner to explain to him what we have to see if  
4 with that application we can comply with what he needs. What I'm  
5 looking at right now is that with that application, they will be  
6 they will be using their private phones. Right? They don't have a  
7 phone from DNER, but we can talk about that later.  
8

9 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. Just to specify, it has federal  
10 and state regulations also.  
11

12 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** That's excellent. Thank you.  
13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Ricardo, comments?  
15 Hearing none. Thank you, Ricardo.  
16

17 Well, we don't have anything from DPNR enforcement. So, we'll go  
18 to U.S. Coast Guard.  
19

#### 20 **U.S. COAST GUARD**

21

22 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Good afternoon, everyone. Can you hear me? Test?  
23 No. Yes. Good. Good. Thank you.  
24

25 My name is James Butler. I'm from the enforcement division over at  
26 Coast Guard sector San Juan. I want to start by saying it's been  
27 an absolute pleasure to be here and witness this process going on.  
28

29 I have a slide to present. It's not quite as robust as Mr. López's  
30 presentation, but I am armed with a script here to read to you all  
31 on the enforcement activities fisheries related from Sector San  
32 Juan since the last meeting. Seems we're a little out of focus.  
33

34 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** If you allow us a moment, I can upload it  
35 from my computer. I think it's Internet issues.  
36

37 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Of course. Perfect. Thank you.  
38

39 Alright. From Coast Guard sector San Juan. While Sector San Juan's  
40 patrol boats are primarily responsible for alien and drug  
41 interdiction, the Coast Guard's fast response cutters have  
42 effectively enforced fisheries regulations by strategically  
43 aligning their illicit trafficking patrol vectors with the key  
44 living marine resource areas, including Bajo De Sico, Tourmaline  
45 Bank, and Abril La Sierra Bank, and the water surrounding Desecheo,  
46 Mona, and Monito Island.  
47

48 This alignment allows Sector San Juan to maintain constant force

1 projection and a living marine resource boarding officer present  
2 in the vicinity of these regulated areas 24/7 with an underway law  
3 enforcement presence. For example, the Coast Guard cutter  
4 Heriberto Hernández patrolled the Hind Bank Marine Conservation  
5 and Grammanik Bank area providing a visible enforcement presence.  
6 And in May, the Coast Guard cutter Joseph Napier conducted five  
7 marine boardings in the West by Northwest region of Puerto Rico,  
8 all of which resulted in no violations.

9  
10 In addition, to the enforcement efforts, Sector San Juan has hosted  
11 a Caribbean Living Marine Resource boarding officer training on  
12 April 28<sup>th</sup>, and this training equipped 17 personnel with knowledge  
13 of applicable federal regulations, species identification, and  
14 relevant procedures. Thank you.

#### 15 16 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Any question or comment for the Coast  
19 Guard? Julian?

20  
21 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. I know the  
22 Coast Guard is responsible for repairing the lights on the buoys,  
23 the navigation buoys, and we have had an issue with two of them in  
24 Saint Thomas for a while now. The Buck Island in Saint Thomas, not  
25 Saint Croix. The light hasn't been working for months. And, also,  
26 the light and the propane, the propane mothership that used to  
27 moor off the South of Saint Thomas right at the beginning of  
28 federal waters. It's right in federal waters. That light hasn't  
29 been working at all either. So, I don't know if there's anyone  
30 that you kind of reach out to from your sector.

31  
32 You know, us as fishers, we know where they are, but there's a lot  
33 of boat traffic in that area. So, thank God we haven't had any  
34 instances with anyone hidden, but I think it's a great concern.

35  
36 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Good afternoon, sir. Thank you for the question.  
37 Speaking as a nonexpert in aids to navigation, I can tell you that  
38 the team that services the aids in the Virgin Islands is located  
39 out of San Juan, and I absolutely have their contact information.  
40 So, if we could meet offline and you could give me the details for  
41 these specific aids, I can get that moved on to the relevant teams  
42 in San Juan.

43  
44 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Thank you. Julian, we have the same situation  
45 a couple of years ago in the West Coast. What we did was, we need  
46 to send an email to the contact information that he will bring  
47 specifying what are the issues with those. And every year, during  
48 the same time, they go around. So, just need to check if it's

1 enough time for bringing the email and that they don't pass it on  
2 to the next year, that situation. Thanks.

