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TABLE OF MOTIONS

PAGE 71: The Council requests the SSC to provide additional rationale for their recommendation to derive OFL (502,387 lbs.) and ABC (443,062 lbs.) from the MSY proxy 30% SPR considering the Puerto Rico spiny lobster assessment concluded overfishing was not occurring in recent years (2022-2024) when average landings (571,265 lbs.) exceeded the current OFL (426,858 lbs.) Motion carried on page 72.

PAGE 72: The Council requests that the SSC consider alternative approaches for setting the Puerto Rico spiny lobster OFL and ABC, including setting variable OFLs and ABCs that are consistent with the predicted values from the assessment to achieve optimum yield while stock biomass is above the target level. Motion carried on page 73.

~~PAGE 85: The Council select Action 1, Alternative 2 as the preferred. Update the Saint Croix spiny lobster OFL and ABC values and set the ACL equal to the recommended ABC of 186,063 pounds. The ACL would equal 186,063 pounds. Motion failed on page 90.~~

PAGE 91: The Council selects Action 1, Alternative 3 as the preferred. Update the Saint Croix spiny lobster OFL and ABC values and set the ACL equal to 95% of the recommended ABC of 186,063 pounds. The ACL would equal a 176,760 pounds. Motion carried on page 92.

PAGE 93: The Council selects Action 2, Alternative 2 as the preferred. Update the Saint Thomas/Saint John spiny lobster OFL and ABC values and set the ACL equal to the recommended ABC of a 132,964 pounds. The ACL will equal 132,964 pounds. Motion carried on page 100.

PAGE 106: For Action 2, because Saint Thomas/Saint John spiny lobster landings have been consistently higher than in the past, the Council requests the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to provide an interim assessment by December 2027 to update OFL projections and inform catch levels using updated available information (e.g., fishery-dependent abundance index). Motion carried on page 107.

PAGE 108: The Council moves to approve Framework Action 4, U.S.V.I. spiny lobster, and submit the action to the Secretary of Commerce for review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to the Framework Action 4. We give the Council Chair the authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule and regulations as necessary and appropriate for implementing

1 Framework Action 4. [Motion carried on page 109.](#)

2
3 [PAGE 202](#): Request staff to review the effectiveness and necessity
4 of the seasonal closure for Grouper Unit 4 in Saint Thomas/Saint
5 John, considering other management measures that restrict harvest
6 of the stocks and protect the habitat supporting those aggregations
7 such as the Hind Bank MCD and Grammanik Bank, among others. [Motion](#)
8 [carried on page 204.](#)

9
10 [PAGE 208](#): Request staff draft an options paper to review the
11 effectiveness and necessity of prohibiting all fishing in the
12 Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra seasonal management areas relative
13 to the management objectives to protect red hind. [Motion carried](#)
14 [on page 211.](#)

15
16 [PAGE 213](#): Request staff to review the effectiveness and necessity
17 of the spatial and seasonal closures of mutton snapper in Saint
18 Croix relative to their management objectives. [Motion carried on](#)
19 [page 216.](#)

20
21 [PAGE 241](#): Request staff to develop an options paper to apply the
22 Decision Tree for evaluating managed stocks presented by staff at
23 the April 2026 meeting and bring it back to the Council at the
24 August 2026 meeting. [Motion carried on page 242.](#)

25
26 [PAGE 253](#): Motion to prioritize Motion 8 as #1, Motion 9 as #2 and
27 Motion 10 as #3 from the motions discussed today. [Motion carried](#)
28 [on page 254.](#)

**CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
189th REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
HYBRID MEETING
THE BUCCANEER HOTEL
SAINT CROIX, U.S.V.I.**

APRIL 21-22, 2026

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened at The Buccaneer Hotel in Saint Croix, U.S.V.I. on Wednesday morning, April 21, 2026, and was called to order at 9:08 A.M. by the Council Chair, Carlos Farchette.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Okay. Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 189th Caribbean Fisheries Management Council meeting being held at The Buccaneer Hotel in Saint Croix, U.S.V.I. on April 21st 2026. We're going to start with the roll call.

I'm going to start on my left with Cristina.

CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ: Good morning. Cristina Olán, Council Staff.

LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA: Good morning, buenos días. Liajay Rivera, Council Staff.

GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER: Graciela García-Moliner, Council Staff.

MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER: María López-Mercer, NOAA Fisheries.

LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD: Tony Blanchard, Councilman.

NICOLE F. ANGELI: Nicole Angeli, U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife.

RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ: Ricardo López, Puerto Rico, DNER.

VANESSA RAMÍREZ: Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.

CARLOS FARCHETTE: Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.

MIGUEL A. ROLÓN: Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.

DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS: Diana Martinó, Council Staff.

HEATHER BLOUGH: Heather Blough, NOAA Fisheries.

1
2 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, NOAA's Office of General
3 Counsel.

4
5 **JOHN WALTER, III:** John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

6
7 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Council Member.

8
9 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Vice Vicente, SSC Chair.

10
11 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Buenos días a todos. Jannette Ramos-García,
12 Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Chair.

13
14 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, Saint
15 Croix, DAP Chair.

16
17 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning, everyone. Julia Magras, DAP Chair,
18 Saint Thomas/Saint John.

19
20 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair,
21 Puerto Rico.

22
23 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning, Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries
24 Science Center.

25
26 **ADYAN RÍOS:** Hello, everyone. Adyan Ríos, Southeast Fisheries
27 Science Center.

28
29 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Good morning. Cedric Taquín, Puerto Rico DAP Member
30 and, PescApp.

31
32 **JOSÉ RIVERA:** Good morning, everyone. José Rivera, PescApp.

33
34 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Good morning. Martha Prada, IRA
35 Coordinator.

36
37 **SENNAI HABTES:** Buenos días. Sennai Habtes, Ecosystem-Based Fishery
38 Management, Technical Advisory Panel Chair.

39
40 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos-Caraballo,
41 Puerto Rico department of natural and environmental resources.

42
43 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning, everyone. Wilson Santiago,
44 Puerto Rico Fisheries Liaison.

45
46 **DINORAH CHACIN:** Good morning. Dinora Chacin, NOAA Fisheries
47 Habitat Conservation Division.

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay, thank you. Online?

2
3 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We have online, David Behringer , Kiara
4 Matías, Mick Walsh, Sarah Stephenson, Jesús Rivera Hernández,
5 Leigh Fletcher, Kate Overly, And Brent.

6
7 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
8

9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay, thank you. Adoption of agenda. Any
10 additions or corrections to the agenda? Nelson?

11
12 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.
13 In other business, I want to read a letter received from the
14 Culebra Fishermen Association.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Yeah, I read that. Graciela?

17
18 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, Mr. Chair, if I may, Graciela here.
19 I think we have a change to the agenda for tomorrow. The 09:30 to
20 09:45 2026 Annual Catch Limit Monitoring Updates that will be given
21 by Heather Blough today, right? Before the Pelagic Stocks-Options
22 at 02:15.

23
24 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Sure. Thank you. Graciela.

25
26 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** And so that's a change in the agenda. And
27 the other. For clarification purposes, during the public comment
28 period, Nelson will read the letter, correct? Es que dijo,
29 "business." Okay. Thank you.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anything further on the agenda? If not, we need
32 a motion to accept agenda as corrected.

33
34 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Motion to accept the agenda as corrected.

35
36 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Included a motion by Blanchard to accept the
39 agenda and seconded by Vanessa. All in favor, say aye.

40
41 **GROUP:** Aye.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next is--

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank You, Mr. Chairman. We had an incident with
46 the SSC where we got unruly behavior through the internet. We had
47 to re-start the meeting. We are developing now a protocol to avoid
48 or minimize that happening in any meeting of the Council or the

1 advisory bodies. We received help from Kevin and other people.
2 They sent us information on how to establish that protocol that
3 will prevent this from happening.

4
5 At this meeting, we don't have it, but the Chairman has given
6 authority to Cristina to stop the meeting if something that
7 happened. Then we would try contacting the people afterwards. I
8 mean, it takes about maybe ten to twenty minutes to get another
9 zoom id and password. And, of course, the issue with this is all
10 this is public. And when you put it in the federal register, people
11 can pick everything from there and mimic the name of any of us and
12 put it in there.

13
14 The other thing for the record, please state your name before we
15 talk. I will say that I'm the first culprit. I forget to say it in
16 every meeting. But we are having some difficulties sometimes with
17 the people who do the translation. And this time, Mr. Chairman, we
18 have--

19
20 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Yes. This is to excuse Kayla Ishida
21 from the U.S. Coast Guard. She just sent me an email saying that
22 she will not be able to attend the meeting today. Tomorrow, she
23 will be entering virtually to give the report.

24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Diana. They also promise to be at the
26 next meeting, if possible, in August.

27
28 Kate?

29
30 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, Office of General Counsel.
31 Just so the record is clear, the unruly behavior was not on the
32 part of any member of the SSC or anyone participating in good
33 faith. It was somebody that was intending to be a disruptor. So,
34 I just want the record to be clear that there's no reason to
35 follow-up with anybody that didn't obey our rules of conduct.

36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you for the clarification. We call it unruly
38 behavior because it's the only thing I found in the paper. So, we
39 call it that. But people call it hacking or related behavior. But
40 thank you for your clarification.

41
42 At this time, Mr. Chairman, if I may, I want to ask a minute for
43 a friend of mine, David Olsen. David Olsen passed this March 7th,
44 2026. I met David in the seventies when he came to Puerto Rico to
45 give us a presentation about his dissertation. Through the years,
46 we met and worked on different projects and offices and everything.

47
48 But he was a former director of the Virgin Islands Department of

1 Fish and Wildlife. He did it twice. Firstly in 1990, and then in
2 2007. He also was instrumental in helping the fishers with the
3 science that they needed to provide documents for the Council and
4 other entities that were of importance to the fisheries of these
5 islands, they U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico too, because he did some
6 work in Puerto Rico also.

7
8 He was a surfer. He loved sailing and diving. He told me one time
9 he was controversial, but with a good heart, whatever that means.
10 And at this time, Mr. Chairman, we would like to, after this
11 horrible sound there, the hotel is trying to fix that, a minute of
12 silence honoring Dr. David Olsen.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So we're going to do a minute of silence.

15
16 (WHEREUPON, A MOMENT OF SILENCE WAS HELD IN MEMORY OF DAVID ANDREWS
17 OLSEN.)

18
19 **CONSIDERATION OF 188TH COUNCIL MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION**
20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Next on the agenda is the
22 consideration of the 188th Council meeting verbatim transcriptions.
23 Any corrections to those minutes?

24
25 Hearing none, we need a motion to accept the verbatim
26 transcription.

27
28 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Motion to accept the verbatim. Tony
29 Blanchard.

30
31 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Second, Nicole Angeli.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion to accept the minutes verbatim
34 transcriptions. Motion by Blanchard, seconded by Angeli. All in
35 favor, say aye.

36
37 **GROUP:** Aye.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Moving forward, we have the Fishery
40 Management Plan Amendments. María López-Mercer. Oh, I'm sorry.
41 Yeah. Executive Director's Report.

42
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**
44

45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I need to talk a lot, but, anyway, very, very
46 quick. I will take this time to pass the word that I got from
47 Federal Register. The Federal Register is not going to publish
48 anything, after forty days. They require forty days before the

1 Council meeting.

2
3 They said forty days before August 11, we need to submit the agenda
4 to the Federal Register. We can tweak it a little bit, 23 days
5 before August 11. They told us that this is the last time that
6 they would give us a break. But the issue with this is I need to
7 have that agenda at least two or three days before that date,
8 meaning forty days before August 11, and we can tweak it a little
9 bit twenty-three days. After that, it's locked. If we fail to do
10 that, then we need to move the Council meeting, and that costs a
11 lot of money because the contract with the hotels has to be done
12 actually right now. So, the staff will do their best to comply
13 with that requirement regarding the agenda.

14
15 The other thing is that we are receiving presentations on the date
16 of the meeting or the day before. We are not going to do that
17 anymore. You will have five days to submit the presentation to
18 Cristina. After that, if you have something to correct, you do it
19 here, and then you send us the presentation with a correction.
20 Cristina works eight hours a day, and anything after that, we have
21 to pay double. We don't have that much money to pay Cristina. But
22 at the same time, Cristina is an excellent professional. Sometimes
23 she calls me at midnight "Miguel, I have this, to put in the
24 agenda. Should I do it?" So, I say, "if I were you, I would not
25 put it there." So, anyway, please cooperate as much as possible
26 with Cristina by sending your presentation five days before any
27 meeting.

28
29 That also, for some of the presentations, for example, if we have
30 new information that we need to cover here, something that come
31 from some from María, Sarah, one of the scientists, we can make
32 room for that and put it there. But the rest, we are not going to
33 have any presentation after the five days included in our meetings.
34 I checked with the other Councils, and they're worse. They have
35 other strict measures of this. So, that's that.

36
37 And then with the budget, we are okay. We received money to cover
38 the second quarter of 2026. All the Councils are expected to
39 discuss this at the May meeting, the CCC in Alaska, where the
40 Washington folks are going to tell us the schedule for giving us
41 the rest of the money for 2026. 2027 and '28, are a question mark.
42 We don't know yet what is going to happen during those days, but
43 they told us that at least we will be able to have level funded
44 for those two years after 2026.

45
46 The AI policy, everybody now has worked with AI. The National
47 Marine Fisheries Service has had some cases where AI was improperly
48 used.

1
2 For example, sending fake papers to affect the outcome of an SSC
3 meeting in one of the Councils. So, we were instructed, the
4 executive directors, to prepare a policy for using AI at the
5 Council level, and it will follow a similar approach of NOAA, not
6 NOAA fisheries, but NOAA level. For example, they adopted Gemini,
7 and they have courses that we need to take if we want to use it.
8 So, the protocol will be presented to you at the August meeting,
9 when we finish it. We also have to send it to the legal counsel
10 just to make sure that we are following the law, applicable laws.

11
12 There's another thing. We cannot lock up a meeting. For example,
13 if somebody-- if we have to stop the meeting here, we open it
14 again, but it has to be public. We cannot lock it. All of that
15 will be included in the protocol that we are going to send to you.

16
17 One thing that they told me to advise everybody sitting here is if
18 you use AI, you are responsible for the product. Staff members,
19 NOAA, Council Members, staff member of the Council. So, more
20 information will be provided at the meeting in August.

21
22 That's all that we have for now, Mr. Chairman.

23
24 Also, we want to welcome Olivia. She's the new Saint Croix Liaison
25 Officer. Angeli, would you like to-- Dr. Angeli, would you like to
26 say something about Olivia? I don't know if she's here or not,
27 but--

28
29 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** She's here.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Where is she? Olivia?

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That's not her.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Esa no es Olivia.

36
37 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Good morning. Thank you so much. Nicole Angeli,
38 U.S.V.I. We have a new liaison for the Saint Croix district, Olivia
39 Walton, and she'll be joining us later today. Once she arrives,
40 I'll make sure I ask the Chair if we can introduce her properly.

41
42 Excellent. Thank you so much.

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And, also, lastly, Nicole Greaux, resigned
45 February, and I was advised by Dr. Angeli that they will be looking
46 into a replacement for her. Liaison officers are very important to
47 connect the communities, fishers, the government, etcetera, with
48 the Council and vice versa, the Council with the communities. So,

1 we have Wilson, in Puerto Rico, Ms. Olivia Walton now in Saint
2 Croix. We're looking forward to seeing who can replace Ms. Greaux
3 in Saint Thomas/Saint John. Thank you, Mr. chiman.

4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Miguel. So, moving on. Fisheries
6 management plan by, María López-Mercer.

7
8 **FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS (FMPS) AMENDMENTS, ACTIONS AND**
9 **PRIORITIES UPDATE FOR 2026—MARÍA LOPEZ-MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES,**
10 **SERO**
11

12 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good morning. This is María López-Mercer with
13 NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office with the Caribbean
14 branch. Like, at the beginning of every meeting, the Council and
15 us prepared a presentation that summarizes all the actions,
16 amendments, regulations, priority dates, etcetera, that the
17 Council discussed during the past meeting so Council members and
18 the public can get an update on where these stand currently. Okay.
19 We can go to the next slide, please.

20
21 Okay. So, this is where we are with three of the actions that are
22 in the regulatory phase, which means that the Council had already
23 taken final action and then NMFS, NOAA Fisheries, is responsible
24 for the regulations part, developing the regulations and comment
25 periods, etcetera.

26
27 So, Amendment 2 to all the Fishery Management Plans, this is the
28 trawl net gear and descending devices. It has been in effect since
29 November 3rd, 2025. The descending device requirement for vessels
30 fishing for reef fish became effective on April 1st. So, by April
31 1st you must have seen the Council outreach letting everybody know
32 about the requirement to have a descending device ready on the
33 boats to be used in case is needed, when the fish exhibits signs
34 of barotrauma, it's in place since April 1st.

35
36 Okay. So, with that, that concludes the actual action. Okay? So,
37 everything is in place for that action. So, the next time you see
38 this slide that's not going to be there because it's already
39 completed.

40
41 The next one is Framework 3 to the U.S. Virgin Islands Fisheries
42 Management Plan. This is SEDAR 80. These are updates to the queen
43 triggerfish from SEDAR 80. The final rule was published in March,
44 and it became effective in April, recently. So, the new ACLs for
45 triggerfish became effective. If you go to the Federal Register,
46 you will see that those new numbers are in there. With that, that
47 concludes the regulation and that action.

1 The next one that we are currently working on is Amendment 4 to
2 the Puerto Rico FMP, the reclassification as a pelagic fish for
3 rainbow runner. We're currently preparing the notice of
4 availability of the amendment, which means that it will open a
5 comment period of sixty days, where the amendment will be
6 published, and the public can revise this amendment and make
7 comments through regulations.gov.

8
9 Then, during that time, after the first thirty days, we usually
10 publish the proposed rule, which is what you are going to see in
11 the regulations that is going to make the actions in this amendment
12 be codified under the Federal Register. That's also going to be
13 open for a public comment for thirty days. After that comment
14 period ends, NOAA Fisheries will address any comments that are
15 received, either for the amendment or the proposed rule, and then
16 we'll publish a final rule when those comments are addressed.

17
18 After the final rule is published, there is a thirty-day cooling
19 period. We call it the cooling period, which is the thirty days
20 before any regulation becomes effective. We will notify the public
21 of the availability of all the comment periods through fishery
22 bulletins, and coordinate with the Council outreach and education
23 so they can ensure that this information is available to you so
24 you can comment, and also all the dates where this would be
25 applicable. Next slide, please. Okay.

26
27 So, this is what we are currently working on, the Council is
28 working on. We talked about it during the past Council meeting and
29 the one before about a modification to the pelagic AMs. The reason
30 is because there is no corrective action defined for accountability
31 measures for this group of species, which has been new to
32 management since the island-based FMPs were put in place.

33
34 It's important to get Council input. The Council provided a lot of
35 input. It was a really good discussion during the last time. And
36 then another reason is that this is a good opportunity to focus on
37 the trigger for the AM, which means, what is it? What needs to
38 happen for an accountability measure to be triggered?

39
40 So, as we discussed during the last time, the focus could be on
41 that AM trigger so that it provides the flexibility for NOAA
42 Fisheries on the Council to look at those landings and see what's
43 going on. So, we're going to be talking about that.

44
45 So, in the December 2025 meeting, I mean, the first column, yellow
46 column, there were some options, preliminary options discussed,
47 and there was some guidance provided by the Council as to what
48 they wanted to see up for discussion during this Council meeting.

1 So, during this Council meeting, the Council is going to be
2 reviewing an options paper, and go through those options, discuss,
3 give input, and see what they want to do next. Okay? So, this is
4 not an amendment yet. This is not an action. This is an options
5 paper where, again, we're going to be discussing what you guys
6 requested from staff to bring during this Council meeting.

7
8 The next action is SEDAR 91 spiny lobster Saint Croix, Saint
9 Thomas/Saint John. This is the modification of the reference points
10 for the spiny lobster in Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Sain John
11 based on SEDAR 91. Why? Because there were assessments that
12 provided updates to these numbers, and then there's a need to do
13 an action to revise the ACLs, which will be based on the
14 recommendations from the ABCs.

15
16 So, during the December 2025 meeting, the Council discussed the
17 SSC recommendations. The Council also selected the P star (P*),
18 the probability of overfishing. And then, they provided options
19 for ACL buffers, which means what reductions they would see
20 included in an amendment, or in an action that could be evaluated
21 for that recommended ABC. So, all those things were done during
22 the December meeting. And then, the Council tasked staff to bring
23 a draft framework action that will incorporate those and an
24 evaluation and an analysis of the effects of the different
25 reductions or different buffers that would be applied to the ACL.

26
27 So, during this meeting, the expectation is that the Council
28 discusses the action. If they are ready to move on, they could
29 select preferred alternatives based on that after they discuss.
30 And if they are ready, they could decide to take final action,
31 too. So, when this is discussed today, the Council can decide how
32 they want to move forward.

33
34 The next action is SEDAR 91 spiny lobster for Puerto Rico. Again,
35 this is because there was an update assessment, and the result
36 from that update assessment would allow the Council to take action
37 to revise the ACLs based on those numbers that came from that
38 assessment. In December 2025, there were still pending updates
39 from the Science Center. They were working on updates for that
40 SEDAR 91. And then, also, after that, SSC reviews.

41
42 So, during April, earlier this month, the SSC met from the 8th to
43 10th, and they reviewed the outcomes from SEDAR 91. And then they
44 also provided ABC recommendations. So, during this meeting, during
45 the SSC presentation, the Council will review the ABC
46 recommendations and will also talk about the discussions that the
47 SSC had. They can review that, and then they can make decisions as
48 to how to move forward with an action to update ACL. So, that's

1 going to be discussed also today.