3  
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. NOAA OLE.

5  
6 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Mr. Chair. We have a comment in the  
7 chat from Nelson Cruz. I want to read it for the record. "We are  
8 really proud and glad to be part of this project," referring to  
9 the presentation that was given by Ricardo López. "We hope to have  
10 you in Puerto Rico soon. I want to take a minute to thank Ricardo  
11 and Daniel for the great job. Thanks, Nelson Cruz."

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Next is NOAA OLE.

14  
15 **NOAA FISHERIES OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**

16  
17 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Miguel Borges, special  
18 agent with NOAA, Office of Law Enforcement. Okay.

19  
20 Here's a short presentation. I know it's one of the last ones, so  
21 it should be pretty quick. I'm going to talk a little bit about  
22 trainings, cases, and some enforcement updates. So, we've done  
23 some training in this period. One of them was with the U.S. Coast  
24 Guard Living Marine Resource training, which is their fisheries  
25 training. That's their fishery training. I went for one day. It's  
26 a very good training they do. It's a three-day training. The Coast  
27 Guard hosts. Thus, I will go for one day and give federal  
28 regulations, case package, trends, etcetera.

29  
30 Also, the DNER academy they, thankfully, have another one right  
31 now. So, we're glad to see new officers for the DNER. I went for  
32 one day as well and gave my presentation on case packages, federal  
33 regulations. I'm very glad to be there.

34  
35 Also, I wanted to inform about port inspections that we've done.  
36 Seafood imports. At the seaport, I've done several inspections of  
37 spiny lobster, yellowtail snapper, lane snapper, and several  
38 others. We have cases open right now of the SIMP cases, which is  
39 the Seafood Import Monitoring Program that was briefly talked about  
40 yesterday, which requires some traceability paperwork from the  
41 importers to be held and to be given to NOAA. So, we have open  
42 cases on some SIMP cases. Go ahead next, please.

43  
44 And other cases that some are ongoing, and some where we've already  
45 issued some fines are conch cases. We have one where a fine has  
46 been issued already. We did another case on deep-water snapper in  
47 closed area. That one had 25 deep-water snappers in the closed  
48 area. That fine has also been issued.

1  
2 We have several ongoing cases of egg bearing lobsters and conch in  
3 the EEZ. These cases have been in conjunction with Coast Guard and  
4 with DNER. One of them was directly referred to us by DNER, so I  
5 could attest to what Ricardo said earlier that they've been more  
6 active in working and doing more patrols on the water. So, we're  
7 glad to see that as well. Okay. Go ahead. Next.

8  
9 Okay. Some enforcement reminders that we wanted to give also is  
10 about the queen conch closure. It's closed year-round on almost  
11 all the EEZ except East of Saint Croix, which is closed right now  
12 as well. The dolphin/wahoo regulation that recently came into  
13 effect on July 25<sup>th</sup> just a few weeks ago, that regulates the  
14 mahi/wahoo by size and bag limit for the recreational.

15  
16 Also, another reminder is about the fish traps. We've mentioned  
17 here as well that they have to be properly labeled with the labeled  
18 buoy. And if not, they can be removed from the water. Okay? Just  
19 a reminder for that.

20  
21 And next. And that's all our presentation. If you have any  
22 questions, we'd be glad to answer them.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Great. Thank you. Any questions for NOAA OLE?  
25 Hearing none. Thank you.

26  
27 Next, we have Advisory Body Membership.

28  
29 **ADVISORY BODIES MEMBERSHIPS**

30  
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, the Council, as you know, made a  
32 closed session yesterday, and they have four recommendations. The  
33 way we do this is we open this to a motion and then you accept or  
34 not the recommendation of the group. Diana has the--

35  
36 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. For the DAPs?

37  
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** has the list of the recommendation, and she will  
39 read it all for the record, or you can take it one at a time. But  
40 at this time, please allow her to read for the record each one of  
41 the recommendations from the group.

42  
43 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** For the DAPs, for Saint Thomas DAPs,  
44 there are two seats available. James Kreglo will occupy open seat  
45 left by Anthony Blanchard.