2
3 The next one is SEDAR 84, for yellowtail Puerto Rico and Saint
4 Thomas/Saint John, and then also for the stoplight parrotfish in
5 Saint Croix. Why? Because there were stock assessments that were
6 done for this species, and that will provide the opportunity for
7 the Council, through an action, to revise the annual catch limits
8 for those species based on the recommendations that come from those
9 assessments.

10
11 During December 2025, there were no further actions for the Council
12 because they were still pending some updates from the SSC, or from
13 the Science Center, and that will lead to what was discussed during
14 the SSC meeting. That happened during April 8th through the 10th
15 where the SSC reviewed and made their recommendations. Those will
16 be discussed also during the SSC presentation and discussion and
17 for the Council to consider what are their recommendations on
18 these, too. Okay. Let's go to the next slide, please.

19
20 Lastly, the review stocks. Review stocks need for conservation and
21 management. This is what we call the matrix. This was also set as
22 a priority for the Council back in August. This is an action that
23 the Council and NMFS have been presenting to you for discussion to
24 maximize management efficiency and, also, is one of the actions
25 that was included under Seafood E.O. 14276. This is the review, as
26 you all know, of the stocks that are currently managed under each
27 one of the FMPs to determine if they are still in need of federal
28 conservation and management.

29
30 So, during December 2025 meeting, there was some discussion. During
31 the months leading to today, there's a working group that has been
32 working on that Decision Tree. The idea today, for the Council, is
33 to take a look at the presentation on the Decision Tree, which has
34 some criteria that could be used or could be proposed to move
35 forward with this action as to help the Council, assist the Council
36 in making a decision as to whether there are any species that we
37 need to reevaluate, the need for conservation and management, and,
38 also, if there are some of those species that could be moved to a
39 category that is called ecosystem component species because of the
40 role that they have in the ecosystem.

41
42 So, that's another presentation that we are going to be seeing, I
43 believe, today. Yes. Okay. So, at this point, as you will hear
44 from Sarah when she's giving the presentation, the idea is for the
45 Council to provide input on that Decision Tree so the working group
46 can continue working on that. This one is a little tricky, so it's
47 very important, your input is super, super important.

1 The other one that I decided to put in here because it's something
2 that we have talked about in the past. We were waiting for a couple
3 of things to happen before. It's the revision of AMs for Puerto
4 Rico's spiny lobster. Why? Because there's a need to address ACL
5 overages that have been happening pretty much every year and also
6 reevaluate current AMs. As you all may recall, that has been on
7 hold because there's other things ongoing, such as the SEDAR 91
8 reviews and the SSC, etcetera.

9
10 So, we just wanted to bring it here because this is something that,
11 eventually, once the Council is ready, they may want to decide to
12 move forward with this. Okay? So, something to consider. Okay. The
13 next slide, please.

14
15 Okay. So, we introduced this during the last, Council meeting.
16 It's a prioritized list of actions to NMFS that were submitted by
17 the Council on E.O. 14276. These are some of the items that the
18 Council wanted to explore.

19
20 One of them is the revision of incompatible regulations between
21 territorial and federal waters. That's an action and it's something
22 that the Council would like to consider. So, there's also revision
23 of duplicative regulations in federal waters. There's been
24 expressed interest in evaluating the regulations currently
25 applicable to Puerto Rico West Coast Marine Managed Areas,
26 specifically Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra. With regards to these
27 two, revision of incompatible regulations and revision of
28 duplicative regulations, depending on the actions that the Council
29 decide to move forward with today or not, it's advisable for the
30 Council to consider if there's any of these items in here that
31 were listed priority that the Council may be wanting to task staff
32 to start evaluating.

33
34 If there is time during this year and the workload gets a little
35 bit lighter depending on what happens, today and tomorrow, then
36 maybe tomorrow, the Council can go back to this and discuss and
37 say, "Okay. So, these are the things that we want to focus on based
38 on this list." The example that I have here is for Puerto Rico
39 because that was something that has been explicitly discussed
40 during past Council meetings.

41
42 This is an evaluation of the current regulations that are
43 applicable to these two areas. Tourmaline is an area on the West
44 Coast of Puerto Rico that is shared between state and federal
45 waters, and it was originally put in place to protect the red hind
46 spawning aggregation that occurs in that area. It's the same for
47 Abrir la Sierra, although Abrir la Sierra is completely in federal
48 waters.

1
2 So, there are regulations that are applicable from December 1st
3 through the last day of February, for both, to protect the hind
4 aggregations. However, there are also other regulations that apply
5 to the red hind that could be evaluated as well to see if there is
6 a need to remove the duplicate regulations if that's the case or
7 if there are other things that the Council would like to explore,
8 in terms of the regulations that apply. For example, are the
9 objectives of these marine managed areas, the reason what they
10 were put in place, are they still valid? So those are some are the
11 things that the Council can ask staff to start evaluating.

12
13 And then in terms of the U.S. Virgin Islands, well, the Council
14 can also identify if there's anything from the U.S. Virgin Islands
15 that has either been discussed in the past or that they would to
16 look into here. So, that's a discussion that can be had later, Mr.
17 Chair.

18
19 We'll also talk about exploration of carryovers of unused ACLs.
20 That one is a little bit more complicated, based on data lags that
21 we have in the Caribbean, at this time, but that's something that
22 could be explored as well. There's also the SEDAR 103, which is
23 the U.S. Caribbean Application of Alternative Assessment Methods,
24 which the expectation is that it will provide ways, better and
25 more efficient ways to assess the species that are more in tune
26 with the nature of our fisheries.

27
28 So, that is a process that is ongoing, and the Science Center is
29 going to give us an update on that later on. And then we added
30 "Other (Council to provide input)" because if there are other
31 things that the Council will want to discuss during this year or
32 set as a priority for the next year, then, that can be discussed
33 during this meeting. Okay. The last slide, please. Okay.

34
35 So, this is just important reminders of things that are in place.
36 Size limits for all harvests of dolphin and wahoo are in place.
37 They have been in place for a while. It's important, I think we
38 have talked about this in the past, to consider that we know that
39 there are some discrepancies between these regulations and state
40 regulations, so that's a good conversation that the Council, at
41 this stage, may want to have. That way we avoid regulatory
42 loopholes on this. Right? This is an amendment that the Council
43 voted on last year, and these regulations are in place.

44
45 The Council's outreach and education have been promoting and doing
46 outreach on this. And one of the requests that we may want to make
47 for outreach and education is to continue to put in effort on this.
48 Super important.

1
2 Recreational bag limits for dolphin and wahoo are also in place.
3 And then, as I mentioned earlier, the prohibition on the use of
4 nets, except for a specific gillnet for certain species. If you
5 recall, there were some exceptions for species that are not managed
6 by the Council, which are baitfish. And there are specific
7 measurements for those nets, and those are all in place for federal
8 waters.

9
10 And then, as I mentioned earlier, the descending device requirement
11 for fishing vessels, *all* vessels, recreational and commercial that
12 are fishing for reef fish, has been in place since April 1st, 2026.

13
14 So, thank you everybody for everything that you have been doing to
15 conserve our species, especially the use of descending devices.
16 Okay. SO, that's all I have. Open for questions or discussion?

17
18 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

21
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Miguel Rolón, for the
23 record. María, what will be the best use of this time that you
24 recommend-- And, by the way, thank you for the excellent report as
25 always. --So, the Council can then move forward with the actions
26 that we need.

27
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I think for the first, second, and third, I
29 mean, obviously, it's an update of what we have been doing. So, I
30 think it will be nice if the Council wants to take any of the
31 actions-- you want to go to the one before, please? If the Council
32 wants to, I don't know if we have enough time to discuss anything
33 about compatibility of regulations or duplicative regulations,
34 maybe this will be a good time to talk about that. Because I don't
35 think there's any other space allotted in the Council's agenda to
36 talk about any of these other things. I'm going to focus here, in
37 the "Other (Council to provide input)" of anything else. So, we
38 can certainly discuss anything that you want to discuss right now.
39 I think we have-- it's 09:39, and this goes until 10:15. So, okay.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

42
43 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, a question for Nicole regarding-- you
44 do have now compatible regulations regarding size of dolphinfish,
45 and wahoo and bag limits. Right? Or you've been talking about it.
46 I just wanted an update--

47
48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** On yeah.

1
2 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, thanks. Nicole Angeli, U.S. Virgin Islands.
3 So, we did receive a letter from the Caribbean Fisheries Management
4 Council earlier this year, and we're still drafting a response in
5 regard to compatible and incompatible regulations. As we've
6 expressed to this body before, we do have a list of regulations
7 that are and are not compatible, federally and territorially. And
8 this has been a project of our Fisheries Advisory Committees, which
9 are our territorial equivalents, really, to our Council, but
10 they're an advisory body. And so, they've suggested different
11 approaches for us to make more consistent the federal and the
12 territorial regulations.

13
14 At this time, our dolphin and wahoo regulations are not compatible
15 between federal and territorial waters.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

18
19 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ricardo López, for
20 the records. This morning, the update was that the fisheries
21 research lab wrote a letter to the secretary of DNR requesting
22 full compatibility in terms of wahoo and dorado, and I'm waiting
23 for that answer.

24
25 Yeah, dolphinfish and wahoo. We are waiting for that answer, but
26 we request the compatibility to be full. That's my comment.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I have a question. How do we initiate the
29 start of discussing compatibility? Because I know the territorial
30 FACs submitted their recommendations a couple years ago. So, I'm
31 not sure when we can start to discuss this.

32
33 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, yeah, Carlos, Mr. Chair. The exercise that
34 we worked on with our Fisheries Advisory Committees was really the
35 creation of a work plan, looking at what was very possible for us
36 to do, things that our commissioner could easily change, and then
37 things that were a little more challenging to do that might have
38 to go into our rules and regulations. And last, drafting
39 legislation that our senators would have to bring to our
40 legislative bodies.

41
42 And so, we have been diligently working first on the things that
43 are easiest, those declarations that we have promulgated,
44 including one that we had discussed, I think, at the last, or the
45 one before, Council meeting. So, we are working on those. We are
46 working on drafting those legislative pieces, and our legal
47 counsel, who has been on board now for about fourteen months, has
48 been working with our fisheries biologists, reviewing all of our

1 rules and regulations, the federal and the territorial statutes to
2 ensure that we have the best possible legislation available when
3 legislators come to us and say, "hey, we're ready to go."

4
5 We have been doing a major update to our entire title in our
6 mandates so that we have more flexibility in the future. I mean,
7 we still have things in our books from 1973, a 25¢ bounty for
8 mongoose. So, we have a lot that we really need to work through in
9 our statutes, but I promise you we have not forgotten that
10 exercise. It was one of the, I think, most exciting things that
11 we've done on our Fisheries Advisory Committee in the past several
12 years. And we are looking at it as our work plan and how it guides
13 all of our policy.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Yeah. We are talking one way from the
16 federal to the local government. Are there any species that the
17 local government, both Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands, believe
18 should have compatible regulation at the EEZ level, provided that
19 they comply with the requirement that the species must be present
20 in the EEZ, part of their life history, etcetera. Any species at
21 this time that you can identify that we need to work on it, or are
22 we okay with that?

23
24 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. Nicole Angeli, for the U.S. Virgin Islands.
25 I think that a request for a list of species that we could work on
26 is something that we could address in our response letter, which
27 we're still working on. So, thank you for the question.

28
29 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes, Ricardo López for the record. In Puerto
30 Rico, at least, what I believe is that we are okay with the
31 compatibility as it is right now.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

34
35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you for that response. I do have a
36 question regarding, for example, the comments about opening MPAs
37 and maintaining just seasonal closures for the species across. So,
38 would that be something that we could ask for in reference to
39 whether you think it's a good idea or not and whether it would be
40 compatible in the territorial and state waters? So do away with
41 the MPAs. Close the season for those species that were protected
42 in those MPAs.

43
44 See what I mean? So, either one. Yes. So, would that be one specific
45 item to put at the top of the list on the agenda?

46
47 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I think at this time, it it's challenging for us
48 to give you good feedback on where we want you to prepare a work

1 plan and to move forward. And we would prefer to respond to
2 prioritization and strategic work plans with a little more
3 preparation, because we do have that very long list of things that
4 are compatible and not compatible, and many of the items that we
5 would want to change are on our territorial side. And so, I think
6 at this time, we don't want to have or to task the federal Council
7 or Fisheries Science Center with anything specific.

8
9 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. For Puerto Rico DNR, Ricardo López. We
10 are open to reanalyzing anything that you will suggest to us. So,
11 please go ahead and write us an email or a letter with that request,
12 and we will do the analysis.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

15
16 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julia Magras for the record. This is for María. My
17 question is I don't know if this is where it falls in. Is where we
18 at with the suggestions or the request-- I'm going to speak for
19 Saint Thomas/Saint John --that the Fisherman's Association asked
20 for, as it pertains to Executive Order 14276, for changes to be
21 done. For example, seasonal closures, etcetera, etcetera. There
22 was a long list, and I know at the last meeting, it was said at
23 this meeting, we will be given updates on where we are at with the
24 request.

25
26 So, if I could get some clarification on that.

27
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Thank you, Julian. This is María. But
29 that's what we're talking about right now. We're talking about
30 that's on number one and number two, revision of incompatible
31 regulations between territorial, federal waters or duplicative
32 regulations. Those things will fall in there.

33
34 If you look at the list of priorities that were sent by the Council
35 to NMFS, I think that's a discussion that we're going to have later
36 today. I think that it will also be a good time to talk about that.
37 But that's precisely what we're talking about right now.

38
39 For example, for the seasonal closures. The example that I have,
40 that's something that I know that we have been requesting also,
41 same as yours, several times, is, for example, Tourmaline and Abrir
42 la Sierra. I mentioned earlier, the evaluation of the red hind
43 seasonal closure in that area. Plus, the red hind seasonal closure,
44 which the seasonal species closure is also occurring at that time
45 and see if there is a way to remove or modify some of those
46 regulations so that they are not duplicative.

47
48 So, that is something that could fall in there and the Council

1 could decide, "Hey, we want—" maybe when we're discussing later
2 today or tomorrow the E.O. 14276, that list of priorities that
3 will be brought back to you, you can say, "Okay. Council, we want
4 for staff to start discussing that." The same for, what the U.S.
5 Virgin Islands have been requested through the 14276.

6
7 So, what time is that? If somebody can check me. It's tomorrow,
8 before noon. There's going to be that list of things that were
9 requested, and I think that will be a good time for the Council to
10 make decisions as to how they want to move forward and start that
11 evaluation.

12
13 So, that's where we are right now, and I hope that answers your
14 question. Okay.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Do you want to say something else before?

17
18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Think, we're good for now. I think the request
19 for seasonal closures, evaluation, etcetera, can be discussed
20 tomorrow when they have that list. So, I don't know. I think
21 there's a comment here from somebody else. We're good on our side.

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

24
25 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.
26 I am wondering about the status of the compatibility regulation
27 for the descending device in Puerto Rico, because most of the under
28 management are caught in-- the risk species under management are
29 caught in state waters.

30
31 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes, Ricardo López. Nelson, thanks for that
32 question. We don't have that compatibility yet. We don't have a
33 request for that yet. But we can work on that. If the request comes
34 to our office, we will lead the way.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

37
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With regard to this, I
39 want to remind the Council that one of the things that the Council
40 decided was that every time here was an amendment, regulations
41 that are finalized or an amendment, and it goes for final actions,
42 the Council decided to send a letter to the states requesting
43 compatibility of regulations, consistency of regulation as much as
44 possible.

45
46 That letter, I believe, is going to be, now that the descending
47 devices is effective, that letter will be prepared by the Council
48 and sent to the states with all the regulations that NOAA Fisheries

1 has implemented based on the Council's action.

2
3 For the dolphinfish and wahoo amendment, Amendment 3, those letters
4 were sent to the states, and that's what both Nicole and Ricardo
5 were referring to because the Council is requesting those
6 regulations. So, that's coming. I think staff were going to be
7 sending those letters out. So, every time there is an action that
8 the Council takes final action and there's regulations that's going
9 to be implementing those actions, then that letter will go as a
10 request to the Councils.

11
12 Then, the other thing I wanted to mention regarding compatibility
13 is that we work with Council staff and prepared, for Puerto Rico,
14 we prepared basically the equivalent that the U.S. Virgin Islands
15 prepared, in terms of a list of the regulations that are compatible
16 and noncompatible. Some of them, the state would have to make those
17 changes. Some of them federal would have to make those changes.
18 So, we have been working with the DNER, and we'll be working with
19 the U.S. Virgin Islands too to go through that list and see what
20 those priorities are.

21
22 I think at this point, perhaps, maybe, it will be something that
23 could be presented in August when this list is more refined, and
24 we have an opportunity to meet with that. But we have been working
25 on that, identifying what things are not compatible. And as Nicole
26 mentioned, there's a long list of things, so it's very important
27 for the states and for the federal to prioritize how they want to
28 do this, based on the workload and based on the things that are
29 more doable than others, right? So, okay. Thank you.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Uh-huh, Heather?

32
33 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you. Heather Blough, NOAA fisheries. So,
34 Sarah will be presenting this afternoon the options that we've
35 been looking at for revising the list of species that we might
36 want to include in the various FMPs. I'm just wondering if this
37 first bullet-- from what I'm understanding, the first bullet
38 wouldn't really be Council action to revise federal regulations,
39 but more territorial action to revise state regulations to be
40 consistent. And if that's correct, I'm wondering if we would want
41 to consider having the work that PRDNR is doing to respond to the
42 letter in terms of planned changes in territorial waters. What you
43 have planned or not planned could maybe be incorporated into the
44 development of that document because we'll be looking at, like,
45 where federal management is effective, is not effective, and our
46 work with the states on managing those species.

47
48 It just seems, to me, it might be more related to that document

1 that we're developing, looking at where we have coordinated
2 management or not, versus developing a separate action related
3 just to that.

4
5 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Mr. Chair? Yeah. Can I just? Just to ensure that
6 I'm understanding. I just want to repeat back what you've just
7 suggested, which is to not conflate the issues of the dolphin and
8 wahoo regulations in that request letter, but to help support us
9 with the process that we're working on to look at those compatible
10 regulations. You mentioned PRDNR.

11
12 SO, are you working on a specific document with them that's outside
13 of what I'm understanding?

14
15 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I'm sorry. I meant DPNR.

16
17 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. Okay. Very good. So, you're suggesting
18 that SERO provides support for us as we work on that plan? I'm
19 sorry. I'm just not understanding.

20
21 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. I probably didn't articulate it well. So,
22 from what I heard you say-- so, I think I'm hearing from DNER that
23 we're mostly compatible, and there's no real changes planned. For
24 DPNR, I understand you guys are looking at areas where you may
25 want to implement compatible changes. Maybe in some cases, yes, in
26 some cases, no, and that you guys are going to develop some sort
27 of a-- You're going to let us know what. You're working with the
28 DAP to figure out what those will look like. What we do with that,
29 right, I think that response could inform our work on the species
30 matrix, how we decide to move forward with federal management of
31 certain species versus not.

32
33 I don't think it would result in a Council action because the
34 change wouldn't be for federal waters. It would be-- so, instead
35 of keeping a separate action, right, prioritizing this among other
36 act-- that would just end up informing our work on the action that
37 we're already developing. Does that make more sense?

38
39 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

40
41 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. So, it would-- I think, just the discussion--
42 and maybe we can have it when Sarah presents that action. I think
43 that would be more around, maybe, the timeline for when you guys
44 think you'll have something ready and how we could incorporate
45 that into the evaluation that we're-- the Decision Tree she's
46 working on.

47
48 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Sure. That sounds great.

1
2 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. And if there are changes for federal
3 management, of course, we could do that in a separate-- I just
4 wasn't hearing that.

5
6 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay.

7
8 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ricardo López. Just
9 to clarify, in Puerto Rico DNR, we don't have full compatibility
10 for all the species. But in most of the cases, we have full
11 compatibility.

12
13 Some cases the lobsters and the wahoo and the dolphin fish, we
14 don't have compatibility. But with the ones that we are dealing
15 with now, the dolphinfish and the wahoo, we are requesting full
16 compatibility with the federal government. Thank you.

17
18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. This is María López. I just want to give
19 an example perhaps of what we're talking about. So, for example,
20 Puerto Rico, there's a mackerel. The mackerels are species that
21 are managed-- the Council started managing this species with the
22 Island-Base FMPs.

23
24 Puerto Rico manages the mackerel with size limits. They have been
25 having those size limits forever, right? So, the mackerel in
26 federal waters in Puerto Rico does not have compatible size limits,
27 and that could be creating some loopholes that the Council may
28 want to address. However, the mackerel is also a species that is
29 included in the Decision Tree, right? So, it's a species that the
30 Council is going to make decisions like with other species, whether
31 the need for conservation and management in federal waters
32 continues to be something that needs to be done.

33
34 So, before the Council perhaps considers going with compatible
35 size limit, if that is what they want to do, right, if we're moving
36 toward compatibility, there's that process of evaluating the
37 species, right? And this is something that also falls within other
38 actions that the Council will be taking. So, these are things that
39 are all happening at the same time.

40
41 So, if we're evaluating species, we're considering what
42 regulations the states have in place for those species and also
43 seeing how the species are being managed at the state, and it could
44 be species that are more abundant or more fish state waters,
45 etcetera. All of those things, the Decision Tree is going to be
46 considering, as well as the current management that we have that
47 if the species ends up, for example, continued to be managed under
48 federal, then there are going to be things that the Council may

1 want to consider in order to make those regulations compatible.
2 And then the same would apply to the states if that's something
3 that they want to do as well. Thank you.

4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Yeah. We also try not to complicate matters
6 more than needed. I liked what María said before. When we get into
7 the meeting in August, we can have a list of those species that we
8 manage in the local government of Puerto Rico, the local government
9 of the Virgin Islands, and the federal government. That will be
10 our road map.