46  
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** If they decide to do that. The proposal is,  
48 remember, we have the Chairman a long time ago, the Council

1 approved that when we have the term of a council member expire, we  
2 allow them to participate in the appropriate DAP. In this case,  
3 Mr. James Kreglo accepted to be member of the DAP Saint Thomas  
4 given that Mr. Tony Blanchard, as of August 15<sup>th</sup>, will be a new  
5 council member representing that area.  
6  
7 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. Also, Sennai, you said yesterday  
8 you would contact Calvin Jr. to see if he would agree to--  
9  
10 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I'm still in contact with him. He hasn't given  
11 me a yes or no yet. But if he does, I'll let you guys know.  
12  
13 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay.  
14  
15 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, for that for right now, that's still open. We  
16 need to find a member to fill it.  
17  
18 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. Then for the Saint Croix DAP,  
19 there's one seat available.  
20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai and I are working on that.  
22  
23 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. And for--  
24  
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, the first motion will be to accept as member  
26 of the DAP, Saint Thomas/Saint John, Mr. Tony Blanchard's vacancy  
27 be filled by Mr. James Kreglo. And we can also say that Mr. Calvin  
28 will be appointed subject his confirmation to meet Mr. Habtes about  
29 his participation. Is that something that can be done?  
30  
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** I'd say let's leave it open until we get a  
32 confirmation. Okay? And I'll let you know, and then we can review  
33 that at the next meeting or do it via email book.  
34  
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, now that you're talking, can you have a motion  
36 from you accepting the change of Tony and  
37  
38 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** James Kreglo.  
39  
40 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I move that we accept James Kreglo's position  
41 on the DAP as a member in the vacancy left by Mr. Tony Blanchard's  
42 movement up to the Council seat.  
43  
44 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.  
45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say "Aye."  
47  
48 **GROUP:** Aye.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion  
3 carries.  
4  
5 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. For the Puerto Rico DAP, Vanessa,  
6 you agreed to contact Genius to see if he is still interested in  
7 participating and being a member.  
8  
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. He can be considered at the December  
10 meeting.  
11  
12 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Yeah. He should be considered at the  
13 December meeting.  
14  
15 Then in the Outreach and Education Advisory Panel to appoint  
16 Liandry de la Cruz.  
17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Motion to appoint Liandry de la Cruz.  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Is there a motion?  
21  
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** Move that we appoint Liandry de la Cruz to the OEAP.  
23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Second?  
25  
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.  
27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Say "aye."  
29  
30 **GROUP:** Aye.  
31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion  
33 carries.  
34  
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, the last part. We have one of an  
36 Ex-Officio Member from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.  
37 Yesterday the group considered or recommended the council to accept  
38 Dr. Skyler Sagarese as a new member of the SSC of this council.  
39 Graciela, can you tell us who is she?  
40  
41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes. She's been part of the Gulf and  
42 Caribbean branch at the Science Center. Now she's with the Gulf  
43 branch, but she has participated in SEDAR 57, for example. So,  
44 she's been a part of the SEDAR process and other stock assessment  
45 analysis. She also has a background on ecosystem approaches to  
46 management. So, she comes in very handy at this time for the SSC.  
47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we need a motion.

1  
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Motion to appoint Skyler Sagarese to the  
3 Scientific and Statistical Committee.

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Need a second.

6  
7 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say "aye."

10  
11 **GROUP:** Aye.

12  
13 **OTHER BUSINESS**

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none. Motion  
16 carries.

17  
18 So, other business. We have a letter to the CFMC on the use of  
19 fish traps in the Puerto Rico, EEZ by Mr. Edwin Font. The letter  
20 is going to be read by Nelson Crespo. Or just to mention the  
21 concern from Font.

22  
23 **NELSON CRESPO:** I think you want to read it. I can't see it.

24  
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. But you can tell us the essence of the letter,  
26 and we can see the letter as submitted.