11
12 Because many of those species, we don't know. Some of the species,
13 we even forgot that we have regulations in either of the three
14 jurisdictions. So, we need to look at that, so everybody will know
15 what it is that we're talking about.

16
17 So, that's why I wanted to pursue María's idea a little bit because
18 that probably will be the next step at the Council meeting. Between
19 here and the next meeting, we are going to send a letter about the
20 descending devices to both governments. That's okay.

21
22 But then we also, Graciela and the staff, María and Sarah, we look
23 at the species that we have compatible regulations and the species
24 that we do not have compatible regulations. And then look at ways
25 that we can solve that matter, either by-- because some of the
26 species can be dropped from the EEZ. So, the regulations in Virgin
27 Islands or the regulation in Puerto Rico will predominate. For
28 those species, that are predominantly in state waters. And for
29 other things that we do with the species in terms that we manage.

30
31 That complies with the 14276 because they are looking at-- we
32 cannot talk about the matrix that we're developing, but we also
33 have been working with a matrix for several years now, and Sarah
34 has given the presentation to us several times.

35
36 So, María, do you think that if we follow your idea, we can have
37 at least a simple list at the next meeting or some time that people
38 can take a look at it?

39
40 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I think this is also part of the Decision Tree.
41 This is actually part of what the Decision Tree is evaluating.
42 Right? So, the list of species that are currently federally
43 managed, the Decision Tree is going to apply to all of that. So,
44 all that information about whether it's a species that is managed
45 under state, what regulations the state have, what we have, what
46 we don't have, landings, predominantly, where is it landed, where
47 is it fished, etcetera. All of those things are part of the
48 Decision Tree.

1
2 So, my recommendation will be, at this point, just to let the
3 process of the Decision Tree bring that to the table, and then the
4 opportunity for the states to provide their input. It's part of
5 this process that the Council and NOAA Fisheries are expecting at
6 this point because, obviously, the state's input on this is super,
7 super important. So, yeah, we're getting there.
8

9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, on that same note. So, maybe, in August,
10 when we look at that list, we can look at the regulations that
11 Nicole mentioned that may need legislative action opposed to those
12 that don't need-- That the commissioner has started to promulgate
13 changes. A good example is that the use of fish traps by
14 recreational fishers in the federal side is prohibited on the local
15 side, but I don't think that needs legislative approval. So, we
16 can separate all of those and then make it easier. The simple ones.
17

18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. This is María. So, there's information
19 in the matrix already as to whether there are compatible
20 regulations between federal and state waters. And I think if it's
21 helpful, that could be-- we can prepare a table or bring that table
22 that is already in the matrix specifying, "okay, this is compatible
23 or not." And, of course, whatever is under federal jurisdiction
24 and there's something that the Council can actually take action,
25 well, that's something that can be discussed here. But then there's
26 other things that belong to the state, and that's their prerogative
27 whether they are wanting to do that or have the capacity to do
28 that, etcetera.
29

30 But we can certainly, obviously, prepare something simple that
31 shows, okay, so these are the areas where we will need
32 compatibility versus not, so we can all have an idea of what we're
33 looking at. But Sarah, in her presentation and in the Decision
34 Tree, she already incorporated all of that. So, we'll make sure
35 that everybody can have access to that.
36

37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
38

39 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, as a
40 fisherman, I see a lot of issues when it pertains to compatibility
41 because some of the species are harvested more in local waters
42 than in federal waters. And if for some reason the federal
43 government decides that the iguana fish has a problem in federal
44 waters and want to shut it down, but the iguana fish doesn't have
45 a problem in territorial waters, if we do compatibility and they
46 shut down the federal waters, automatically, the local water shut
47 down. And I have a serious problem with that as a fisher because
48 my future depends on this and my fishers and future generations.

1
2 And the reason saying that because I have seen over years of being
3 involved, different presidents on their way out of office,
4 especially democratic presidents. I'm just saying it because
5 that's how it is. Have made decisions to make large area closures,
6 or we're going to do away with this species, etcetera, etcetera.
7 That can affect the future livelihood of the commercial fishers in
8 territorial waters.

9
10 So, all I am requesting that when we go through this process, my
11 local government, Nicole, her staff, which we have the FACs, which
12 I was involved in that document a couple years ago when we
13 discussed it, that we are very careful in what we decide
14 compatibility to be.

15
16 And as it pertains to Puerto Rico, a perfect example is the
17 lobsters, and it's going to be discussed here very soon on the
18 agenda, and we're going to discuss it heavily. So, we must take
19 our time when we are looking at compatibility. Some can work, which
20 is very easy, descending device. The large parrotfish. We already
21 did the yellowtail snapper. Those are just examples. Nassau
22 grouper. Those are easy ones.

23
24 But when we come to the individual stocks, we need to be very,
25 very careful on how it's addressed. I understand the concerns of
26 the management, but I think there are ways around it.

27
28 That's just my comment.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?

31
32 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, for the record. Let me
33 just piggyback on what Mr. Magras says. Let me move this away
34 because I'm loud. I do believe and I do understand the need for
35 comparability, but I don't believe in putting all the power in one
36 man's hand. Meaning, once you go compatible, just like he says,
37 for whatever reason, we got one man running the show. And a one
38 man is either federal government or local government.

39
40 Now, the federal government always holds a stronger hand. Whichever
41 way you want to turn it, that's just how it is. So, just like him,
42 I think we need to be very, let's say, serious about how we take
43 this decision. Because, although I believe in compatibility, I
44 don't believe in full compatibility. Because if-- and it's just
45 like religion and government. You don't ever mix them too. Well,
46 just like the state-- Ah. No, okay, good.

47
48 We should not have the state and the federal government being in

1 full compliance because you put all power in one man's hand. So,
2 to the end of the day, guess who holds all the cards? Guess who's
3 making all the decisions? So, I will agree with him. And, yes, I
4 should be sitting on hand, saying we should go compatible straight
5 across the board, but I am not a blind man walking through the
6 door.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.
9

10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Just to clarify, both of you are right.
11 When we say compatibility, that doesn't mean that it would be
12 identical in every means or way. So, what María is bringing to the
13 attention to the Council is that they are preparing this list where
14 you can analyze the species that you have, which species have a
15 regulation in the federal government, which have regulation in the
16 local government, where they are landed or where they are caught,
17 which is really the important part.

18
19 Since the get go, since the beginning of the Magnuson-Stevens Act,
20 we identified the species that are predominantly in federal waters,
21 predominantly in the local waters, and the ones in between, that's
22 why we have the species management plans that we have.

23
24 If you look at the spiny lobster, it's the only species that have
25 compatible regulation across the Caribbean and the U.S. Caribbean
26 with the 3.4 carapace length, except for Florida, they have 3.0.
27 So, that was a decision made by all the countries, taking into
28 consideration the fishers, the way that they fish, and the
29 socioeconomics issues were involved. So, that's why I believe that
30 it is very important that every Council member and the members of
31 the of the advisory bodies and the public will be presented with
32 that list of species. So, you can go one by one, and then you can
33 say, not blindly, but you can say, "Okay, these species could be
34 compatible or are in need of compatible regulations. Some of these
35 species might not be in need of compatible regulation." That's
36 what Nicole was saying too. They will be prepared probably by the
37 meeting.

38
39 The mechanism that we have is the Decision Tree. With the Decision
40 Tree, you start with the number of species, and then you go down.
41 You go through them; you look at each one of them. The status they
42 have, the regulations they have, etcetera, and where they're caught
43 and where the regulations are. That's why I agree with both of
44 you, Julian and you, because we are not asking the Council to
45 blindly approve a blanket of compatible regulations. Neither are
46 the local governments asking for the same thing.

47
48 So, remember, under the Magnuson Act we have to also have a

1 rationale for everything that we do. It has to be supported by
2 science and supported by everything before we make any decisions.
3 So, what María is presenting today is sort of a schedule of event
4 that is going to happen. So, we are going to be addressing these
5 compatible regulations. And the 14276 called for all the Councils,
6 the National Marine Fisheries Service, to take a look at all the
7 species that we manage and decide which one you will manage in
8 another way. Which can you drop from the management plans that you
9 have because you can put it into the ecosystem, etcetera.

10
11 So, the schedule, María, will be then for the next meeting, we can
12 discuss the table. What is, in your words, what we are going to
13 have for the next step in August?

14
15 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Thank you. This is María López. So, at
16 this time, I think we should let the presentation of the Decision
17 Tree take place, and I think that will give Council members and
18 the public an idea of how this is moving.

19
20 Again, at this time, there are no decisions. This is the
21 discussion. I think that discussion is going to be happening today
22 when the presentation and then discussion starts happening. Then,
23 the Council can decide what are the next steps of what they want
24 to look at in August. Right?

25
26 So, consistency, compatibility, whatever makes sense is what we're
27 thinking. Right? And there are, as I mentioned earlier, other
28 processes that are ongoing at the same time, dropping species,
29 changes here and there, etcetera; SEDAR 103 helping the Council
30 make decisions on how to manage, etcetera. So, I think it's very
31 important to take all of that into consideration, and then we'll
32 listen to that discussion a little bit later today and wait on
33 that. Yeah.

34
35 Okay. And then, Mr. Chair, I think I'm done with this part. Right
36 on time. I'm proud of that. So, it's 10:13. Okay. Thank you.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, María. Yes. Let's take a quick,
39 fifteen-minute coffee break.

40
41 (WHEREUPON, A BRIEF RECESS WAS TAKEN.)

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to get started again. Next on the
44 agenda is the Southeast Fisheries Science Center with Kevin
45 McCarthy.

46
47 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks, Carlos. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast
48 Fisheries Science Center.

1
2 Can you not hear me now? How is that? *I can project*. How's that?
3 Okay.

4
5 Can I share my screen? Great.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** A quick message here.

8
9 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** I'm going to be giving these papers for
10 the lunch menu so that everybody marks what they want, and I can
11 give them to Brad so that he can prepare them. This way we'll have
12 a little less time to wait for it to be served. Thank you.

13
14 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay, Carlos. We ready to get going?

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Go ahead.

17
18 **SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES—KEVIN MCCARTHY,**
19 **CARIBBEAN FISHERIES BRANCH, NOAA FISHERIES, SEFSC**
20

21 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. We'll try this again. So, Kevin McCarthy,
22 Southeast Fisheries Science Center. Welcome back from break,
23 everybody. The good news is for the next forty-five minutes you
24 don't have to make any decisions. I'm not going to tell you about
25 who got arrested. We're going to wait for that for tomorrow. And
26 you can just sit back and relax, and, hopefully, everything is
27 interesting and informative.

28
29 So, I'm going to give the update for the work that the southeast
30 fisheries science center is doing here in the U.S. Caribbean. These
31 are some of the topics we'll talk about. I'm going to give a brief
32 overview of the various SEDARs. That's 84, 91, and 103. I won't
33 steal any of the punchlines from our SSC Chair. He'll get into
34 more of those SEDARs, after this presentation, but I'll just give
35 you sort of an intro to them.

36
37 Then we'll talk about some social science projects, collaborative
38 research projects, some other projects that the Caribbean
39 Fisheries Branch is doing, some fishery-dependent work, Puerto
40 Rico deepwater snapper survey, and a lobster recruit survey if we
41 have time. Those last three will be more in-depth presentations,
42 maybe ten, twelve minutes each, and we'll have other speakers. You
43 won't have to listen to me droning on and on. We'll have two
44 different speakers talking about fishery-dependent surveys and the
45 Puerto Rico deepwater survey.

46
47 So, let's talk about the stock assessments. So, we'll talk later.
48 The Council will ponder later, results of SEDAR 84. There were

1 some additional model runs that were requested by the Council and
2 as recommended by the SSC back in September. We had planned on
3 providing those in the fall, but with the lapse in funding and
4 everything, we had to move that to the SSC meeting, here in April.
5 So, those were reviewed then.

6
7 There were no additional modeling requests to consider for the
8 U.S. Virgin Islands. And so, all of these models went through CIE
9 review. So, that's Center for Independent Experts. That review was
10 last summer. They didn't recommend additional work in the U.S.
11 Virgin Islands, so they were presented as is to the SSC, during
12 that April 8 through 10 meeting. So, the Chair will tell you more
13 about the SSC deliberations of those.

14
15 So, spiny lobster, SEDAR 91, this goes back a way. So, there were,
16 at the Council meeting back in August, some requests for additional
17 analyses. We have to give credit to DRNA and their presentation of
18 some nominal indices of abundance and really sticking with the
19 value of those indices. So, my group developed what we call a
20 standardized index of abundance. What we ended up with was a fish
21 trap and a dive index, two separate ones as those data were handled
22 separately. And, again, this was Puerto Rico DRNA really, really
23 leading the effort to get those included.

24
25 The work was done back at the Science Center, to take their initial
26 work and expand upon it. These were very significant and positive
27 additions to the assessment process. And again, this was reviewed
28 during that last SSC meeting, April 8 through 10.

29
30 So, on the right-- I don't know if you could see. Yeah. You can.
31 So, on the right here, these are the indices. So, the longer time
32 series is the fish trap. The shorter time series, that gray line,
33 is dive.

34
35 These were truncated. The data do go back to 1983. However, due to
36 available data, what we need for one of these things is not just
37 what was the catch per trip, but what was the catch per trapped
38 fish? What was the catch per diver? So, we need some very detailed
39 effort information.

40
41 When you look at all that and look at the data that's available in
42 the logbook, in the CCL, you have to cut off the time series a
43 little bit. But still, 2001, to 2024 and 2012, I think, to 2024.
44 We don't quite know what was going on with that big drop in 2013.
45 But overall, what you see is an increase as fishers have been
46 reporting. There are more lobsters in the water, and that's
47 certainly backed up by these indices.

1 And so, you see a really strong increase in the relative abundance
2 of lobsters in the water as seen by these data. And these are,
3 again, the CCL data. So, those were included in some additional
4 modeling runs, which Vance will talk about in the next
5 presentation.

6
7 So, an update on SEDAR-one 103. This is the process that's ongoing
8 now. And the whole idea there is to look at alternatives to the
9 kind of single species stock assessments that are really data
10 demanding. So, the kinds of assessments that you all have seen
11 take a long time to do. It requires a lot of data. We're looking
12 at other approaches so that we can provide more timely information
13 for the Council to act upon and also more rapid turnover, and more
14 species that we'll be able to provide some scientific information
15 for the Council to act upon it with management actions.

16
17 So, the goal here is to really have an analytical approach
18 recommended for every federally managed species in the U.S.
19 Caribbean. Right now, we don't have that because a lot of species
20 are really data limited. So, we want to be able to have an approach
21 for every species. So, we've got an organizing committee that's
22 made up of Council staff, SSC members, a lot of the SSCs are part
23 of this process, Science Center, the University of Miami, CIMAS
24 group, and also the SEDAR staff are involved.

25
26 So, so far, we've had two webinars that have provided overviews of
27 fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data. The idea isn't
28 really to review the available data, but we have over 50 experts
29 involved in this process, and they're not all familiar with the
30 kinds of information we have in the Caribbean. So, that's the idea
31 of these webinars.

32
33 We'll have an in-person workshop where we really go over the
34 methods. What methods are people bringing to the table that will
35 help provide management advice. That's going to be in August.

36
37 So, the next couple of webinars will look at life history
38 information, all the Lenfest work that has been funded over the
39 years, some additional fishery-independent surveys, and
40 socioeconomic studies. We want to get all of this data out there
41 for people to be able to consider. They'll know what is available,
42 and that will help inform them what kinds of analyses can be done.

43
44 So, just moving along quickly. There are some social science
45 projects that are in the works. We're all quite interested in the
46 social science aspect of fishery.

47
48 So, our SSRG, that's a Social Science Research Group that is

1 located at the Science Center, they're developing a Caribbean
2 spotlight for fisheries economics of the U.S., and, of course,
3 that's got an acronym associated with it.

4
5 The fisheries economics of the United States. So, this is a
6 collaborative effort between the Social Science Research Group and
7 the Office of Science and Technology. Those are folks located at
8 headquarters. They've got a section in the Fisheries Economics of
9 the U.S. 2024 report. It's 2024 because that's the most recent
10 year that's fully available with information. So, the topics that
11 will be included, and we're all interested in this cultural,
12 social, and historical fabric of the Caribbean. So, this is very
13 timely, given all the other discussions that are ongoing. So, this
14 is something that our Social Science Research Group is actively
15 working on right now.

16
17 The economic information on the commercial fisheries that'll be
18 included in this kind of evaluation is the volume and value of the
19 landings. They're particularly going to highlight, of course,
20 important species. We'll get estimates of the contributions of
21 fisheries to the broader economy of the islands. I think that's
22 really important. How big of a chunk of the economy does fisheries
23 represent? I think that's really important. And then it'll include
24 recreational fishing and sport fishing as well.

25
26 They're completing, in another project, fieldwork in Puerto Rico
27 examining dive, trap and some hook-and-line fisheries, documenting
28 fishing practices, gear use, the cost structures across those
29 gears. Juan Agar, whom many of you know, is studying the role of
30 tourism in the lobster fishery in Saint Thomas as a case study to
31 understand that link between tourism and fisheries and those
32 linkages.

33
34 So, a lot goes on with SSRG. We'll also talk about some
35 collaborative projects, the first one being NCRMP, the National
36 Coral Reef Monitoring Program. This is a dive survey. So, the last
37 survey was conducted in 2025 here in the Caribbean. It happens
38 every other year. So, last year was one of the years for the
39 Caribbean. The other years they're in south Florida. But for us,
40 here in this region, they sampled 325 sites in Saint Croix, 340 in
41 Saint Thomas/Saint John, and 232 in Puerto Rico. All those data
42 have been quality controlled. They're publicly available. There's
43 nothing confidential about them. So, other researchers can access
44 and use those data.

45
46 I should also say that SEDAR 103, which I just spoke about, this
47 data will play a significant role, I think, in that process. So,
48 there are a couple links there that take you to the data that can

1 be supplied if you're interested.

2
3 We also-- and I'll talk more about this in a minute. Immediately
4 following this meeting, some of us will be going over Saint John
5 to participate in a spiny lobster workshop. The idea there is we've
6 got several fishery-independent surveys. They're all dive surveys.
7 They all need to be collaborating and coordinating and on the same
8 page for things like methods and their survey designs so that those
9 data can be integrated instead of having three different surveys.
10 They'll still be three surveys. They're funded by different
11 mechanisms, but they'll use common methods so that we can combine
12 those data for when we need to analyze them for other analyses.

13
14 Okay. We've also got a life history project that's going on in
15 Puerto Rico. This collection of data from 2022 through 2025. We've
16 got some additional funding. This is cooperative research program
17 money. So, we're going to get another contract in place for 2026.

18
19 The way this works is that we have on board observers who collect
20 the samples, but they're on commercial vessels. So, it was a very
21 collaborative project. They're focused on snappers, groupers,
22 hogfish, grunts, triggerfish, and parrotfish. Those groups have--
23 Not only are they important, economically, but also those are some
24 that have been identified to have some real holes in life history
25 information and so they're sampling to try and fill those gaps.

26
27 They're collecting otoliths, which are these things right here.
28 So, those are the ear bones, essentially, and you can age the fish
29 with those. They're collecting gonads. So, here's a cross section
30 in the lower left. And then they also collect the eyes, which is
31 another way to age the fish, and then DNA samples.

32
33 The otoliths and the eyes are being archived in the Science Center
34 of Panama City lab where a lot of life history work is done. We've
35 got to get-- they are pretty over-- they've got a lot to do there,
36 so we're going to be looking for partners to help analyze those
37 data. But we do have a partner at Puerto Rico DNER, Noemí Peña,
38 who has already worked up all the gonad samples. And so, we're way
39 ahead on that work.

40
41 We've got another project that some of you may have seen. This is
42 using this gadget here on the right, and it integrates getting
43 lengths, weights, and species identification. All of that is
44 automated. So, in the Virgin Islands, with DPNR, there's a
45 validation project going on. So, we want to make sure that the
46 data that comes out of this electronic data collection matches up
47 with what a person gets if they measure the fish, if they ID the
48 fish, if they weigh the fish.

1 So, that's an ongoing process. And what will happen, we think, is
2 that it is going to be validated, and it will vastly improve the
3 speed at which landings can be processed. Because the fishers don't
4 want to stand around there waiting for us to take hours and hours
5 to measure all the fish. But if we could process those in a fraction
6 of the time, and by "we," I don't mean me, I mean DPNR staff.
7 That's going to make everybody happier and make the whole process
8 go more smoothly.

9
10 In Puerto Rico, with DRNA, we're focused right now on including
11 that in the recreational fishing sampling. So, there's sometimes
12 a different suite of species that the recreational fishery catches
13 versus the commercial fishery. Not always and not exclusively, but
14 they tend to catch more pelagics. So, they're working on validating
15 those.

16
17 There's a lot of words here, so I'll try and walk you through it
18 pretty quickly. So, these are additional projects that are going
19 on. I mentioned that spiny lobster survey workshop that will be
20 happening on Thursday and Friday this week in Saint John. That
21 involves SEAMAP-C, NCRMP, and the National Park Service. Those are
22 the three studies that we're going to try and get coordinated and
23 with more collaboration. So, we'll be working on that at the end
24 of the week.

25
26 Something that's really pretty exciting. The second one, there's
27 this GFISHER that is shown there. What that is, those are cameras
28 that are in the Gulf that drop down, and they get video to sample
29 rather than using divers. So, that gives you a lot of advantages
30 in the sense that they can go deeper than divers. They can maybe
31 sample, maybe/maybe not sample more places at once, but you
32 certainly need fewer staff. So, they take videos, and this VIAME
33 software identifies the fish in the water and gets a length
34 measurement. And so, what we want to do is work with the folks
35 doing that in the Gulf and bring that down to an existing video
36 survey in Puerto Rico that we'll hear about later in this
37 presentation.

38
39 But that's pretty exciting stuff, from my perspective, to be able
40 to have automation of those surveys, and then you don't have people
41 looking at hours and hours of video to identify and get length
42 estimates on fish if you can automate it all. But that's in
43 process. And, luckily, people in the Gulf are spending all the
44 money to make this thing work, and we can bring it down here at a
45 lower cost. Or at least that's the plan. Teach it to recognize the
46 fish that are down here and have that same process work.

47
48 We've got a couple more automation things that are data driven.

1 So, the Trip Information Program. So, those are the folks who come
2 around and measure the fish at the dock. We want to automate the
3 data side of that process. Also associated with that sort of thing
4 is having the database. These are things that aren't very-- don't
5 get a lot of attention, but they're critical to the whole process.
6 You can measure as many fish as you want, but if you don't have a
7 system behind it to store and analyze those data, you've spent a
8 lot of time on very little reward.

10 And then, we've also got a project where we're taking the existing
11 data, and looking at the history of the catch forms that really
12 drives what the data look and doing some comparative analyses of
13 the commercial landings in Puerto Rico and in the U.S. Virgin
14 Islands for the full time series of data that we have.

16 So, I want to now switch over and let David Behringer take over.
17 I think he's going to become presenter, and he's going to go
18 through this presentation that is some data analysis. This came
19 from the contract that we had with MER Consultants years ago.
20 They've taken those data and really done some really interesting
21 new analyses.

23 So, if we could turn it over to David, that would be great. Do I
24 need to stop presenting, or can you just take it from me?

26 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Is he going to--

28 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** He's going to present.

30 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. If he wants to share the screen,
31 you have to stop.

33 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. I can do that. If I can see how to do it.

35 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Hello. Can everyone hear me?

37 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yes.

39 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Alrighty. Let me get this into presenter mode. We
40 can get started. Okay. Does everyone now see the full slide in
41 presenter mode?

43 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.

45 USING MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES TO INFORM STRATIFICATION AND SURVEY
46 DESIGN FOR FISHERY-DEPENDENT SURVEYS IN THE U.S. CARIBBEAN -
47 DAVID BEHRINGER

1 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Okay. Awesome. Hello, everyone. My name is David
2 Behringer, and today I'll be presenting some preliminary work using
3 multivariate analyses that will help inform stratification and
4 improve survey design for fishery-dependent surveys in the U.S.
5 Caribbean.

6
7 One of the main reasons for conducting fishery-dependent port
8 sampling surveys is to be able to estimate landings, and most of
9 these surveys use some sort of stratification to group sampling
10 sites based on similarities. Common strata include regions, day of
11 the week, time of day, and site usage. And the reason that
12 stratification is incorporated into these surveys is that it
13 reduces variance of catch rates, which ultimately improves
14 landings estimates.

15
16 The overall objective of the work I'm presenting today is to
17 investigate alternative stratification schemes to improve survey
18 design, catch rates, and landing estimates. We are addressing this
19 objective by using the species composition of the commercial catch
20 at different landing locations to group areas with similar species
21 composition and create fishing regions, rather than geographic
22 regions, which can be used for stratification in future fishery-
23 dependent surveys.

24
25 The data used for this analysis comes from the MER Commercial port
26 sampling survey that was conducted in Puerto Rico in 2018 and 2019.
27 This survey used a randomized sampling design. And for this survey,
28 they sampled the entire catch for every commercial trip that they
29 encountered. For each trip, total pounds and the number of
30 individuals for each species were recorded. They also collected
31 gear information as well as effort information, such as hours
32 fished, number of lines, number of traps, and number of divers.
33 Post data collection, a trip type was assigned based on the gear
34 and method used as well as the species landed. So, just as an
35 example, if a trip used-- okay. Yep. Can you guys still hear me
36 alright?

37
38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. We can hear you.

39
40 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Okay.

41
42 So, post data collection, the trip type was assigned. And so, just
43 as an example, if a trip used hook-and-line and landed dolphin,
44 the trip was assigned "trip type, hook line pelagic." The trips
45 were broken into six trip types, shallow hook line, deep hook line,
46 pelagic hook line, dive trips, fish trap trips, and lobster trap
47 trips. We don't have enough time to cover the results for all the
48 trip types, so I'll focus on fish trap trips and dive trips for

1 this presentation.

2
3 It's important to note that the fishing location on the water was
4 not recorded during the MER survey. So, for this analysis, we're
5 using landing location as a proxy for fishing location. On the map
6 here, the MER sampling sites are represented by black dots, and
7 there's a fifteen-minute by fifteen-minute grid system. For each
8 sampling site, the adjacent fifteen-minute by fifteen-minute grid
9 was assigned as the fishing grid. This decision was based on
10 analysis of the commercial logbook data as well as discussions and
11 understanding that most of the fishing occurs relatively close to
12 the landing location.

13
14 So, just as an example, a dive trip that landed in Fajardo would
15 be assigned to the fishing grid highlighted by the red square. And
16 just one additional note is that these grids are larger than the
17 grids that you may be familiar with on the CCL forms, but those
18 CCL grids fit within these larger grids.

19
20 So, once all the fishing trips were assigned a trip type and a
21 fishing grid, trips were grouped by trip type, and total catch per
22 unit effort or CPUE was calculated for each species in each fishing
23 grid. So, the total CPUE for each fishing grid for each species
24 equals the total number of individuals landed across all trips for
25 that fishing grid divided by the total sum of the effort across
26 all trips for that fishing grid. And the effort variables used
27 were number of traps for trap trips, diver hours for dive trips,
28 and line hours for hook line trips. I also want to note that, for
29 each trip type, grids with less than 15 trips were dropped from
30 the analysis. And, also, rare species that did not have at least
31 five occurrences in one or more grids were removed.

32
33 So next, using the CPUEs for each species and each fishing grid,
34 the similarity of species composition and their respective CPUEs
35 between fishing grids was measured using a statistic called Bray-
36 Curtis Similarity. Then, using the results of the Bray-Curtis
37 Similarity, a cluster analysis was performed. And what a cluster
38 analysis essentially does it sorts the data into groups based on
39 how similar they are to each other. And the final step was to
40 calculate percentage similarity, which identifies which species
41 contribute most to the dissimilarity between those groups.

42
43 So, now on to some results. The first set of results I'll walk you
44 through is for fish trap trips. So, on the top of the slide is a
45 dendrogram showing the results of the cluster analysis. And a
46 dendrogram is similar to a family tree in that the more closely
47 related groups are closer together, and more dissimilar groups are
48 further apart. So, we have the fishing grids on the x axis and

1 percent similarity on the y axis. And groupings as determined by
2 the analysis are represented by different colors. And the same
3 results from the dendrogram are plotted in space on the map at the
4 bottom of the screen.

5
6 There were seven grids with fish trap trips, so the gray grids
7 didn't have enough trap trips to be included in the analysis. But
8 those seven fishing grids were grouped into five groups. We can
9 see by looking at the dendrogram that the orange group is the most
10 dissimilar from the other groups with only 41% similarity to all
11 other grids, followed by the brown grid with 46% similarity. You
12 can see that the two green grids in the east are grouped together,
13 with 81% similarity, as are the two blue grids in the south, which
14 have 77% similarity. Now although these two groups are distinct
15 from each other, you can also see, by looking at the dendrogram,
16 that these two groups are actually quite similar to each other
17 with 73% similarity.

18
19 So, we see that fish trap trips in the South and the East are much
20 more similar, while the fish trap trips in the North are very
21 dissimilar from the trips in the South and East. It's also
22 interesting to note that while the orange and brown grids are both
23 on the North Coast and geographically very close, the species'
24 compositions landed are quite dissimilar. And just one important
25 reminder is that the results represented here show the species
26 composition of the landed catch, not necessarily what's in the
27 water.

28
29 We're going to take this analysis one step further and examine the
30 species that contribute most to the dissimilarity between certain
31 groups. So, let's compare the blue group with the brown grid group
32 by taking a look at the table in the bottom right. This table
33 contains the species whose CPUEs contributed most to the
34 dissimilarity between groups.

35
36 So, the table has species in the far-left column and then average
37 CPUE for the blue grids, and then the brown grids, and then how
38 much each species contributed to the overall dissimilarity between
39 those two groups. And so, one major difference is that the trips
40 leaving out of the San Juan area and fishing the area represented
41 by the brown grid are catching deepwater snappers, while the trips
42 fishing in the blue grids did not catch any deepwater snappers.
43 And so, you can see that by comparing the average CPUEs between
44 the two groups. And the opposite is true for more shallow water
45 species. These species were not observed at all in the brown grid
46 while the trips in the blue grid landed these species.

47
48 And so, this is just highlighting and suggesting that the fish

1 trap fishery in the North is distinct from the fish trap trips in
2 the South. So, using this sort of information, we can use this to
3 inform survey design to ensure that these distinctions are
4 accounted for and sampled sufficiently.

5
6 Let's take a look at results from another type of trip, dive trips.
7 These results are not quite as straightforward compared to the
8 fish trap results, largely due to the fact that there are many
9 more dive, dive fishers and dive trips in Puerto Rico. There are
10 a few things that I want to point out. First is that the South and
11 the East were grouped into four distinct groups represented by the
12 royal blue, the light blue, the green, and the aqua blue. However,
13 it's important to note that these distinct groups are actually
14 quite similar. So, if you look at the dendrogram, you can see that
15 they all share about 70% similarity to each other.

16
17 The dive trips in the North are quite dissimilar to the trips in
18 the South and the East. Also, if we look at Vieques, the dive trips
19 out of Vieques, they're quite dissimilar from the mainland eastern
20 grids, which to me is a little surprising. However, in the survey,
21 Vieques were sampled inconsistently across seasons. So, some of
22 those dissimilarities could be due to the way and the frequency in
23 which vehicles were sampled. And then another interesting thing
24 here is that the dive trips in the northwest off of Rincon in the
25 pink grid, are the most dissimilar from all the other groupings.
26 And this is due to the fact that the only dive trips that were
27 observed from here were divers collecting fish for the aquarium
28 trade. So, there's kind of a unique quirk, to that region and the
29 data.

30
31 So, now for dive trips, let's compare the blue grid group to the
32 adjacent reddish pink group on the West Coast. Once again, the
33 table contains the species whose CPUEs contributed most to that
34 dissimilarity. And so, we see here that octopus were the highest
35 contributor to dissimilarity, and that's because octopus are
36 caught at a much higher rate in the blue grids than in the reddish
37 pink grid. We also see that parrotfish is caught at higher rates
38 in the blue grids as well, while boxfish are caught at higher rates
39 in the reddish pink grid.

40
41 So, what are some of the main takeaways from this work so far?
42 While the data analyzed is only a snapshot in time, right, it was
43 2018 and 2019, the species compositions and respective catch rates
44 of the commercial catches varied across Puerto Rico even when
45 comparing trips using the same gear type. This approach, we
46 believe, can be used to identify and group areas with high
47 similarity as well as identify areas with high dissimilarity. And
48 we can also see that the groupings do not always fit neatly into

predetermined geographic regions, and this also varies from gear type to gear type.

And finally, what are some of the next steps? While I was only able to cover dive trips and fish trap trips today, we're working on analyzing all the other trip types. And, ultimately, we plan to use this survey, use the results from these analyses to create fishing region strata and incorporate those strata into future fishery-dependent surveys. So, this will result in strata that more closely reflects the realities of the fisheries, and better strata will help control variants of the catch rate, ultimately resulting in better estimates of total commercial landings by species by gear. This information from these analyses can also give us insight into how to allocate sampling effort.

And then, all the work presented here was commercial catches, but we also plan to use the same approach to start looking into the recreational fishery data in Puerto Rico. And if there's time, I'll take any questions.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD: Tony Blanchard for the record. I just got a couple questions and a couple statements. Out of curiosity, how much of these studies was done in state waters? What percentage?

DAVID BEHRINGER: So, yeah, so this was collected by MER Consultants, and they actually didn't collect the fishing location on the water. So, we don't know for sure with 100% certainty where all of the fishers were fishing, but we used information from the CCL commercial logbook data to kind of inform this analysis. So, yeah, I mean, I think, for the pelagic trips, there's a good bit more in federal waters. But then for the dive trips and stuff, a lot of that was closer in. But as far as the exact proportion or ratio, I couldn't give you that just based on how the data was collected.

LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD: Okay. Another question.

DAVID BEHRINGER: Mhmm.

LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD: What I see is us putting fish in box, meaning the areas what was more fished or more used, bigger percentages we use. The others we basically put aside. The other thing is the time the year span in which this was done. The two hurricanes had just gone through this area in 2017. Okay?

DAVID BEHRINGER: Correct. Yep.

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** But to the end of the day, the point I'm
3 trying to make is how valid is this data? Because once a hurricane
4 goes through an area, it destroys and disrupts everything for a
5 certain amount of time, and then it rebuilds. So, really, what
6 percentage was caught in federal water? Because that's what we
7 manage to a certain degree or for the most part. And how valid is
8 this information seeing that this just happened right after a
9 hurricane?

10
11 And why are we discarding areas that were not heavily fished and
12 keeping areas where were heavily fished? What are you actually
13 doing to a certain degree is putting a target on it, in my opinion?
14 And that's my statement, and that's my questions.

15
16 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Yeah, I think you make a good point about the
17 hurricane issue and the way that could impact the fish themselves
18 and also the way the fishers and fishery was operating. And so,
19 yeah, I do think we could take the same approach and apply it to
20 different sets of data, and just really look at how's the best way
21 to stratify and organize future surveys to really get at just to
22 improve that efficiency.

23
24 And then, yeah, as far as the areas that were not included in this
25 survey just based on a small sample size, that is just the way the
26 analyses work that if there is a fishing grid, with only five trips
27 that were observed by the by the samplers, it's just not enough
28 information for the analyses to really use. But, yeah, I do think
29 that, ideally, we could kind of apply the same approach to longer
30 datasets to really, figure out how it's changing over time and
31 things of that nature.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Vance and then Vanessa, Kevin, and then
34 John.

35
36 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. David, thanks a lot. This is
37 excellent work. The kind of fine tuning that we need to make
38 management decisions or make suggestions for management decisions.
39 I really like the way that you were able to partition the variance.
40 In other words, how you explained what percent of the similarity,
41 dissimilarities were attributed to what, especially pointing out
42 that the CPUE is a major factor in determining the dissimilarity
43 between the different locations. But my recommendation will be--
44 I mean, this is really excellent. I really admire you for doing
45 that work. I don't fish, but I hire fishermen. They move me around
46 and in speaking to them many of them say, "Vance, this landing
47 data is really doubtful because many fishers fish in one location,
48 and then they transport their catch either by boat or by car, by

1 vehicles into a totally different location depending what the
2 demand is for that species by localities." And I understand why,
3 the exact position of catch was not determined. I mean, fishers
4 don't want you to use a GPS in their boat. Okay? If it's locating
5 my station that's fine. Locating their stations, we really have to
6 go way ahead because we still have a far way to go. In other words,
7 work more together with the fishers. Thank you.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa? Yep.

10
11 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair Vanessa Ramírez, for the
12 record. I have a question. Cristina, if we can go back to the map
13 for the traps, please.

14
15 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Is David the one that has it. He is
16 sharing the screen.

17
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Thank you. Okay. Knowing that Puerto Rico,
19 the best platform that we have is on the West Coast and I don't
20 see any information about, for example, from Aguadilla up to Cabo
21 Rojo in the Southwest. We only see there the Parguera and Guánica
22 area. Is there any data about that not being included in here, or
23 just that they didn't sample?

24
25 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** So, they sampled that region. So, if there were
26 trips coming through, they would have encountered those. And then
27 these are-- so, the way the samplers asked, "what gear were you
28 using?" So, it'd be trap. And then, "What type of traps." So, the
29 fishers responded with either fish trap or lobster trap. So, there
30 may be lobster trap trips over there. But, yeah, the MER, they
31 didn't pick up a lot of traps over on the West Coast.

32
33 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So, from what I see in here, for the area that we
34 have up to 12 miles, the best platform in the West and the more
35 fishermen of Puerto Rico. We don't have any data right now for
36 traps. Right?

37
38 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** This was-- I mean, there should be plenty of data
39 in the CCL database. But this, yeah, this was just the two-year
40 MER commercial port sampling.

41
42 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Then can we move to the map for the divers,
43 please? The next one?

44
45 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Oops. Sorry.

46
47 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yeah. So, also, the same question. From what I
48 see in this map, the two areas that are most used by our divers,

1 and, practically, we have more divers than trapped fishermen right
2 now. They were also not included in this area that is going to be,
3 practically, all the southwest after the blue and the pink area.
4 Those are the most areas that the fishermen use right now for
5 diving, and they were also not sampling in here. Just for question.

6
7 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Yeah. So, yeah, so this goes back to, I guess,
8 kind of a comment that Vance made as far as-- so the MER samplers,
9 they didn't ask the fishers where they were fishing on the water.
10 So, as far as location data, all they all that we had was what
11 port or marina did they landed their catch at. And so, we use that
12 as a proxy for where they were fishing on the water. But really,
13 the map here is just kind of a helpful visual essentially.

14
15 But, like you said, the far bottom left grid, it's showing up as
16 blank or with no data. But really, if you look at one grid to the
17 right, a lot of the trips that were in that far left grid are being
18 placed in the grid one to the right just based on the fact that we
19 don't know for sure where exactly they were on the water. But if
20 we were to allocate some of those trips or even all the trips from
21 the blue grid that's the most to the left to the bottom left corner
22 grid, it is still really the same picture.

23
24 So, it's kind of just, yeah, a result of we don't have fine scale
25 to know exactly where they were in the water. But that's good
26 information to have, because we can look at reallocating the
27 designated fishing zone for those different sampling sites.

28
29 So, it's not that there wasn't data. It's just the way that we had
30 to assign a proxy fishing grid.

31
32 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you. Vanessa, for the record. The southwest
33 coast is very well known as the fishermen's hotspot, which is
34 between Cabo Rojo and Aguadilla. So, I had the opportunity to be
35 there and look around where this survey was conducted. One of my
36 questions was why we didn't have enough information about the
37 number one town and best area to get sampling. I never got that
38 answer, I just want to put that in the record.

39
40 Thank you.

41
42 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Thank you for that.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

45
46 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. So, I have a lot of
47 issues with this whole study altogether, but I'm going to start
48 off with the first question that Tony asked. He asked, what's the

1 percentage of this study being done in territorial waters? I'm not
2 a mathematician, but if I look at the squares, the squares all
3 come with coordinates. So, that would be able to tell me what the
4 percentage of the landings in this project was in federal and local
5 waters.

6
7 I see a lot of faults with this study. The reason why I see that
8 is because you can be looking at an area today, this is the square
9 that we are fishing in today. I'll use a perfect example. The
10 alleyway between the Grammanik Bank and the MCD. We only fish there
11 for three months out of the year. So, if your study falls outside
12 of those three months, it's going to show no activity. So, when
13 you come to do it, "well, the fishers are fishing in this box.
14 There's nothing there. They don't fish there." Fishers move their
15 gear around to the different areas where the fish are located
16 throughout the year throughout the season. We're not going to stay
17 fishing in an area that is not productive. That's not how we make
18 a living. We make a living by moving all over the place.

19
20 And this here, I don't understand where we are going with this.
21 All I'm seeing that's coming out of this is more money for more
22 studies. That's what I am seeing. Without studying the fisherman,
23 you don't have to study the fisherman, then you don't need a
24 scientist. And this has always been my problem and my fisher's
25 problem.

26
27 All I continue seeing coming out of these meetings is more studies,
28 more studies, more studies, more studies. The Council has been
29 designated to come up with annual catch limits, and we report our
30 annual landings. We report everything that is caught, and that's
31 what you're supposed to be going with.

32
33 What do we need to know what's going on in this box? That box is
34 out there. That box can change, Tony said it, in a split of a
35 minute. Anything can go on. They'll have a deep coral disease.
36 They'll have a storm that's passing through. Strong rip currents.
37 The guys in the West go through that in Puerto Rico. When you have
38 these big north swells that are coming in, they have to move in
39 order for them to survive.

40
41 So, I have a lot of issues with what's going on here, and I hear
42 a lot of hesitation and questions and answering the questions by
43 saying, "I'm not a 100% sure on how to answer the question." So,
44 I'm not feeling that what is coming through is actually what is
45 there.

46
47 So, that's my opinion. Thank you.
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?
2
3 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Yep. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.
4
5 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, David, let me handle this one
6
7 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Yep. Sure.
8
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Let's recall what the purpose of this is. It is
10 not to say, "This is what's going on in this square." It is not to
11 say, "There's no fishing in that square." The purpose of this is-
12 - and, by the way, these are data we already have. This isn't a
13 new study. This was a study that was funded by the Science Center
14 years ago, and we're now extracting more information out of
15 existing data.
16
17 The purpose of this is if you're going to have port sampling, how
18 do you maximize the effectiveness of that port sampling? And one
19 of the ways you do that is to figure out in all of those ports how
20 similar they are to the one down the road. How similar is that to
21 the one around the corner on another coast? So, once you know that,
22 you can then design your survey to maximize the effectiveness of
23 the survey based upon the kinds of trips that are coming in.
24
25 So, that's the purpose of this. This isn't to say, "Here's what's
26 going on in that square." This is to illustrate, as a visual aid,
27 the water that's right next to those ports, these are the kinds of
28 trips that are coming in. So, the idea is not to say, "This area
29 is more important than that area." That's not what it is at all.
30
31 I also want to-- so, when I'm done, I have one more thing to say.
32 So, that's not the point of it. The point is to say, "In the
33 Southwest, those trips are very similar when they come in." That's
34 going to help us design a better survey. Those trips that are over
35 on the East Coast are different to the ones in the Southwest, and
36 they're different than the ones in the North.
37
38 We already know that, but in what way, quantitative, can we say
39 they're different? It's to design a better survey. It's not to
40 change management. It's not to do any of that. It's to get better
41 data from the existing programs that are already being paid for.
42
43 If we're going to maximize the utility of a TIP sample, well, let's
44 maximize it.
45
46 So, that's the point of all this, is to have a better survey that
47 requires fewer days in the field, fewer dollars because you don't
48 need to survey-- you won't be surveying in an inefficient way. So,

1 the whole idea is to save money and to do a more efficient job in
2 existing programs.