27  
28 **LETTER TO THE CFMC ON THE USE OF FISH TRAPS IN PUERTO RICO – MR.**  
29 **EDWIN FONT**

30  
31  
32 **NELSON CRESPO:** The fishers from the Northwest side of the island  
33 come to me because they have a concern regarding the traps that  
34 were dropped in the area that we named Corona del Sur. They are  
35 really concerned because this is an area that the fishermen used  
36 to fish early in the morning and late afternoon for deep-water  
37 snapper, but during the rest of the day, we don't usually fish it  
38 there because we consider that area as a nursery. Those traps are  
39 not allowing the fishermen to do their job.

40  
41 And also, it is a problem for the navigation because we have a  
42 situation with the hard winds. One fisherman got tangled, the  
43 engine got tangled with one of the traps and the lower unit of the  
44 boat blew up and he had to tow it to shore. Also, as I mentioned,  
45 is dangerous for navigation.

46  
47 Also, that area, is also an area that is a very important area for  
48 pelagic species. Charter fishers, recreational fishers. Also,

1 commercial fishers developed that area early in the morning, you  
2 know, to catch bait, to catch mahis, you know, wahoo all related  
3 to pelagic species. And because those traps are set in the middle  
4 of the-- it is crossing the Corona del Sur from one side to another,  
5 you know, interrupting the activity from other fishers.

6  
7 You know, they are really concerned for many things. The worst  
8 part that they are concerned about is that those traps are killing  
9 the juveniles because--

10  
11 The worst thing is that Corona del Sur is an area recognized for  
12 its hard currents. If one of those traps gets lost, it's going to  
13 be a silent killer, and it is going to kill so many species that  
14 you cannot imagine, and we don't know for how long.

15  
16 So, we request to this Council, you know, to implement the same  
17 regulation we have in Abrir la Sierra and put a restriction for  
18 bottom gear in Corona Del Sur, just to avoid the drop-off traps in  
19 this area.

20  
21 Also, the letter was signed by around six Fisherman Association  
22 and Fisherman Village from the Northwest side of the island.

23

#### 24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

27  
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, in essence, the letter is requesting the  
29 Council and DNER Puerto Rico to prohibit the use of bottom-line  
30 gears, such as traps over those concerns. And we don't have to  
31 decide it now. It's just for you to-- do you want to consider that  
32 as [inaudible] the possible amendment. Thank you, Kevin.

33  
34 So that should be it.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I don't know how much people have interest in  
37 prohibiting the use of those traps in that area to protect the  
38 habitat.

39  
40 **SENNAI HABTES:** It's territorial water. No? It's federal water?

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No, it is Federal.

43  
44 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, it's federal. It's both. Okay.

45  
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Abrir la Sierra is federal. Tourmaline is federal  
47 and local, mostly local. And Bajo de Sico is federal and local.

48

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** The coordinates he put in the letter seems like  
2 they're boxed entirely in federal waters.

3  
4 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Mhmm. So that's Tourmaline. That's Abrir  
5 la Sierra. These are federal waters here. There is a little bit of  
6 territorial waters up here. If that red is also included in the--  
7 I think that this is also EEZ.

8  
9 So, I do have a question of clarification, if I may. So, is this  
10 a group of people who are fishing this area, or is this someone  
11 specifically who's putting the traps out there?

12  
13 **NELSON CRESPO:** To our best understanding, it is only one person  
14 who is dropping the traps in this area. In the past, we usually  
15 saw traps in that area, but not as many as we see now. You know?  
16 That's weird. You know? We want to protect it because it is true  
17 that when we are fishing hook and line, maybe we can catch some  
18 juveniles when we are searching for the big ones. But can you  
19 imagine, with the amount of traps in this area, the huge amount of  
20 juveniles that are going to be killed when you pull all those traps  
21 up?

22  
23 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, my next question would be, are there  
24 any other unmarked traps or other people fishing in the area? That  
25 would be something for enforcement to address. The second thing  
26 would be there is already regulations in place regarding the size  
27 and shape, etcetera, of the traps.

28  
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** One of the issues the fishermen have is that the  
30 deployment of those traps is legal at this time. So, they wanted  
31 to consider, first, whether this is true or not, and that's where  
32 the staff can look at and report back at the next meeting. And  
33 then whether it is true or not that is not a prohibition for that  
34 activity within the area of jurisdiction of the DNER. Just that.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

37  
38 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. I did the exercise in my office. I took  
39 the coordinates that Nelson provided us. One of the corners was  
40 the closest to any territorial waters, and it was in Desecheo. I  
41 believe the whole square is in-- I'm not a geographer, right, but  
42 I believe the whole square is in federal waters.