3
4 And the one thing I would add is, I don't know what we're doing--
5 how we're doing for time, but we have one more presentation that
6 I would like to get through, and that's Kate Overly who's kind
7 enough to be waiting on the phone for us. So, I just want to put
8 that out there.

9
10 Thanks.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** John, you still want to--

13
14 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Yeah. [inaudible] be describing the objective.

15
16 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** We're going to move on to Kate. I'll take control
17 back. For five to ten minutes. Thanks.

18
19 **DAVID BEHRINGER:** Yep.

20
21 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay, Kate, are you there? Take it away, please.

22
23 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Hey. Can you hear me now? Sorry. I was muted.
24 I think everyone got muted briefly. So, I think I just got control
25 back.

26
27 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I wasn't clear.

28
29 **PUERTO RICO DEEPWATER REEF FISH SURVEY - KATE OVERLY**

30
31 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Perfect. Okay. Hello, everyone. So, my name
32 is Kate Overly, and I am going to be presenting today on the Puerto
33 Rico deepwater reef fish survey. And it is a fishery-independent
34 survey that's focused on those deeper reef fish complexes.

35
36 For the purposes of this presentation, what I'm calling deep is
37 from about 50 to 450 meters. Although, you may hear mention of our
38 new, 20-to-50-meter depth bin as well in this presentation. Just
39 a heads up. Next slide, please.

40
41 Alright. So, a little bit of an overview of the survey. So, back
42 in about 2015, there wasn't really any existing fishery-
43 independent survey that focused on the deepwater species complex.
44 We had fairly limited data for the species that are pictured in
45 the middle of the slide here. That's predominantly going to be
46 your snappers and groupers. But what we were able to gather from
47 TIP data at that time was that there were two prominent species in
48 the deepwater catch data, and those were queen snapper and silk

1 snapper. So, that is really what prompted this work initially.

2
3 And then, what we have developed is a fishery-independent survey
4 that is capable of supplying data, producing indices of abundance,
5 size composition, life history samples to support stock
6 assessments and management going forward. So, our initial
7 objectives were to develop, with the commercial fishers, a standard
8 sampling method for using a hook in line specifically around Puerto
9 Rico that targeted these deepwater fishes of interest. So, we
10 collaborated with a local consulting firm, that's HJR Reefscaping,
11 along with the commercial fishers and local observers to actually
12 collect that scientific information as well as the DRNA.

13
14 So, our goal was to develop a statistically rigorous sampling
15 design that optimized for two primary species, that silk and queen
16 snapper, while also generating data on other species within those
17 complexes, of course. We also wanted to collect biological samples
18 for our target species, for future life history work, and then
19 conduct research and development on camera and lighting systems to
20 really start to figure out how to effectively sample these fishes
21 and these habitats, which are very complex, with optical data and
22 methods. Next slide, please.

23
24 So, a brief history. There's a lot going on of the survey
25 development just to kind of orient you. So, this work began
26 initially in 2015 with Steve Smith and his team at University of
27 Miami RSMAS. Michelle Schärer and Hector Ruiz within each share of
28 Reefscaping, and then the commercial fishers who obviously have
29 the experience with this deepwater complex to fully develop a
30 standard fishing sample.

31
32 So, that's the gear they're using, the grid size we're targeting,
33 time fishing, all of that. And so, this work was also informed not
34 only by that group, but by work that was previously conducted
35 within the Hawaiian Islands to develop a fishery-independent
36 survey for their deepwater complex.

37
38 So, from 2017 to 2022, what's now is the Gulf and Caribbean Reef
39 Fish Branch, where I'm at within NOAA, we kind of took that over
40 following that pilot study that was conducted by Steve and
41 generated data around the island using that standardized fishing
42 protocol that they developed while also conducting R&D on camera
43 and lighting systems as well as exploring the depth range for a
44 lot of these species to make sure that everything was optimized
45 and we were actually, targeting the depth ranges for the species
46 of interest.

47
48 So, then in 2023, we ran the first island-wide survey, taking into

1 account all that initial pilot work that had been done, and we
2 continued to do this for two consecutive years through 2026. So,
3 that spanned seven different depth strata and three rugosity strata
4 from 50 to 450 meters. And then this past year, we were able to
5 add an additional shallow water depth stratum from 20 to 50. Next
6 slide, please.

7
8 So, here is a look, real quick, at our sampling universe. It's
9 obviously island wide in Puerto Rico, as is shown on the map on
10 the right there, across the depth range that we determine through
11 our pilot phases for the species of interest. Our standardized
12 fishing occurs in a 500-by-500-meter sampling grid. So, fishing
13 hook-and-line gear within one of those grids constitutes a single
14 sample. And so, this survey follows a stratified random sampling
15 design. It has two principal strata, rugosity and depth. The map
16 on the right is color coded, you can see that, for the three
17 rugosity strata. And lastly, the survey has been occurring
18 annually. Next slide, please. There we go. Okay.

19
20 Here's just a quick look at the strata themselves. So, we have
21 depth and rugosity bins. The rugosity metric that we're using is
22 actually the vector ruggedness metric. So, as I mentioned, we have
23 seven depth bins, three rugosity bins. With math, that gives us 21
24 total strata. So, you can see that on the left there, S01 through
25 S21. And, obviously, these are the combinations of depth and
26 rugosity.

27
28 And then I'll point out a couple other columns here. So, the
29 "ntot_h," that column is the number of 500-by-500-meter grid cells
30 that exist for that habitat and depth combination within the
31 universe. And then, the "wh" column is the proportion of the
32 sampling frame that actually goes into that stratum. And so, for
33 example, you look at that first row, S01, about 11.495% of the
34 survey area falls into those particular strata.

35
36 And I think lastly on this slide, that far right column is our
37 current allocation. So, that's based on the stratum area and the
38 variance of per unit effort or CPUE of our two main target species
39 that we're designing the survey for. So, as I mentioned, it's queen
40 and silk snapper. So, we're allocating effort to about 200 grid
41 cells per year based on this. Next slide.

42
43 And then, Kevin mentioned this a little bit. So, we are supplying
44 data from this survey to SEDAR 103 in that process. So, on this
45 slide, I just have a quick background and kind of an overview of
46 what we're providing.

47
48 So, we have four total years that we're analyzing for SEDAR. We

1 have that first year from 2017 to 2018 that covered three different
2 regions, somewhat island wide. But due to a lack in mapping data,
3 it's a little patchy in areas. Starting in 2023, we were able to
4 begin island wide sampling. We filled out those gaps with mapping
5 data, and we have two island wide surveyors that are fully
6 completed, QA/QC done ready to go. And the third, we're hoping to
7 have full QA/QC done, have it analyzed by the time the workshop
8 occurs in the fall time. But from each of those four years, we
9 have 200 grid cells that have been sampled each year.

10
11 So, as far as the data that's been collected is your standard hook-
12 and-line survey. We have catch data. We have the species that we've
13 caught, the length data, depth range coordinates, things of that
14 nature. And from our preliminary analysis, we found we have fairly
15 robust data collection on the species on the right-hand side here.
16 So, these are the species of interest.

17
18 There are six snapper species. You have blackfin, cardinal, queen,
19 vermillion, silk, wenchman. But that's not all we generate data so
20 those are the more robust species where we have a lot of samples,
21 but we do have 66 total species that have been caught on hook-and-
22 line over the course of the survey. That's not just fish. It's
23 sharks as well. And this does not include the video data, like,
24 all of that R&D we did, this is just the hook-and-line species.

25
26 The main data products that come from this then are going to be
27 your CPUE indices, CPU at length, and frequency of occurrence. And
28 while we might not be able to do that for all 66 of those species,
29 we are optimistic that we can do it for the six on the right-hand
30 side of the slide there. And we're going to look into a few others.
31 I think some of the squalus' species of sharks, we might have
32 enough data as well.

33
34 So, next slide, please.

35
36 We don't have to spend a whole lot of time on this, but, basically,
37 it's just a quick look at our sample sizes for those six main
38 species for the years that we're currently analyzing for SEDAR.
39 You'll notice that last column there is still TBD because we're
40 just undergoing QA/QC still. Next slide, please.

41
42 And I think this is the last slide. And the video works, which is
43 great.

44
45 Alright. So, we are expecting the survey to continue at this point.
46 It's funded predominantly by the NOAA Cooperative Research
47 Program, so the CRP. We have received additional funding very
48 recently to do additional work involving the survey with

1 optimization and calibration across different gear types. So, that
2 would be stereo video. So, a lot of the R&D work that we did in
3 earlier years with our wavelength modified lighting systems, then,
4 obviously, the established hook in line method and diver based.

5
6 So, the idea here is to conduct quantitative year intercalibration
7 studies to determine the relative fishing power and eventually
8 expand that into a full pilot survey over the next couple of years.
9 So, what we really want to do is find the most effective sampling
10 method that we can use given a habitat step and complexity while
11 reducing sampling effort overall. So, that'll be taking place in
12 the coming years. And I will also mention, because Kevin mentioned
13 that, for the video, as we collect this video, we are working, I'm
14 in the Gulf and Caribbean reef fish branch, the GFISHER survey,
15 Golf Fishery-Independent Survey of Habitat and Ecosystem
16 Resources, which is a mouthful. We do a lot of AIML work with our
17 video that we collect in the gulf, as Kevin mentioned. And so, we
18 are going to be training those AIML models to help us read this
19 video data that we'll be generating in Puerto Rico as well.

20
21 And I think that is it, Kevin. Any questions? That is my email too
22 if you think of something after the fact.

23 24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25
26 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes, Kate. Very interesting and useful
27 information. In one of your slides, you mentioned a light
28 wavelength study. Are you referring to photosynthetic active
29 radiation wavelength or below 400 nanometers and above 700
30 nanometers?

31
32 My other question is about essential fish habitat. Recently, there
33 was a publication on the occurrence on essential fish habitats of
34 the queen snapper that just came out. Can you say something about
35 it? Thank you.

36
37 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Yeah. So, for the lights, we've collaborated
38 with the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center as well. So,
39 they've done some side studies on wavelength modification and how
40 fish respond to it, and we have done a bit in Puerto Rico as well.
41 So, what we found basically is that anything that is in the blue
42 to green to white spectrum has a pretty significant bias in the
43 fish response. It's different for different species, though.

44
45 And so, through our study that we did in those earlier years, for
46 most species, red-orange, or sorry. Red/orange wavelength works
47 the best, but it attenuates the least amount into water, so it
48 really simple limits your field of view. The amber, which is what's

1 in that previous slide, that video clip, we saw very, very little
2 response to, we still saw queen snapper. We still saw the queen
3 snapper, we still saw the pristipomoides species. So, cardinal and
4 wenchman, those are the three in particular that when we had white
5 lights initially, they would not come near. They would stay right
6 on the outskirts. You could barely identify them. But with these
7 wavelength modifications, we're looking at starting with amber.

8
9 And then your other question on essential fish habitat of queen
10 snapper, I haven't seen that paper yet. We did do, using this data,
11 we did some habitat suitability modeling for queen snapper. And
12 so, I can speak to that, but I haven't read that new manuscript.

13
14 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. I can send you the reference in a
15 little while. Right now, I'm dealing with my next presentation.

16
17 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** No. No worries. That would be great. Thank
18 you.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?

21
22 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard for the record. I was just
23 noticing a couple of things. We are going back, how far is the
24 information that we're using? Number one. And the point I'm going
25 to make is, we I understand using information from before, to a
26 certain degree, but how far back are we going to go digging into
27 the information that we are going to use to make decisions now?
28 And it would be kind of me to expect the fishery to ever be what
29 it was when I was a young boy. That will never happen.

30
31 There are too many things that have come in and just made it
32 impossible for that to ever become what it was. So, the whole thing
33 here is, what I'm looking at is, I understand that we're trying to
34 save money, and I think that's a big factor here. But the question
35 is if we're using information that is that far outdated, in my
36 opinion, how valid are the results that we are going to get? And
37 that's the statement I'd like to make.

38
39 Because I've noticed this with a couple different slides where
40 we're going so far back. But how far back is too far back is my
41 question, realistically, that we could use that information and
42 guess more and out of it.

43
44 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Yeah. So, I can speak about that, a little
45 bit in turn with reference to this survey at least. So, what we're
46 trying to do to the best of our ability is kind of build a time
47 series. So, we're looking at each year independently, and the
48 survey is still operating. So, we do have that initial year that

1 we're trying to-- we have robust data, so we would like to look at
2 those top six pieces of interest to kind of build something out of
3 that data, but we do have more current years of data. So, they are
4 sampling right now, and given funding, we'll continue sampling.

5
6 So, each of those years will have its own indices. It'll have a
7 mark on a graph for how that abundance is doing for that species,
8 in theory. So, this isn't compiling everything starting back from
9 2015 altogether and lumping it together and saying that that's the
10 trends of these species. It's more, looking at those individual
11 years where we can see how those trends may have changed given
12 that the survey itself has been standardized over that time frame.

13
14 So, those three years of island-wide sampling were all concurrent,
15 and then we were looking at also using that 2015 to 2017 pilot
16 study as well just to kind of get an idea of what that looks like.
17 But, yes, going forward, we would be utilizing that island-wide
18 survey that started really in 2023 to current day. If that makes
19 sense.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

22
23 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, for the record. Katherine,
24 thanks for an excellent presentation. I have only two questions.
25 One is, are you planning for the future for the 2024/'26 to
26 implement more use of robotics or new technology in order to get
27 that information?

28
29 And the second question is, do you have plans to-- In order to
30 move from the CPUE to abundance estimates? Those are my two
31 questions. Thanks.

32
33 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Yeah. So, regarding your first question, as
34 far as advanced technology is concerned in implementing camera
35 systems, what we are developing is going to be back-to-back facing
36 stereo video system. So, they're going to be pointed in two
37 different directions, facing opposite direction that is. And then
38 from that, we're able to generate length data through, basically,
39 software. So, we can rather than bring up a fish on hook-and-line,
40 we can get a very good estimate of the length of the fish that
41 swims across the view of the camera.

42
43 We have to implement the lighting because after about 250 meters,
44 you can't see anything on video, unfortunately, and we obviously
45 operate a lot deeper than that. So, that's where the lighting
46 system comes in. And it's kind of a semi-neutrally buoyant system,
47 so it has a weight on the bottom, and then the camera system hovers
48 just over that. We did a lot of trial and error in the Western

1 region in particular, and we tried tripods and a bunch of different
2 setups. But because of the bathymetry and the way that the sea
3 floor is, they fall over.

4
5 So, we've taken all that into account to build this new system.
6 And then, in post processing, because right now it would just be
7 me reading through the video data, and we don't have a whole lot
8 of people, what we are doing in the Gulf that is working really
9 well is this AIML identification of species. So, you would train
10 a model that has a high level of confidence in select species to
11 reduce the workload of a human having to read the video. So, it's
12 not that we would be getting rid of humans. I would still be
13 reading the video as well, but it would be assisted with AI, and
14 it would speed the process along.

15
16 We have looked at ROVs and things that, to do more of a transect
17 method. But with the currents, and the limitations we have on the
18 vessels that we're using, this is completely cooperative, it would
19 just require a lot more to do something like that, and we probably
20 have to limit our sampling just because of the high current areas.
21 It just gets kind of crazy with that.

22
23 And then your second question, we are exploring different ways.
24 So, we haven't produced final data for SEDAR 103. That is what we
25 are doing over the next three to four months. So, I should have
26 another update prior to that workshop this fall where we have
27 generated information that I can share with you all on those six
28 pieces of interest, but it's something that we're currently in the
29 works on, but we'll have updates for you. Hope that helps.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

32
33 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. So, I can see that we're way overtime. So,
34 I want to thank the Council for the opportunity to present. I want
35 to thank David and Kate for their excellent presentations, and
36 we'll yield the floor.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Kevin. We have Vance for SSC report.
39 Any more questions for Kevin or his crew? Okay. Vance?

40
41 **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT—VANCE VICENTE, CHAIR**

42
43 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks
44 to Council for this invitation. Okay. This is the SSC report for
45 the 189th Caribbean Fishery Management Council meeting. Next slide,
46 please.

47
48 Before I continue. Well, here you see on the left side the SSC

1 participants. Unfortunately, Michelle Schärer was not able to
2 participate, so, therefore, we missed her, always, valuable
3 comments. We hope that, sometime, we might get them in written
4 form. And, also, I want to thank the SSC meeting, which was held
5 by the participants listed on the left, DAP Chairs, Southeast
6 Fisheries Science Center, personnel SERO, Southeast Regional
7 Office, researchers, and the CFMC members and staff. Here,
8 specifically, I want to thank Liajay Rivera for organizing and
9 maintaining order during the April 2026 meeting. So, thanks a lot
10 Liajay. And for this specific presentation, Kiara Matías is
11 responsible for setting it up really nicely. So, thank you, Kiara,
12 and thanks to the Council Staff, as always, giving their support.

13
14 Well, the agenda overview for the April 8-10, April 2026 SSC
15 meeting was the following. We reviewed the SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean
16 Spiny Lobster, Puerto Rico. There were two presenters, Kevin
17 McCarthy and Adyan Ríos, which covered this topic, in very much
18 detail. We also had a final review for the SEDAR 84 Caribbean
19 Yellowtail Snapper, Puerto Rico. Also, review, SEDAR 84 Caribbean
20 Yellowtail Snapper, Saint Thomas/Saint John. Also, we made a final
21 review of the SEDAR 84 Caribbean Stoplight Parrotfish Saint Croix.
22 We also listed the SSC Final Review and Recommendation for SEDAR
23 91 Puerto Rico and SEDAR 84 P.R. and U.S.V.I. Then lastly, we had
24 a nice brief presentation from Liajay Rivera on an update on the
25 SEDAR 103 U.S. Caribbean Application of Alternative Assessment
26 Methods. Next slide.

27
28 SEDAR 91 Caribbean Spiny Lobster Puerto Rico. Next, please.

29
30 In March 2026, the SSC received from the Caribbean Fisheries Branch
31 a good summary of Puerto Rico's spiny lobster SEDAR 91 additional
32 sensitivity runs incorporating standardized fishery-dependent
33 indices of abundance and 2024 terminal year. This was a request,
34 a request from the SSC meeting of September 2025, specifically
35 motion eight proposed by Richard Appeldoorn and second by Jason
36 Cope.

37
38 So, this report was very valuable in finalizing, looking and
39 evaluating the final review for SEDAR 91 spiny lobster of Puerto
40 Rico. The report that was submitted describes the requested
41 supplemental analysis following the SSC initial review of the SEDAR
42 91 assessment highlighting a fundamental improvement to the
43 modeling framework through the incorporation of standardized
44 indices of abundance, reference Martínez Rivera and McCarthy 2026,
45 and b, recruitment deviation into the final assessment model.

46
47 The original SEDAR 91 base model, which lacked these dynamic
48 components, indicated then that the stock was overfished, in other

words, standing stock biomass over standing stock biomass, SPR 30% was less than one, and undergoing overfishing F/F_{SPR} 30 more than one. The updated sensitivity run, label 8324, suggests a more optimistic stock status by transitioning to F parameter estimation and enabling recruitment deviations the model identifies a decade of very strong recruitment signals that reconcile the simultaneous increases in catch per unit effort and catch observed in recent commercial landings, citation of Matos Caraballo et al. 2024.

Under this more biologically representative configuration, the sensitivity run indicates the Puerto Rico spiny lobster stock is not overfished and not undergoing overfishing. Incorporating abundance indices fundamentally improved the SEDAR 91 modeling framework by allowing the model to distinguish between overfishing and natural recruitment fluctuations, providing more accurate and responsive management advice. Next slide, please.

SEDAR 91 Caribbean Spiny Lobster Puerto Rico. Standard Index of Abundance Presented by Kevin McCarthy. It shows the fishery-dependent indices of abundance available data.

One, landing and fishing effort of commercial fishers from the Caribbean commercial logbook. Two, each fishing trip has a unique identifier. The landing date, the fishing gear, the location or coast, gear specific effort, species caught, and weight in pounds of the landings. Also included data subsetting, that's extracting specific information from the general file. Catch per unit effort defined as a whole weight per gear quantity. Between parenthesis, traps fished, SCUBA tanks used. Next slide, please.

The outline is, one, background; assessment approach, SEDAR 57 assessment approach; SEDAR 91 assessment approach; SEDAR 91 sources of data; data and life history overview, in other words, what information went to the model; SEDAR 91 models; quantile analysis, looking at different quantiles in the length data; figures; and finally, the SSC discussion and next steps. Okay. Let's go to the background. Next slide.

SEDAR 91 addressed the stock assessment for U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster. The process consisted of an in-person data workshop with several webinars before and after the workshop and a series of assessment webinars. The stock assessment report for U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster, Puerto Rico was disseminated to the public in September 2025. The SSC was tasked with recommending whether this assessment represents the best available science or best available information or best scientific information, and whether the results are useful for providing management advice and developing fishing level recommendations. Next slide, please.

1
2 Here we have a comparison regarding SEDAR 57 assessment approach
3 and SEDAR 91 assessment approach. SEDAR 57 assessment approach was
4 the first application of the stock synthesis SS3 in the U.S.
5 Caribbean. This was in 2019. Also, under SEDAR 57, the Puerto Rico
6 assessment models developed during SS7-- during SEDAR 57, I'm
7 sorry, were fit to catch time series and length composition
8 information from dive and pot/trap fisheries using a data-limited
9 to moderate implementation of the SS3. SEDAR 57 also resulted in
10 a satisfactory determination for providing management advice. A
11 data-only update was conducted through 2022 to provide OFLs,
12 overfishing limits, and ABC acceptable biological catch through
13 2023 to 2025.