43  
44 My question for Nelson, if he can clarify and provide us more  
45 information, is about the legal issues in that activity. Is there  
46 any evidence? Is there someone that have seen those cages that are  
47 not following the regulations of federal waters? Like, are they  
48 taking the cages out and being vigilant of those cages that are

1 doing the work correctly, or they are leaving those cages there  
2 without any supervision. As far as you know, what's going on?

3  
4 **NELSON CRESPO:** No. In reality, the person has, at this moment,  
5 with the status quo, he has all the rights to drop the traps in  
6 the area. The guy has the buoys and everything. The problem that  
7 we are bringing here is that it's a problem for navigation. That  
8 area is considered, by the fisherman of the Northwest side of the  
9 island, a nursery. We want to protect the juveniles that are in  
10 this area.

11  
12 And, also, it's a problem for the navigation because the amount of  
13 traps is a considerable amount of traps. I drop a line that's  
14 supposed to be on the other side, but when I'm looking for the for  
15 the map, I have it in the opposite side, but the yellow line maybe  
16 reflects the way that the traps cross from one side to the other.

17  
18 So, fishermen cannot trawl because the traps are in the middle.  
19 Deep-water snapper you cannot fish it because you have to avoid  
20 the gear getting tangled. And also, I guarantee you that all those  
21 traps are catching small fish. The fish that we have been  
22 protecting for so many years that the fishermen support the Snapper  
23 Unit One closure, you know, closed season. And now all that work  
24 can be lost because one guy is dropping that amount of traps that  
25 are catching the juveniles that we pretend to protect to keep  
26 fishing, you know, for the upcoming generations. It's so sad. You  
27 know?

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy and then Graciela.

30  
31 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, I feel like I don't have enough information.  
32 Right? I don't want to proceed with an action until we get more  
33 information. And so, my recommendation is the council staff working  
34 with Ricardo, his team, Nelson, others to gather more information  
35 about the specific issue.

36  
37 You know, I'd like to understand, is he really bringing up  
38 undersized fish? Is that a major problem? Get a better  
39 understanding and handle the navigation issues, the ability to  
40 obviously move around in this area. So, I feel like we need more  
41 time to discuss this and would suggest we bring this back as we  
42 have more information at a future meeting.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

45  
46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the only area for which you have a  
47 complete prohibition of setting traps is Bajo de Sico. So, that  
48 right there. Anything within that area, and that's both state and

1 federal, there should be no traps whatso--

2  
3 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** In addition to Bajo de Sico, Graciela, I think  
4 we also have a provision of all bottom tending gear in all of the  
5 areas. So, Bajo de Sico, which is shared jurisdiction, then we  
6 have a Abrir la Sierra and Tourmaline as well.

7  
8 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But we are not-- I mean, there is nothing  
9 in Tourmaline, and there is nothing in Abril La Sierra. So, in  
10 this case, is Bajo de Sico that can be looked at immediately  
11 because if there is any traps fishing there, they should be  
12 removed. I mean, that's something that it's--

13  
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, I suggest following the guidance from Andy.  
15 Let the staff collect the information, look at the regulation that  
16 we have in place. That way we will know, and then we'll all be in  
17 the same place to determine what we were talking about. That can  
18 be done in the next meeting or the following meeting. But at least  
19 this way, you will have all the elements of judgment, all the  
20 information that you need.

21  
22 So, I suggest, Mr. Chairman, you don't need a motion for this. You  
23 just follow what Andy said and the staff will talk to Nelson,  
24 Ricardo, all the appropriate people so we can get the information  
25 at the next meeting. And also, we need to look at the applicable  
26 regulation at this time. So, we'll have both sections, the whole  
27 information for you to decide the next steps. Miguel?

28  
29 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Miguel Borges, law  
30 enforcement. NOAA Law Enforcement.