14
15 The SEDAR 91 assessment approach. One. Iterates on existing SEDAR
16 57, SEDAR 57 update, length-based statistical catch at age models
17 using SS3 through the year 2023. SS3 was implemented as a length-
18 based statistical catch at age model, or we're projecting a
19 structured population dynamics model that is fit to landings or
20 removals, length composition data, and indices of abundance. Next
21 slide, please.

22
23 The SEDAR 91 sources of data were, one, landings from self-reported
24 fisher logbooks. Length composition from shore-based port
25 sampling. Three. Life history parameters carried over from SEDAR
26 57. The following are new. Incorporated into the assessment,
27 included in the base run. One. Length composition obtained from
28 SEAMAP-C dive surveys conducted off the Southwest Coast of Puerto
29 Rico during 2021 through 2023. Two. Length composition obtained
30 from an HJR Reefscaping lobster trap survey conducted throughout
31 Puerto Rico coastal waters during 2021 and 2022. Fishery-dependent
32 indices of abundance-- third, fishery-dependent indices of
33 abundance from fisher logbooks by Kevin McCarthy. Next slide,
34 please.

35
36 These are the SEDAR 91 models. These are all in detail. I'm not
37 going to go through all of them. You have them on record. So, let's
38 go to the next slide.

39
40 So, the SSC meeting, action items, the motions that were proposed.
41 Topic one. Review SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean Spiny Lobster Puerto
42 Rico Assessment Report. Motion one. The SSC considers the
43 assessment for SEDAR 91, U.S. Caribbean Spiny Lobster for Puerto
44 Rico to represent the best available science. Motion two. The SSC
45 also finds that the results presented in SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean
46 Spiny Lobster Puerto Rico are indeed useful for providing
47 management advice and developing fishing level recommendations for
48 the Council. Next slide, please.

1
2 Following, SEDAR SSC meeting, action items, motion proposed. Topic
3 one. Review SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean Spiny Lobster Puerto Rico
4 Assessment Report. This is now motion three. The current assessment
5 indicates that the stock is currently above target and therefore
6 experiencing a fishing down to the maximum sustainable yield proxy.
7 In addition, the new stock assessment shows an increase in the
8 overall size of the population. That is a higher unfished
9 population size, which leads to an increase in catch with all other
10 things being equal. This increase in stock scale is greatly
11 influenced by the final point in the new abundance indices, which
12 adds further uncertainty in the model, between parenthesis as shown
13 in the retrospective analysis.

14
15 These conditions lead to a three-year average ABC that will exceed
16 the proxy MSY OFL in 2029. Instead, the SSC recommends using the
17 ABC that is derived from the OFL based on the proxy m s MSY,
18 between parenthesis, F at SPR 30% as a constant catch value for
19 management. Further, the SSC recommends using the 2022 to 2024
20 landings average for each fleet as the provisional landing values
21 for 2025 and 2026. Next slide, please.

22
23 SSC review decisions. In this table, we see there's one, two,
24 three, four, five, six columns. In the first column, we have the
25 MSY 30 SPR in metric tons, 227.879 metric tons. In pounds, that is
26 502,387 pounds. The ABC proposed in metric tons are 200.97 tons,
27 and the ABC proposed in pounds are 443,062 pounds. The current ABC
28 is 376,452 pounds. The tentative ABC is based on CFMC on the
29 Caribbean Fisheries Management Council of $P^* 0.45$. Next slide.

30
31 Now we go to SEDAR 84 Caribbean Yellowtail Snapper Puerto Rico.
32 Next slide, please.

33
34 Regarding SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean Yellowtail Snapper Puerto Rico
35 Assessment Report. Motion four. The SSC considers the assessment
36 SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean yellowtail snapper for Puerto Rico to
37 represent the best available science. However, in motion five, the
38 SSC finds that the results presented in SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean
39 yellowtail snapper for Puerto Rico are not at present useful for
40 providing management advice and developing fishing level
41 recommendations for the Council. Next slide, please.

42
43 Now we go to SEDAR 84, Caribbean Yellowtail Snapper Saint
44 Thomas/Saint John. Next slide, please.

45
46 Six. The SSC considers the assessment for SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean
47 Yellowtail Snapper for Saint Thomas and Saint John to represent
48 the best available science. But motion seven, given the

1 uncertainties noted during the review workshop, the SSC finds that
2 the results presented in the SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean Yellowtail
3 Snapper for Saint Thomas/Saint John are not at present useful
4 providing management advice and developing fishing level
5 recommendations for the Council. Next slide, please.

6
7 SEDAR 84, now we go to Saint Croix for the stoplight parrotfish.
8 Next slide, please.

9
10 There are two motions. Motion eight. The SSC considers the
11 assessment for SEDAR 84 U.S. Caribbean stoplight parrotfish for
12 Saint Croix to represent the best available science. Motion nine,
13 however, the SSC finds that the results presented in the SEDAR 84
14 U.S. Caribbean stoplight parrotfish for Saint Croix are not at
15 present providing management advice and developing fishing level
16 recommendations for the Council. Next slide, please.

17
18 SSC's final review and recommendation for SEDAR 91, Puerto Rico,
19 and SEDAR 84, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands. That is Saint
20 Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix. Next slide, please.

21
22 Final review. Best available science, SEDAR 91 PR SL. Yes. Useful
23 for providing management advice and developing fishing level
24 recommendations for the Council. Yes. So, SEDAR PR SL SSC presents
25 the ABC to the Council Members. Results of the models demonstrate
26 that they are not undergoing overfishing and/or underfishing.
27 Action items. Okay. Next slide, please.

28
29 Final review is SEDAR 84, PR, U.S.V.I. Best available science.
30 Final review. The best available science, SEDAR 84, Puerto Rico
31 yellowtail. Yes. SEDAR 84 Saint Thomas/Saint John, yellowtail
32 snapper. Yes. SEDAR 84 Saint Croix, the parrotfish, is that the
33 parrotfish. Yes. Whether the final review, whether the information
34 was useful for providing management advice and developing fishing
35 level recommendations for the Councils. No. No. No. Next slide.

36
37 Motion 10. The SSC endorses the recommendations made by the data
38 and review panels and also makes the following recommendations
39 related to SEDAR 91 and SEDAR 84. Next slide.

40
41 SEDAR 91 SSC recommendations. One. Investigate further potential
42 factors for use in the catch per unit effort index standardization.
43 The fish trap survey, in particular, shows large dynamics outside
44 biological bounds that may be due to other factors currently not
45 included in the standardization process, such as historical
46 management decisions, that is size limits, socioeconomic factors,
47 and fishing behavior. Example, given how traps are baited.
48 Collection and analysis of local ecological knowledge and other

socioeconomic data can contribute to understanding potential drivers.

Two. When developing fishery-dependent indices of relative abundance, consider alternative trip selection methods and/or improvements to the Stephens and MacCall (2004) trip selection approach, such as exploring whether species is correlation coefficients (Example, index of association) vary over time periods. Next slide.

Recommendations continued. Model sensitivity analysis shows that when catch is given a larger variance, the model will deviate from the inputted catch time series, especially towards the end of the time series. This period of catches is also recognized as more uncertain and currently derived from a catch correction process that contains in itself its own uncertainty. Local ecological knowledge may bear further insight into the best catch time series on how to calculate it, as it is preferred to model catches with low uncertainty rather than let the model estimate catches.

Four. Adding recreational or other removal fleets will help estimate the overall scale of the lobster population and offer a more complete estimate of the overall fishing mortality. Five. Explore potential impacts of warming water temperatures on spiny lobster recruitment and growth. Next slide.

Okay. So, that's a summary. SSC recommendations for SEDAR 84 with respect to the Puerto Rico yellowtail snapper, with respect to the Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper, and the SEDAR 84 Saint Croix. Take a look at it. Next slide.

Regarding increased data collection for determining discards, increased comparative research effort, increase FI sampling in waters deeper than 30 meters, evaluate the utility of NCRMP and TCRMP surveys, and investigate whether landing time series can be extended back in time with either available data or total ecological knowledge. There you have the three columns, one for SEDAR 84 Puerto Rico yellowtail snapper, SEDAR 84 Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper, and SEDAR 84, the Saint Croix parrotfish. Next slide.

Then we had a really good presentation by Liajay Rivera, who gave us an update on SEDAR 103, U.S. Caribbean Application Of Alternative Assessment Methods. Next slide.

On SEDAR 103, U.S. Caribbean Application Of Alternative Assessment Method details. Review and recommend options for alternative assessment approaches to better inform management of U.S.

1 Caribbean federally managed species. Approaches are likely to
2 differ from species and species groups. The goal is to have
3 analytical approaches recommended for most federally managed
4 species in the U.S. Caribbean. The Project started in January 2026,
5 a delay from the original 2025 start, due to the 2025 government
6 shutdown. Next slide.

7
8 Then Liajay provided us with SEDAR 103 scheduled data for data
9 webinars. So, these are the dates that are listed in the
10 presentation, so I won't go one by one. Next slide.

11
12 You see the SEDAR 103 schedule. To be determine and extended in
13 this slide. Next slide.

14
15 SEDAR 103 schedule to be determined. Again, we heard it during the
16 presentation. I'm not going to read them all. We are running short
17 of time. Next slide. I'm sorry.

18
19 And this is SEDAR website, where you can find reference documents,
20 working papers, terms of reference, and the project schedule. Next
21 slide, and I think that's it. No. That's it.

22
23 Thank you.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

26
27 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you very much. That's it.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Vance. We're going to hold your
30 questions for Vance until after lunch. So, we'll be back at 01:30.

31
32 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Mr. Chair, may I just make one announcement
33 before we adjourn to lunch?

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sure.

36
37 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Thank you. I would like to introduce everyone to
38 the Saint Croix district liaison. So, if you haven't met her as
39 yet during the first break, you may meet her during lunch. Olivia
40 Walton, if you could stand up. Olivia Walton is a Saint Croix
41 native.

42
43 She has come back home to work with environmental education across
44 the territory. Some of the projects that she's worked on with the
45 Saint Croix environmental association included a program for high
46 school students to be environmental change makers, some of whom
47 had projects that included education around queen conch and also
48 promoting the kids' handline tournaments with Golden Hook. So, we

1 really appreciate Olivia joining us, and make sure you say, "Hi"
2 over the lunch break. Thanks, Olivia.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Thank you, and welcome aboard.

5
6 (WHEREUPON, THE MEETING RECESSED FOR LUNCH ON APRIL 21, 2026.)

7
8 - - -

9
10 APRIL 21, 2026

11
12 TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

13
14 - - -

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to get started again. You all can
16 grab your seats.

17
18 When we left out with the SSC, I don't know if anybody had questions
19 for Vance. Floor is open for Vance. Okay. So, question for Vance
20 on the SSC report. Heather, do you have something?

21
22 Do you have anything for Vance?

23
24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, thank
27 you, Dr. Vicente, for the summary of the SSC meeting. I didn't
28 have the opportunity to listen to that myself but was really
29 encouraged by the positive results that we saw after we had
30 incorporated the abundance indices in there.

31
32 And I did have some questions about the SSC motion that you
33 reviewed, and also about the rationale that the SSC used to
34 recommend the ABC and OFL values that would be derived from the
35 30% SPR proxy. So, I don't know. Could we put the maybe the motion
36 back up on the screen so we can talk about that first?

37
38 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Okay. These motions

39
40 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** They are not on the screen yet.

41
42 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks, Cristina.

43
44 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, the statement, "these conditions lead to a
45 three-year average ABC that will exceed the proxy MSY OFL in 2029."
46 I was curious about 2029, including 2029 in there. It looks like,
47 based on the table and values that they provided that the three-
48 year average ABC they calculated would actually exceed the proxy

1 MSY OFL value in all of the years.

2
3 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** I will ask Adyan to help me with that.
4 She is the analyst that made all the calculations based on the
5 discussions that we had during the meeting. In other words, there's
6 plenty of discussion after each presentation, and those motions
7 resulted from the discussion previous to the motion. And then,
8 they were read and discussed and voted on, and that's what the SSC
9 finally determined. So, that's the reason. That's where the motion
10 comes from.

11
12 With regards to the ratio of the SPR, etcetera. Well, those are
13 standard ways of determining whether our population is being
14 overfished or underfished using the different values. I don't know
15 whether that answers your question, but maybe Adyan or Kevin needs
16 to expand on that. Or-- Kevin?

17
18 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Kevin McCarthy. So, we're looking-- so I
19 emailed Jason Cope who proposed this motion, about some of the
20 wording. So, we're just reviewing that. Adyan and I are just
21 reviewing his response.

22
23 He says he agrees that a motion to a modification to the SSC
24 statement is required so that it says, "The average ABC almost
25 exceeds the OFL in 2029." I think he just wants to clean up the
26 language so that it's an accurate statement. He's not proposing a
27 change to this recommendation. He just wants to clean it. He thinks
28 the language needs to be adjusted so that it's an accurate
29 statement. I think there was a little confusion as to when things
30 would be exceeded, and I think that's what he's recommending gets
31 cleaned up.

32
33 The main point here is that last underlined, the second to the
34 last bullet, which is a recommendation to use the ABC that is
35 derived from OFL based on the proxy MSY as a constant catch value
36 for management. I think that recommendation stands. It's just where
37 it's mentioned, the bullet right before that. "These conditions
38 lead to a three-year average ABC that will exceed proxy MSY OFL in
39 2029." I think that just needs to be corrected, as to when that
40 would happen, like if it's 2029 or some other year. I think that's
41 what needs-- that's what Jason is suggesting needs modification.
42 Not the ultimate recommendation, which is that last underlined
43 part, "using proxy-MSY as a constant catch value."

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

46
47 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** My question in part is, how is that influencing
48 the rationale for the ABC and OFL recommendations that they've

1 provided, that instead because the three-year average ABC will
2 exceed the proxy. Instead, we want to recommend this other value.
3 And for me, it creates a little bit of confusion because the 2022
4 to 2024 average landings, right, are above all of those values and
5 were included in the assessment when the assessment concluded that
6 there's no overfishing and the stock is not overfished. So, to
7 recommend using that proxy rather than some other alternative ABC
8 and OFL value, it would just be helpful to have some more rationale
9 from them, I think, about how that determine-- the basis for that
10 recommendation.

11
12 Go ahead, Tony.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony?

15
16 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, for the record. I'm just
17 curious to know how we are going to move from where we were an
18 overfish stock to now not overfishing. The point I am trying to
19 make is how easily one could be swayed from one position to the
20 next. If this survey was not done-- or study or however you want
21 to call this, this process that we just went through was not done,
22 Puerto Rico would have suffered a shortened season again. OAO.
23 Let's say they would have been called out again and suffered some
24 restrictions. That's my terminology. So, I'm just a little curious
25 about how we could make such a big mistake.

26
27 Because now I'm questioning how much time before this happened?
28 So, from taking one piece of information and plugging it in, we've
29 gone from overfishing to not overfishing. Until the end of the
30 day, when we make mistakes here at this table, you know who suffer?
31 Me, Mr. Magras, Salvador. The guys that are actually in the fishery
32 or participating in the fishery. Not the guys sitting down at this
33 table, some of us.

34
35 So, I'm just a little curious because I sit down here saying, we
36 want to put reductions on Puerto Rico for a fishery that is now
37 not suffering overfishing. So, once again, I ask myself, how much
38 time are we going to make this boo-boo? That somebody had to pay
39 the price for something that was not theirs to pay.

40
41 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. Blanchard, the way this goes is
42 that the more information we get, the more recent information
43 becomes further analyzed. Okay? So, this is an ongoing process.

44
45 And, yes, we went from an overfish to an underfish based on new
46 data, based on new analysis, and based on an advancement of the
47 SS3 modeling. That's the way it goes.

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** John?

2
3 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Many years ago, there were many things that we
4 didn't know were bad for us that now we know are bad for us. I
5 mean, smoking wasn't bad for us fifty years ago. So, we do learn,
6 and this is not just one new piece of information. I think we
7 really need to reinforce the value of a long time series of an
8 index. And that's what this is.

9
10 This is not just one year. This is, if we look at that time series
11 that Kevin presented, a long-time series of information. And now
12 we've got the capacity to incorporate it into the stock assessment,
13 and we see the value that provided. And when we say that we need
14 indices for a lot of the stocks, that's what it provides because
15 otherwise, our stock assessments are largely static.

16
17 They're looking at the long-term catches and then saying that's
18 essentially what we can get out of the stock. And I agree. We don't
19 necessarily know what we can get out of these stocks till the
20 indices tell us that we've caught this and the index continued to
21 go up. And that's what this did. We caught more than we than the
22 OFL before, previous OFL, and the index still went up. That is
23 telling the model, oh, there's more lobster out there than we
24 previously thought.

25
26 So, it's not just one new piece of information. It's a critical
27 time series of information. And I think that's what we want to get
28 for, ideally, more of our species so that we have that feedback.
29 And then we really want to develop fishery-independent indices
30 because then we know that we don't have to rely on the fishery
31 staying constant because we know the fisheries are going to change.
32 And so, that's really the goal for us is to get those long-term
33 surveys. And we're getting them with a number of the other
34 initiatives NCRMP and the deepwater snapper survey so that we're
35 building those long time series.

36
37 And you're probably going to see stock assessments change based on
38 getting that long time series, and they should change based on
39 that. Good point.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?

42
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Let me just follow up here. This was what
44 I was talking about earlier in the meeting when I said, how far
45 back do we actually have to look to get good information, and what,
46 realistically, can we ask the fishery to produce it now with the
47 circumstances that surround us.

1 I do believe going back to a certain period of time, but when you
2 start to plug in too much information into something, it becomes
3 so complex that it just goes out of whack, in my opinion.

4
5 Because to be honest with you, as a fisherman, and I sit on here
6 and watch this screen sometimes, and you have all these graphs and
7 all these different ways of dealing with fishery and how you figure
8 it work and how it doesn't work. I am totally confused sometimes,
9 and I'm saying to myself, logically, this doesn't make no sense to
10 me. I am trusting somebody to plug information up there and write
11 down a bunch of numbers, and I have to believe in it.

12
13 That's how it looks from my standpoint sometimes. And some people
14 may say that, hey, you are a little crazy. But you know what?
15 Sometimes a little crazy is good because, I mean, I don't trust
16 anybody. So, I have to be the tenth man out here, and I go look
17 from at this whole thing here from a whole different angle. So,
18 when I have to ask the question, I am going to ask the question
19 because I'm not afraid to ask. I am not afraid to push.

20
21 So, if I run, you point me in the right direction so I could see
22 for myself because I am not following a blind man. And sometimes
23 I think that's what it is. We plug up numbers here, and I understand
24 it works for you because you think differently. A man that has
25 done this all his life, not looking at this, says it don't make no
26 sense. And I am sure Mr. Magras would back me on that statement
27 because we don't deal with anything like this. We don't deal with
28 these kinds of numbers and graphs and all of that. We deal by going
29 out there and adjusting to what comes in. That's what we deal with.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

32
33 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, just to
34 piggyback a little bit on what tony said. I have seen over and
35 over on many occasions from attending more meetings than Mr.
36 Blanchard has attended because the DAP members actually get to see
37 everything that a lot of the Council Members only get it in
38 reports. We are actually involved in those meetings. So, we are a
39 little bit more-- I don't want to use the word educated, but we
40 are a little bit more familiar with the process.

41
42 What I see happens a lot of times in the meetings is we are trying
43 to create a model that's going to fit the data. And we always run
44 into a lot, a lot of issues trying to make the data fit the model
45 or the model fit the data. Here's a perfect example. From what I
46 just understand is that we didn't do it right before, or we weren't
47 doing it to come up with the correct numbers for Puerto Rico.
48 Puerto Rico has taken, what?, three closures already.

1
2 So, how do we credit the fishermen of Puerto Rico back for not
3 getting the job done correctly? We want to correct it going
4 forward, but we don't want to go credit the fishers back for what
5 they lost already. They went days or months with closures of lost
6 income. We, here at the table, not the fishers, don't lose income.
7 We're still paid. So, this is where it becomes a problem. So, I
8 just want to leave that statement there, then you guys can
9 elaborate if you have to or if you want to.

10
11 And then, the next problem. Vance, thank you for excellent report.
12 But a problem that I just had with this SSC meeting that took place
13 is the three of us were trying to get our hands up to say something,
14 and we never were recognized to say anything. Every time we press
15 the button, "the host will get back to you." "The host will get
16 back to you." Well, this is a problem. This is our fishery. We
17 want to speak about it. I understand there's a budget issue, but
18 out of all the meetings that we try not to do in person anymore,
19 the most important meeting besides the actual Council meeting is
20 the SSC meeting.

21
22 That meeting needs to be an in-person meeting because more is
23 accomplished around the table during breaks, after the meeting, or
24 before the meeting with the side meetings, if that makes sense to
25 everyone. How this just took place, I couldn't talk to advance. I
26 couldn't talk to none of the scientists, nothing. So, I have been
27 told over and over by many of the scientists at the table, "Oh,
28 well, we didn't know that. Your input made us look at things
29 differently. We would have gone a different way if we didn't
30 understand that information from the fishers."

31
32 That's why it's very important that we need to try to get back the
33 SSC as a in-person meeting. Find some way, somehow, talk with
34 powers that be about at least that one meeting, the SSC meeting
35 that takes place two-to-three times a year that that is an in-
36 person meeting.

37
38 We're not looking for a vacation. What we're looking for is the
39 future of our fishery and our fishermen and our people. And it's
40 very, very important that this takes place. So, those are my
41 comments. If anybody wants to elaborate on anything that I said,
42 I'm open to respond back.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, while I have a lot of questions about the
47 motion and the recommendation they made, I don't necessarily
48 interpret this to mean, the model was wrong. To me, what I'm

1 reading is when they incorporated the additional abundance indices
2 information, right, we're seeing that recruitment has been really
3 high, and that's pushed stock biomass above target levels. So,
4 we've got really high biomass levels right now and there are
5 different options for ABCs and OFLs and fishing mortality rates
6 when that happens. Right?