31  
32 So, two things, quickly. When we got that information a few months  
33 ago, I coordinated with the DNER, and they did patrol the area  
34 because, like, Graciela and Mr. Miguel, director, correctly said,  
35 so far, nothing illegal has been said or been alleged here. It's  
36 legal for them to fish with those fish traps there.

37  
38 The only thing they have to-- as long as they follow the marked  
39 buoy, like I said in my presentation. If they have a marked buoy  
40 correctly labeled, then it's legal. If it's not, then I can remove  
41 them. But we did put two patrols with DNER verifying if there were  
42 traps in the area. So, far, we haven't found any inside Bajo de  
43 Sico.

44  
45 All the three protected areas are close to fish traps year-round.  
46 Like Graciela said, the closest one is Bajo de Sico. Nonetheless,  
47 we'll continue to do the patrols in that area to make sure they're  
48 not inside the closed area and that they're properly labeled. If

1 they're not labeled, we will remove them. So, that's it. Thanks.  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?  
4  
5 **NELSON CRESPO:** I'm pretty sure that the guy right now is not  
6 fishing that area because he's in the States. He removed all the  
7 traps because he fished there for seasons. So, he fishes that area  
8 for a few months and then moved the traps to another area.  
9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?  
11  
12 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to make some points in  
13 here. I think that maybe this will be addressed to Miguel. I feel  
14 that this is more that he needs more education. He's practically  
15 a two-year commercial fisherman coming. He lives already here in  
16 the West Coast, but as Nelson explained, he goes, for the season,  
17 to harvest crabs in the States.  
18  
19 So, I already know the information that Nelson provided. He's a  
20 commercial fisherman from Cabo Rojo. The boat is in the  
21 association, so maybe we can arrange, as soon as he comes back, a  
22 meeting so you can explain everything to him. But yes, he has all  
23 the permits and everything that the law requires. I think that  
24 it's more that he doesn't recognize the area or the value of the  
25 area for the other fishermen.  
26  
27 It's something that we can get a meeting with him as soon as he  
28 comes back. I can provide you the name and the phone number.  
29 Thanks.  
30  
31 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Okay. Thank you for that.  
32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Ricardo?  
34  
35 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Another thing-- Ricardo, for the record.  
36 Another thing that we can do is we can look for the statistics of  
37 this fisherman. If we have the measurements, we can estimate the  
38 size distribution of what he's catching.  
39  
40 Why am I saying this? Let's say that we talk to him, and he stops  
41 fishing there, but what stops other fishermen from doing the same  
42 thing in the future? And that is Nelson's concern of Nelson. That  
43 bring us to the next question, which I believe is, should we  
44 protect those areas where there are juveniles? We don't know the  
45 answer for that question, but it is something to think about.  
46  
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You know, I was talking to the translator, and  
48 it's too late. Can we just drop this until December or some other

1 time that we have enough information? Okay.

2  
3 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (5-MINUTE PRESENTATIONS)**

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we have a five-minute comment period,  
6 public comment. Nobody here. Okay. So, Okay.

7  
8 So, this brings us to the end of our 187<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Council  
9 meeting. Sennai?

10  
11 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sorry, Mr. Chair. Just one comment on the record.  
12 I made a mistake earlier in answer to Tony's question regarding  
13 the ACLs within territorial waters in Saint Thomas/Saint John.  
14 It's the same in both districts and territorial waters. It's only  
15 in federal waters that it's zero ACL for the Saint Thomas/Saint  
16 John District. Conch. Yeah. So, I just wanted to make that clear  
17 on the record so there's no confusion.

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Done?

20  
21 **NEXT MEETING**

22  
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. Next meeting. Very quick.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Next meeting in the agenda.

28  
29 The next meeting will be in Saint Thomas on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, next meeting will be December 3<sup>rd</sup> and  
32 4<sup>th</sup> in Saint Thomas. Hybrid and in person.

33  
34 So, I want to I want to thank our translator and his staff for all  
35 the good work that they do for us. I also want to give a special  
36 thank you to Cristina for all the hard work she does with Social  
37 Network and Liajay for keeping us straight on the screen, and also  
38 to Alberto Font, our IT guy back here. He does some good work for  
39 us.

40  
41 Okay. So, meeting adjourned. Have a safe trip.

42  
43 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 13, 2025.)