7
8 The SSC is recommending that we use a constant catch value at a
9 lower level, which means if we did something like that we wouldn't
10 have to bring down catches in subsequent years, but they would
11 come down now. We'd be fishing, and there'd be more stability in
12 the fishery. But understanding that recruitment's high right now,
13 we can also be fishing at a higher level if we had the ABC and OFL
14 that would support that until biomass comes back down to target
15 level.

16
17 So, those are the kinds of questions I had about what they
18 recommended and the rationale that they used to recommend the MSY
19 SPR values. And I would just like to hear more about that rationale
20 and also ask them to consider some other strategies that wouldn't
21 be necessarily inconsistent with, right now, where our landings
22 are. Right? Right now, we have landings above both the OFL and ABC
23 values and a stock assessment that concludes overfishing, and--
24 Overfishing hasn't been occurring, and the stock wasn't overfished
25 during the same years.

26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. I have the memo from Andy, and we are
28 discussing this up and down. But, when on the agenda can we take
29 final action regarding the spiny lobster? And when are we going to
30 be ready with this today to take that action?

31
32 The other thing that he wanted, and we discussed yesterday, is the
33 spiny lobster. The SSC will provide an update on the stock
34 assessment, etcetera.

35
36 So, Heather, are we ready to discuss that at this time, or do we
37 have to wait for another presentation?

38
39 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, General Counsel's Office.
40 There's nothing for the Council to act on today with regard to
41 spiny lobster Puerto Rico, but you have the SSC making a
42 recommendation on an ABC level. And if that gets accepted, you
43 will not be able to have an ACL higher than that ABC.

44
45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mhmm.

1 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, what Heather is telling everybody here
2 is that landings are currently higher than that value, and she is
3 suggesting that perhaps it's appropriate to ask the SSC for a
4 little bit more rationale for why they recommended the approach
5 that they did and perhaps see if there's other alternatives.
6 Because it does sound there's a higher biomass that can sustain an
7 elevated level of fishing. But if you accept the ABC that's been
8 presented, that's going to really constrain future options for the
9 Council.

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's my point. If we have that motion, then we
12 can move forward, right, rather than keep going around the same
13 thing. And the motion has to be put on the screen.

14
15 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, I do have a couple of motions I can put forward
16 if there are seconds, and the Council would like to weigh in on
17 them.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We need a new screen.

20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Me avisan cuando estén listos? Heather, you have
22 them already in writing? You can send it to us. Oh, she's got it?
23 Yeah.

24
25 No, she already has them. You can send it to me, and I'll send it
26 to Cristina. Ya la tiene, pues ponga la primera. Okay. Yeah, she
27 got it. No, she got it there. You can read it for the record.

28
29 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. The first motion is the Council requests the
30 SSC to provide additional rationale for their recommendation to
31 derive OFL and ABC from the 30% MSY proxy considering the
32 assessment concluded-- I wanted to add, --considering the Puerto
33 Rico spiny lobster assessment, just to be clear.

34
35 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Where should we add--

36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** There.

38
39 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Yeah.

40
41 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Concluded that overfishing was not occurring in
42 recent years, which are 2022 to '24 when landings exceeded the
43 current OFL.

44
45 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second, Tony.

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Discussion. Further discussion about the motion.
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? Blanchard?

2
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, my rationale for this thing here is
4 because what just occurred, we went from one, from being overfished
5 to now not being overfished, basically. Got me sitting down in my
6 chair here sitting down, thinking what other options we're going
7 to get on table. So, I want to see this explored, to see what other
8 options we're going to be able to look at, before I agree to
9 anything. That's my rationale.

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mira, a ver si hay alguien más que quiere decir
12 algo, y llama el roll call.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

15
16 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. Yes. Thank you
17 for that, Tony. I just want to follow-up that, as Julian mentioned,
18 that they were not able to make any comments on that SSC meeting,
19 I think it is very important to us, as the Council, to have all
20 the information, especially with this presentation before the
21 meeting so that we can do our homework as well and check all this
22 information that is just presented here today. Thank you, Heather,
23 for this motion.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

26
27 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Kevin McCarthy. So, I'm not
28 in the Council, obviously, but I think we've got a wording issue
29 here. So, it's not 30% MSY proxy. It's sort of out of order there.

30
31 I think what you want to do is refer to this as MSY 30% SPR or
32 even better, the long-term equilibrium proxy for MSY, parenthesis,
33 30% SPR.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait.

36
37 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** We can send you that. We can send you that. It's
38 just not--

39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I know. I'm glad you're not a Council member.

41
42 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** It's just incorrect.

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But, yeah, she made the change. So, do you
45 agree with that, Heather? You are the owner of it. y le quita el
46 MSY 30%.

47
48 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So MSY proxy. That's fine. I would have put 30% in

1 front of SPR, but that's works too.
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay, Heather. You have to check it and read it
4 again if you agree with the language.
5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?
7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Espérate, no, tiene que leerla primero antes de
9 seguir discutiendo.
10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the new motion is, *"The Council*
12 *requests the SSC to provide additional rationale for their*
13 *recommendation to derive OFL (502,387 lbs.) and ABC (443,062 lbs.)*
14 *from the MSY proxy 30% SPR, considering the Puerto Rico spiny*
15 *lobster assessment concluded overfishing was not occurring in*
16 *recent years (2022-2024) when landings (571,265 lbs.) exceeded the*
17 *current OFL (426,858 lbs.)"*
18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Motion by Heather Blough and second by Tony
20 Blanchard.
21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Heather Blough, seconded by Blanchard.
23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Heather wants to says something and then tienes
25 a Ricardo.
26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?
28
29 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one more edit. If we
30 could insert "average" before "landings." "When average landings
31 exceeded the current OFL."
32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Ricardo?
34
35 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** You, Mr. Chairman. No comment.
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Roll call vote. So, I'm doing a roll call vote.
38 I'll start on my right with Sabater.
39
40 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.
41
42 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yes.
43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.
45
46 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.
47
48 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.

1
2 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, yes.

3
4 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard, yes.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, hearing no nays or abstains, *motion carries*.

7
8 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** May I present the second motion? Okay.

9
10 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah, go ahead.

11
12 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, this motion reads, "*The Council requests that the SSC consider alternative approaches for setting the Puerto Rico spiny lobster OFL and ABC, including setting variable OFLs and ABCs that are consistent with the predicted values from the assessment to achieve optimum yield while stock biomass is above the target level. And if I can get a second, I'll just say a little bit more about that.*"

13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Heather, seconded by Vanessa. Any discussion? Heather?

23
24
25 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Vanessa. So, this motion is just to ask the SSC reconsider. I talked about how the assessment is showing that the stock is above target biomass at present because of the high recruitment levels we're seeing in the fishery, and the constant catch value that they recommended would require us to immediately bring down fishing mortality so that we're not overfishing, which would require closures and other measures to bring the catches down. And so, to also consider, as an alternative, giving us variable OFLs and ABCs while the stock biomass is at that higher level that would allow us to achieve optimum yield and take advantage of those higher yields, while recruitment is high.

26
27
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36
37
38 I'll just add that this could ultimately end up with us having to reduce harvest in the future, right, if we did something like started with higher mortality rates now as recruitment comes down. So, the benefits of constant catch is stability, we might bring them down now, but they would have to stay at that level versus, looking at an alternative approach like this.

39
40
41
42
43
44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion, john?

46
47 **JOHN WALTER, III:** I'm not in the Council, but I have seen the opposite. So, this is a really positive situation, and I think we

1 really should recognize it as a positive. In a lot of other
2 regions, we have the opposite where recent recruitment is really
3 down. So, the SSCs often choose to use recent recruitment to
4 develop ABC and OFL advice under the situation where recruitment
5 in recent years is low. This is the opposite and a positive one.

6
7 So, SSCs could choose the recent recruitment, which is high. And
8 I think that's the question of it being asked of the SSC just for
9 the rationale there. So, I think it's a good situation to have un
10 some of the ones we've seen in the South Atlantic. Thanks.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? Okay. So, we're going to
13 do a roll call vote again. This time I am going to start on my
14 left with Blanchard.

15
16 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard. Yes.

17
18 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, yes.

19
20 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.

21
22 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.

25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

27
28 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, all in-- Unanimous vote. All in favor,
31 no abstentions and no nays. *Motion passes unanimously.*

32
33 So, next on the agenda we have-- we finished with Vance. Right?
34 Okay. Next on the agenda, we have the Review on Final Action for
35 Framework Action 4 to the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John
36 FMPs to Revise Spiny Lobster Reference Points Based on SEDAR 91.
37 Then this is going to be by Sarah.

38
39 Kevin?

40
41 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Did the Council need to do
42 anything about SEDAR 84? Were there anything-- Talk to me about
43 what the next part of that process is. You've had stock assessments
44 reviewed by the SSC. They've made some recommendations. Does the
45 Council not then have to take action?

46
47 I mean, the recommendation was best available science, however,
48 not useful at this time to inform management, which I think,

1 correct me if I'm wrong, but I think means the status quo continues
2 for those species. I don't know if the Council needs to do anything
3 about that. I'm just asking for my own-- so that we don't miss
4 something and so I understand the process.

5
6 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** There's nothing that the Council needs to
7 do. I don't remember all the recommendations from the SSC whether
8 there was anything that could improve upon SEDAR 84 to make that
9 suitable for management advice. But, yeah, as it stands now, it's
10 best available but not suitable for management advice, so you
11 wouldn't make decisions based on it. But if there's something more
12 that can be done with it to make it suitable, that would be
13 appropriate. But I don't remember what those recommendations were.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

16
17 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks, Kevin McCarthy. Yeah. I don't recall that
18 there were specific recommendations. There were certainly
19 recommendations coming from the SSC, but those were more long term,
20 larger issue kinds of things, generally speaking. Correct me if
21 I'm wrong, Vance.

22
23 So, I just wanted to make sure that we're making sure we take care
24 of everything before we move on to the next thing. I'm not
25 suggesting you all get into a big, long discussion about it. I
26 just want to make sure we-- you all took care of whatever needed
27 to happen for 84 to be finalized. Thanks.

28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The Council, at this time, said let the record
30 show that we consider 84 in the report by the SSC. And at this
31 time, we don't need any further action.

32
33 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do think that's a good
34 question. I don't think we need additional action on 84, but should
35 we talk about-- so we just recommended the SSC, right, provide
36 some additional rationale and consider other alternatives for 91.
37 Should we talk about the timeline for that?

38
39 We will need to start a Framework Action for SEDAR 91 to revise
40 OFIs and ABCs. Do we want to have the SSC meet between now and the
41 next meeting so that we could start the framework action for
42 amendment 91? The August meeting is--

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. It's a little different from what Kevin was
45 addressing. But we were discussing if we want to do that before,
46 I mean, meeting the SSC forty days before the meeting, the SSC. We
47 need to have that agenda, and we have a couple of topics. Graciela,
48 you can put that together, the agenda for the SSC based on the

1 discussions that we had today and maybe tomorrow. So, we can have
2 a meeting to address those concerns of the Council, and we can
3 report back at the Council meeting in August. I guess that follows
4 your-- Okay. Gracias.

5
6 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, staff and staff from the Science
7 Center need to work on the timeline of when things can happen and
8 then we need the availability of the SSC to set everything up and
9 the forty days plus the twenty-three days for the SSC agenda to be
10 accomplished. So, we'll be working on that.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And if I may, Mr. Chairman, we already told the
13 SSC what we want when we discussed this. We don't have to populate
14 the whole agenda, one day agenda with a lot of stuff at the same
15 time. But I follow your way of thinking, and we can report to the
16 Council.

17
18 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So right now, that would be the only thing
19 that we would have for the SSC. SEDAR 103 is running, so that would
20 be the next thing. And, actually, that would also involve EBFM
21 Technical Advisory Panel, to be involved when that comes to the
22 table for discussion.

23
24 Now part of what the SSC does is that it provides recommendations
25 of what to do, what to look at, etcetera, for SEDAR 84. So, the
26 Council has had research priority starting in 2023, and we have
27 been adding addendums from the SSC as we move along.

28
29 So, if it's the desire of the Council to do that, we'll add another
30 addendum, and then we pass that information over to the Science
31 Center and to the Regional Office, so that everyone is on the same
32 page.

33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Well, let's do something. Draft an agenda,
35 circulate an agenda among the Council, make sure that we cover all
36 the bases. Especially the Regional Office and the Center, make
37 sure that we are all, as you say, on the same page. And then mid-
38 September, we need to plan for that meeting this month if you want
39 it in the summer.

40
41 So, we report back to you on the development of the schedule.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we got that done. We'll continue with
44 the agenda and the Review on Final Action for Framework Action 4
45 to the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John FMPs Spiny Lobster
46 Reference Points. Sarah Stephenson.

47
48 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. Okay. Hi.

3
4 **FRAMEWORK ACTION 4 TO THE ST. CROIX AND ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN FMPS**
5 **TO REVISE SPINY LOBSTER REFERENCE POINTS BASED ON SEDAR 91—SARAH**
6 **STEPHENSON, NOAA FISHERIES, SERO**
7

8 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yes. I'm Sarah Stephenson. Cristina's going
9 to drive for me. Thank you, Cristina. I'm going to present on the
10 results of SEDAR 91 for Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John.
11 So, the stock assessments that we're updating reference points for
12 spiny lobster in those two islands. So, I know the numbers are the
13 same, and I just wanted to be clear that these are just for the
14 U.S.V.I. Next, please.

15
16 As a quick reminder background, both the Saint Croix fishery
17 management plan and the Saint Thomas/Saint John fishery management
18 plan set status determination criteria and management reference
19 points for spiny lobster. To do that, they used Tier 4a of the
20 acceptable biological catch control rule that was included in each
21 FMP.

22
23 Tier 4 meant that it was data limited with no available stock
24 assessment, and the "a" part meant that the stock was not
25 vulnerable to fishing pressure. So, that's how they kind of
26 determined, where spiny lobster fell. And from that process, the
27 SSC recommended ABCs, and the Council took those ABCs and set the
28 ACL equal to 95% of those values.

29
30 Then we had our first stock assessment, SEDAR 57, for spiny
31 lobster, and we updated management reference points for lobster
32 using Tier 3 of the control rule. And then, again, a couple years
33 later we updated those same numbers just during an update
34 assessment.

35
36 And so, those new numbers are reflected in the Council document
37 Framework Amendment 1 and then Framework Amendment 2. And the table
38 here shows you what's currently in place for spiny lobster for
39 each FMP, and that, again, correlates to Framework 2. So, you can
40 see all of the numbers for the overfishing limit, the acceptable
41 biological catch, and the annual catch limits that are in place
42 right now for Saint Croix, spiny lobster, and Saint Thomas and
43 Saint John.

44
45 I put a little asterisk here by Saint Thomas/Saint John because I
46 wanted to point out that the value that's included in the draft
47 document that was included in the briefing book for this Framework
48 is incorrect. It says, 159,993. But this value here in the

1 presentation is the correct number, and we will fix that between
2 this version and the next version that you see. Next slide, please.

3
4 The proposed updates that are included in Framework Action 4 for
5 spiny lobster are based on the SEDAR 91 stock assessment, which
6 the SSC reviewed back in September of last year. They determined
7 them both appropriate for management use and recommended updated
8 ABCs.

9
10 So, the models used commercial landings and length data to
11 understand the productivity of the stocks, like how productive
12 they are, how big they are, and from that produced the overfishing
13 limit and the acceptable biological catch values that are designed
14 to keep each stock at its most productive. So, that's what the
15 assessment set out to do, and that's these are the numbers in the
16 table that were recommended for the overfishing limit and the
17 acceptable biological catch.

18
19 The Council was given that same SSC Chair presentation with these
20 numbers at the December Council meeting, and they agreed and asked
21 staff to develop a Framework Action to set annual catch limits
22 using, no buffer, between the ACL and the ABC, a 5% buffer and a
23 10% buffer. And so, that's what's included in the Framework Action,
24 and that's what we'll be kind of reviewing today, those
25 alternatives for setting the catch limits. Next slide.

26
27 I got a little ahead of myself. At this meeting, we're not going
28 to review the document itself, but we're going to review the
29 proposed alternatives and some of the effects of those alternatives
30 for modifying the spiny lobster reference points, again, based on
31 the SEDAR 91 stock assessment for the U.S.V.I., FMPs. So, through
32 this framework action, you're going to set annual catch limits for
33 spiny lobster based on those recommended ABC values that we saw
34 back in December and then decide on what level of management
35 uncertainty buffer you have for the Saint Croix spiny lobster and
36 for Saint Thomas/Saint John spiny lobster.

37
38 And just to kind of remind you what the management uncertainty
39 buffer is because there is a scientific uncertainty buffer that
40 the SSC considers, but you have a management uncertainty buffer
41 that kind of reflects your uncertainty to constrain the catch to
42 the catch limits that we set. So, we don't want those ACLs to be
43 exceeded. We do want them fishing right up to them, but we don't
44 want them exceeded. So, what kind of uncertainty do you have in
45 the fishery around being able to do that?

46
47 And then, of course, is there any uncertainty in knowing the true
48 catch amounts? Are they overreporting, underreporting? Are they--

1 that's what we call estimation errors. So, again, just if there's
2 any uncertainty by the Council, for either of these two stocks,
3 that's the management uncertainty buffer you want to select. And
4 then, with that, of course, what's your rationale for that? I don't
5 think I put that anywhere in here, but we really want to hear, if
6 you if you pick an alternative, always give us the rationale so we
7 can document that.

8
9 And then lastly, you can select a preferred alternative for setting
10 the catch limit. You can pick the same one. You can pick a different
11 one. That's a benefit of having these individual island FMPs is
12 that you can tailor your management to the respective island. Next
13 slide, please.

14
15 We include this in almost every presentation that we do for
16 Framework Actions or Plan Amendments because it really tells you
17 what we're doing and why we're doing it. So, what are we doing? We
18 are updating status determination criteria and management
19 reference points for lobster under both the Saint Croix FMP and
20 the Saint Thomas/Saint John FMP to ensure that management is
21 consistent with the most recent spiny lobster stock assessment,
22 that's SEDAR 91, and recommendations from the Council's SSC. That's
23 the acceptable biological catch that they recommended.

24
25 Why are we doing it? The need for this action is to ensure that
26 management measures for spiny lobster are based on the best
27 scientific information available, to prevent overfishing and
28 achieve optimal yield in accordance with requirements from the
29 Magnuson-Stevens Act. Next slide, please.

30
31 This is a lot, but I kind of wanted to be aware of what was
32 requested at the previous meeting. These are huge terms, big
33 numbers, acronyms, all of that. So, I tried to explain, and these
34 definitions are included in the document. They're in an appendix,
35 kind of a glossary of terms to try to help you understand. So,
36 first off, Framework Action 4 is going to update the status
37 determination criteria and management reference point value. So,
38 it's not changing the formula that the control rule uses to do
39 that. It's just updating the numbers. So, I wanted to make that
40 kind of clear too.

41
42 So, the assessments recommend a new maximum sustainable yield
43 proxy. I think we've been talking about it a lot. It's 30% SPR.
44 And so, that's just the longest-- I'm sorry, the largest long-term
45 average catch that can be taken from a stock under the current
46 conditions and fishing characteristics. So, that's kind of what
47 that is. It's the size of the stock long term, like much you can
48 take from it.

1
2 And then your maximum fishing mortality threshold, that's another
3 one. And this one, I've underlined the word overfishing because I
4 wanted to try to tell you or show you the terms that align with
5 what's a status determination criterion versus maybe just a
6 management reference point, like a reference point. So, the
7 overfishing, the maximum fishing mortality threshold, that's the
8 point that we compare to look at is overfishing occurring. So,
9 it's the level of fishing mortality per year, above which-- so if
10 your number is larger than, say, one, you're going to be undergoing
11 overfishing. And please, Science Staff, if I say anything wrong,
12 please correct me.

13
14 And then the last one is the minimum stock size threshold, and
15 this is your biomass. And this is linked to if the stock is
16 overfished or not. And so, those are the numbers that came out of
17 the assessment that will just be updated. They don't get put in
18 the regulations. They're just kind of a part of the Framework
19 Action, and they'll stay static until they're updated again. So,
20 those are those terms. Next slide, please. It's just a divider.

21
22 Now we're going to look island by island. So, Action 1 is specific
23 to Saint Croix. Action 2 is specific to Saint Thomas and Saint
24 John. They're going to kind of mirror. The next few slides will
25 mirror what we do for each island. So, hopefully, it'll be familiar
26 by the time we get to Saint Thomas. Next slide.

27
28 The Framework Action includes four Alternatives. The number one is
29 always no action, do nothing, stick with what you have. And so, it
30 shows you there that if you do nothing, you're going to keep the
31 numbers that are in place now. The spiny lobster catch limit for
32 Saint Croix was set equal to 95% of the recommended ABC, and
33 there's that value. So, the catch limit equals 137,254.

34
35 Alternative 2 is going to update the values for OFL and ABC, and
36 then the Council is going to choose to set the ACL, the annual
37 catch limit, equal to the recommended ABC under this Alternative.
38 So, the catch limit for spiny lobster in Saint Croix under this
39 one would equal 186,063. Alternative 3 uses a 5% uncertainty
40 buffer, and so it sets the catch limit equal to 95% of the
41 recommended ABC. And so, the annual catch limit under this one
42 would equal a 176,760 pounds. And then finally, Alternative 4 is
43 going to set the ACL equal to 90% of the recommended ABC, and so
44 that catch limit would equal 167,457 pounds. Next slide.

45
46 This figure is not included in the draft document, but it includes
47 all of the values that are. So, I tried to put a visual
48 representation of the current landings, which are included in

chapter three if you're looking for them, what the current ACL is, the current catch limit for spiny lobster, and then what are each of the proposed catch limits based on the no uncertainty buffer, a 5% and a 10%. And then, of course, we also wanted to kind of show you where everything is in relation to the five-year average landings from the period of 2020 to 2024, because that's kind of used in the analysis of the action.

So, showing you this and walking through it, for spiny lobster and Saint Croix, you can see that the annual landings are well below the current ACL, which is that solid black line, just slightly under the 150,000 mark. And then all three of the proposed Alternatives are above the current ACL, and you can see how they relate to each other from the ACL equaling the ABC to equaling 95%, which is the great-- sorry. Equal to is the blue line. Equal to 95% of the recommended ABC is the green line. And then finally, equal to 90% of the ABC is the pink line.

So, you can kind of see there's already kind of a natural large buffer just in how they're fishing to the current catch limit and then the proposed one. And then, again, down below, if you wanted to see the actual landings and numbers there in table 3.1 in the document. Next slide.

So, then the other thing we want to do is kind of compare the effects of each of the alternatives, biological and ecological effects, so effects to the stock. social and ecological effects to the fishermen. And then administrative, and that would be effects to the managers and regulators.

And so, if you do nothing, if you keep what you have, there would be no changes to the reference points, but it would not be based on best scientific information. And one of our kind of mandates under the Magnuson-Stevens Act is that we do kind of base things on best scientific information. The SSC did recommend these as such back in December, and so we really want to conform to that.

So, for biological/ecological effects for Saint Croix. You could have potential long-term negative effects from not managing reference to reference points that are based on best scientific information. As we just showed, the landings are very low, so that's probably going to be on the low side. But that is the potential. If you're not managing to the best scientific information, you could not be managing sustainably.

For social and ecological, you're really not going to have any short-term effects because nothing would change. But for Saint Croix, if fishing levels increased above the current ACL, then you

1 might have more long-term negative effects. For example, negative
2 effects for the fishers are going to be decreased income or fishing
3 opportunities. And those are going to be because you're not using
4 reference points that are based on best scientific.

5
6 And then, of course, administrative. There's really no effect if
7 we're not changing anything. Next slide.

8
9 I've kind of lumped Alternatives two through four, altogether.
10 These are the ones that are going to be updating those overfishing
11 limits, acceptable biological catch, and annual catch limits,
12 based on the SEDAR 91 assessment.

13
14 So, for the biological/ecological, you're going to have short term
15 negative effects from increased removals, but that's only if the
16 fishers really start harvesting above the ACL that's proposed. So,
17 right now, there probably wouldn't be any short-term negative
18 effects, but we put it in there because that's analyzing the effect
19 of the Alternative. And then, again, you would have those long-
20 term positive effects from managing, based on best scientific
21 information. And then just out of the three Alternatives,
22 Alternative 4 does set the lowest catch limit. And so, with that
23 one, you would theoretically have more lobster left in the water.
24 So, it would be better for the biology of the stock.

25
26 From the socioeconomic perspective, you're going to have positive
27 effects from the potential increased revenues because, remember,
28 all three of these proposed alternatives are increasing the catch
29 limits above the current catch limit. So, you're going to have
30 positive potential there. And then, again, pointing out, but they
31 are fishing at a much lower level. So, the theoretical might not
32 be the actual. And then, again, Alternative 4 is going to provide
33 the smallest revenues gains, and that's because the ACL under that
34 is the smallest number.

35
36 And then administrative. You're going to have some short-term
37 effects from creating this framework amendment, administering, and
38 enforcing new regulations, and from any additional outreach
39 efforts that's needed to notify stakeholders of the changes. And,
40 generally, those administrative effects are equal across
41 Alternatives 2, 3, and 4. Next, please.

42
43 So, now we're going to walk through the same slides for Saint
44 Thomas/Saint John. Yes. Thank you.

45
46 So Alternative 1, again, does nothing, doesn't update anything.
47 The ACL would still be set at 95% of the previously recommended
48 ABC, and that's based on the SEDAR 57 update. And so, under that,

1 the catch limit is 133,207 pounds. Alternative 2, setting the catch
2 limit equal to the recommended ABC from SEDAR 91. The catch limit
3 would equal 132,964 pounds. So, there is a slight decrease.

4
5 Alternative three is going to set the catch limit equal to 95% of
6 the recommended ABC, and that ACL would equal 126,316 pounds. And
7 then finally, Alternative 4, setting the annual catch limit equal
8 to 90% of the recommended ABC sets that number at 119,668 pounds.
9 Next slide, please.

10
11 Same kind of layout as the landings for the last five years. And,
12 again, five years for what we have available. Obviously, not five
13 calendar years. But this is what we have available. This is what's
14 used in the Framework Action to analyze the alternatives. And so,
15 you can see the landings here are a lot closer to the current ACL,
16 which are very close together.

17
18 The black line at the top and the dotted dashed blue line are
19 almost right on top of each other. So, the solid black line is the
20 current ACL, and you can see that landings are increasing from
21 2020 to 2024. And they're getting close to that current slash--
22 actually, they're getting close to the green dashed line, which is
23 Alternative 3, and then close, to the current and the 5%-- I'm
24 sorry. The ACL is equal to the AC-- So, Alternative 2.

25
26 They are, in the last two years, you can see, the landings are
27 above the five-year average. They're also above the ACL that's
28 proposed in Alternative 4. So, again, these are all just proposed,
29 nothing's final yet. The Council needs to deliberate on that today
30 and make a decision. And if you want to see the landings numbers,
31 they're in table 3.9 in the Framework Action. Next slide, please.

32
33 Same concept here. If you do nothing, if you keep what's on in
34 place, no changes. And then, also, the current ACL is greater than
35 the acceptable biological catch that was recommended by the SSC
36 for SEDAR 91, which is inconsistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
37 The ACL cannot be greater than the recommended ABC.

38
39 So, this is another aspect of why Saint Thomas/Saint John, we
40 probably can't select alternative one because it's just
41 inconsistency with our mandates. We didn't see that for Saint
42 Croix, but we do see it for-- and so that's explained a little bit
43 more in the Framework Action when we're talking about all of the
44 effects of the action.

45
46 So, biological/ecological. There's the potential for negative
47 effects from not managing to reference points that are set using
48 best scientific. That's the same as it was for Saint Croix.

1 Social/ecological. No short-term effects because, again, there's
2 no changes to the current levels, but you are going to have those
3 long-- or you could potentially have the long-term negative effects
4 from not managing based on best science. And then, again,
5 administrative. No effects because we're not changing anything.
6 Next slide.

7
8 Alternatives 2 through 4, update the numbers based on SEDAR 91.
9 And, again, all three alternatives do have a reduction from the
10 current ACL.

11
12 So, for biological/ecological, what does that mean? You're going
13 to have maybe short-term positive effects from the decreased
14 removals. Again, that's assuming fishermen fish right up to the
15 ACL that they're allowed to. And that's because we're allowing
16 them to take less under these three alternatives. So, that means
17 that there's more lobster potentially left in the water. It's
18 better for biology. And then, again, long term positive effects
19 from using reference points that are based on best scientific
20 information. And out of the three proposed Alternatives, same
21 thing. Alternative 4 sets the lowest ACL, so it leaves the most
22 lobster in the water.

23
24 This one, for social/economics, is going to have negative effects
25 from decreased revenues and fishing opportunities. And those are
26 going to range from minimal under Alternative 2, and that's
27 because, if you remember the plot, those two lines were almost
28 right on top of each other. So, there's not a lot of change there.
29 But you're going to have moderate effects and then major effects,
30 social/economic effects, for Alternatives 2 and then 4. And, again,
31 that's just because of the amount of decrease in the proposed catch
32 limits for those two.

33
34 Administratively, you're going to have short-term effects from
35 creating, administering, and enforcing new regs and then from
36 additional outreach efforts. And then, additionally, if
37 Alternative 4 was selected, you remember it showed that that catch
38 level was below the 2023 and 2024 landings. So, there's a higher
39 likelihood that if that one was selected, if that Alternative was
40 selected, that future accountability measures, for spiny lobster,
41 the accountability measure is a fishing season reduction.

42
43 Those could be required if landings continue at that level that we
44 saw in 2023 or '24 or if they increase. And so, that's going to be
45 a potential-- that's also part of the why alternative four is going
46 to have major negative social and economic effects because it's
47 not just the decrease in the catch level. It's the potential for
48 that one to also trigger future catch accountability measures. So,

1 that's going to affect the fishers as well as the managers having
2 to do these closures and put those in place. Next slide, please.

3
4 So, now we're to the items and next steps. And so, for the rest of
5 this discussion, you can, if you're ready to, based on what was
6 presented, select a preferred alternative, for both Saint Croix
7 and Saint Thomas/Saint John lobster. Again, it can be the same
8 alternative, or it can be something different. You can, if you do
9 select it, then you could also review the regulatory text, and
10 that's just how the regulations are going to look in the future.
11 And, really, it's just kind of taking what's there and updating
12 the number for the annual catch limit.

13
14 There's not a lot that's included in this regulatory text. But we
15 did prepare it, and you could review it just to see how it's going
16 to look. And then you could, if you're, again, if you're ready,
17 approve Framework Action for submission to the Secretary of
18 Commerce. And then allow us-- we always make the motion to allow
19 staff to make minor editorial changes. For instance, I'll go in
20 there, and I'll fix that typo in that table. If we see any other
21 kind of grammatical or-- that's what we call minor.

22
23 And then the next step. So, over the summer, after we come home
24 and we start trying to finish it up, if you've recommended that
25 you submit it for the secretary's review, we're going to finalize
26 it, which we have to add some required analysis, which those are
27 chapters five and six. You'll see them in the draft document, and
28 it just says to be determined because those are regulatory economic
29 act analysis that we have to kind of always include with the
30 Framework Actions with any of our amendments. And so, we have to
31 populate those, our economists do, and that's what it means by
32 finalizing the amendment.

33
34 And then, once we have it all together, we send that back to the
35 Council Chair with the changes that were done. And if you'd like,
36 you give him the approval to accept those, and then the Council
37 would then submit it back to the NMFS to begin the rulemaking. And
38 so, that's going to probably be closer to the August time period,
39 when we would start the rulemaking process.

40
41 And so, during that, the public would have an opportunity to
42 comment on the proposed rule, and that would be announced in the
43 Federal Register, and we would do a fishery bulletin, which
44 Cristina would help us distribute to all of your stakeholders.

45
46 And I believe that's the last slide other than my "Thank you.
47 Question?" slide. So, with that, I'll stop and see if anybody has
48 any questions or wants to go back and discuss anything that I've

1 presented today. Thank you.

2
3 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel, then Vance.
6

7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The question is for María and Sarah. This is a
8 long presentation. But from this meeting, do we need, what? And
9 then can we go back to the specific slides so we can address that,
10 and the Council can discuss and vote on it?
11

12 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Are you asking what we need the Council to
13 make a decision on?
14

15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. At this time. Also, at the beginning, when
16 you were saying, the uncertainty of the Council, the management
17 uncertainty, we call that risk, because uncertainty is the sigma,
18 then the risk percentage is what the Council is supposed to--
19

20 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** So, you did already do that. You did, at the
21 December meeting, you selected the risk of overfishing. That's the
22 P*. You selected that already, and so that was included in the
23 document summary. You selected 0.45, which is kind of what you had
24 selected for the previous spiny lobster assessments.
25

26 So, you did already do that, so good job. Today, we need you to
27 decide which Alternative, of the ones presented, you prefer. If
28 there's one there that-- if there's a different one that you would
29 want us to add, then theoretically, we would take that back and
30 have to add that and analyze it. But these are generally the
31 standard ones that we do for most of our actions where we're
32 setting catch limits, the different management uncertainty
33 buffers. But you're definitely willing to choose a different buffer
34 if you'd like.
35

36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But at this time, where do we start?
37

38 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Thank you. This slide is a good starting
39 place. So, for Saint Croix, would you like to discuss between
40 Alternatives 2, 3, and 4? Also, try to maybe toggle between that
41 and the graph to familiarize yourself again with landings and where
42 those levels fall. Do you have-- can you make a motion to select
43 your preferred Alternative for Saint Croix?
44

45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. I'll leave that to the discretion of the
46 Council members. Which one do you want to call the preferred
47 alternative?
48

1 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
2 record. Already reviewing all the discussion that we have in the
3 December meeting and also with the report that the SSC presented,
4 I think that we are ready to present Action 1 and Alternative 2.
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That would need a second?
7

8 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I'll second the motion.
9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion? Blanchard?
11

12 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** (Mr. Blanchard's comments are inaudible
13 on the audio recording.)
14

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. The motion reads, "*The Council select*
16 *Action 1, Alternative 2 as a preferred. Update the Saint Croix*
17 *spiny lobster, OFL, and ABC values and set the ACL equal to the*
18 *recommended ABC of 186,063 pounds and the ACL would equal 186,063*
19 *pounds.*"
20

21 Discussion? Heather?
22

23 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Because of the current status quo regime has a 5%
24 buffer between the ABC and ACL to account for management
25 uncertainty. I just want to hear a little bit from Council members
26 about that and the rationale, if there's rationale for reducing
27 the size of that buffer from 5% to zero.
28

29 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, I could give you some rationale.
30 Just the mere fact of the error that we made earlier with Puerto
31 Rico. That's the rationale. And we are even meeting the ACLs right
32 now. So, why should this not fly? That's my question.
33

34 I mean, there could be something else happening here that this is
35 what's going on. But, I mean, until I could really see that there
36 is a problem, I could go with equal straight across the board.
37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think-- Nicole.
39

40 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** You can go ahead.
41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I was looking at this, and I was looking
43 at Alternative 3 because we don't know the recreational catch right
44 now. And I think I believe it'll take at least three years of data
45 collection from DPNR, with this new recreational license program
46 they have in place, to really get a hold of what's being removed
47 by the recreational sector. So, if this doesn't pass, then we'll
48 select-- and I'm speaking only for Saint Croix --to be Alternative

1 3, if this motion doesn't pan out. Because we don't have that
2 recreational data.

3
4 Nicole?

5
6 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, just for a reminder,
7 setting the ACL equal to 95% of the acceptable biological limit
8 means that we don't think there's any uncertainty in what we're
9 producing and that we know that all of our landings are accurate
10 and that all of our data is accurate. But first off, we aren't
11 including the recreational catch. Second, we know that there is
12 uncertainty in the landings, that we don't have good correction
13 factors. And as we collect more data, we want to ensure that there
14 is a buffer.

15
16 I would also point out that, at least for the Saint Croix decision,
17 this doesn't matter perhaps very much because we're nearly 90,000
18 pounds under our ACL. So, for DPNR and for the U.S.V.I., on this
19 specific motion, we are neutral.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I'm glad you made that point, Nicole, because I
22 was thinking the same thing that we're way below our ACL threshold.
23 So, I mean, I think we're doing pretty good, but we still don't
24 have that recreational data. Julian?

25
26 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras for the record. This is a question.
27 So, because we don't have the recreational information, presently,
28 this is all commercial that we are seeing that we are looking at
29 right now. So, wouldn't that mean that the fishery actually can be
30 harvested more once you plug those recreational numbers in because
31 they never were plugged in before compared to Puerto Rico where
32 they had prior recreational landings. So, this is a question for
33 Kevin and his team.

34
35 So, we had 100-- let's say, 150,000 pounds landed in the U.S. in
36 Saint Thomas right now. I use Saint Thomas as an example. But then
37 after collecting three years of recreational data, it shows that
38 the recreational is harvesting another 30,000 pounds. That would
39 bring us to 180,000 pounds. Wouldn't that reflect you resetting a
40 new ACL where it would include both recreational and commercial.

41
42 It shouldn't go towards what's the commercial guys are already
43 doing. So, this is a question that I need to get clarified.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** On that on that point, what I've been looking at
46 maybe in the future is that we separate recreational and commercial
47 ACLs. Because right now, the way it sits, if we go over our ACL,
48 which is commercial data, the recreational pays the piper. They

1 pay the price because they have to stop fishing if it's over
2 overrun. If we have separate ACLs, one for commercials, one for
3 recreational, then I think that would balance out a little more.
4 Miguel?

5
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** To that point, Mr. Chairman, we we're talking
7 about the future, and we have the presence right in front of you
8 here. The uncertainty that is created by science, the smaller the
9 uncertainty, the more risk you can take, which is P*. This is for
10 Saint Croix only.

11
12 What we are saying here is given the situation that we have, the
13 preferred alternative-- and this is for public hearings, by the
14 way. This is nothing that you are going to decide right now, and
15 it won't be set in stone. But, anyway, for Saint Croix spiny
16 lobster, the OFL and ABC values are set to the ACL equal to the
17 recommended ABC.

18
19 So, what you're saying is that you are certain of what you have,
20 and you are saying the ABC and the ACL, we trust them, and it could
21 be equal, because we are way under what the ACL could be. If this
22 is your rationale? Fine. You can vote on this one. But remember,
23 you have to review this whenever we have more information.

24
25 Regarding dividing the ACL between the commercial and the
26 recreational. Until you have recreational data, you cannot do that.
27 And that's the problem when we get the data, you penalize one
28 sector versus the other when you don't have the data. So, probably
29 Dr. Angeli is telling us that we may have that data in three years
30 because of the license. And you'll repeat that. So, probably at
31 that time, you will be able to review this.

32
33 But at this time, the question that is presented on the screen to
34 the Council voting members is whether you are, for lack of another
35 word, at ease with Alternative 2. Your preferred alternative.
36 Actually, the preferred alternative is not the one that's going to
37 be the final one, because you take these to public hearings, and
38 you may have people that will destroy this and provide you better
39 data, and you will have to go with another one.

40
41 But that's the question that we have here. Do you trust that the
42 language that you have in front of you is acceptable at this time
43 as a preferred alternative to be taken to public hearings?

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have someone with a raised hand over zoom.

46
47 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Sarah Stephenson.

1 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Well, I just wanted to answer Julian's
2 question about the ACLs and accountability measures. The way they
3 were set for both Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John, because
4 we only had commercial landings is that we set ACLs, but those
5 were to govern both the commercial and the recreational. So, we
6 don't have recreational landings. We only have commercial
7 landings.

8
9 We compare those to the ACL that was set, which was only based on
10 commercial landings. If there is an overage that's determined to
11 be a true overage and not because of enhanced reporting, and we
12 trigger and apply the accountability measure, then Carlos was
13 right, we close the portion of the fishing season to try to prevent
14 that catch limit from being exceeded again. But that closure
15 applies to everybody. So, we only have commercial landings as kind
16 of our lever. But then if we say, "Oops, there's a problem, they
17 exceeded, the hammer," if you will, it applies to everybody.

18
19 So, I hope that answers your question, Julian. So, if recreational
20 landings, all of a sudden, we get that data, what would have to
21 happen is we would have to go back and amend whichever fishery
22 management plan to now include recreational catch limits. What
23 would be specific just for them, and so that would require an
24 amendment. So, until that happens, we do want recreational data.
25 We do want things to improve, but it's not going to be an instant
26 plug and play. We'll have to do some heavy lifting to set
27 recreational catch limits.

28
29 SO, I hope that helps.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Heather, levanto la mano.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather.

34
35 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to clarify. I
36 believe where we are with this document is it won't go to public
37 hearings. This is final action. So, if we select preferreds--

38
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But no. That's--

40
41 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni. The Council can select
42 preferreds and tell the staff, "hey, now bring back the completed
43 document." As Sarah noted, there were additional sections that
44 haven't been written yet. They're required because they have to
45 analyze ultimately what's selected, and so the Council could bring
46 it back at a later time. They don't have to.

47
48 Sarah laid that out as well, but you would have to have public

1 comment before adopting the final.
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep.
4
5 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** The Council doesn't have to adopt the final
6 at this meeting. They could decide we're just selecting preferred
7 alternatives at this meeting.
8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.
10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, any further discussion, we'll take this to
12 a vote. I'll do a roll call. I'll start with, Sabater on my right.
13
14 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, no.
15
16 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.
17
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.
19
20 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, abstain.
21
22 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, no.
23
24 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, abstain.
25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, no.
27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, ¿qué pasó?
29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Two yays, three noes, and two abstentions.
31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Asegúrate que sumen a siete.
33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** *So, the motion fails.*
35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The motion is defeated. Motion fails.
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I'd to, for somebody, I can't do it, but I
39 would rather see Alternative 3.
40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Tú puedes decir que Vanessa sea Chair, y entonces
42 tú hablas sobre la tres y te explicas.
43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:**
45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank You, Mr. Chair. So, should we make a
47 substitute motion. A new motion. So the Council selects Action 1,
48 Alternative 3 as the preferred?

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿quién la presenta y quién la segunda?
3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We need a second?
5
6 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Angeli, second.
7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Discussion?
9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. ¿Quién la va a move? Necesitas a alguien que
11 move the motion. Oh, y otra que la segunde o
12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. The motion is to--
14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, we need the moving party. ¿Quién la presento?
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** It was Heather.
18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Por eso te digo. Tienes que decirlo para el
20 récord.
21
22 Is that your motion Heather?
23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Yeah.
25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, it wasn't her, but--
27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** It was!
29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** She made it for you.
31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You owe her something.[laughter]
35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you.[laughter]
37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Further discussion and voting.
39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** "The Council selects Action 1, Alternative 3 as
41 the preferred. Update the Saint Croix spiny lobster OFL and ABC
42 values and set the ACL equal to 95% of the recommended ABC of
43 186,063 pounds and the ACL would equal a 176,760 pounds."
44
45 Gerson?
46
47 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. DAP Chair of
48 Saint Croix. I agree with Action 1, Alternative 3.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Gerson. Any other discussion from the
3 Council on this alternative? And, of course, we're doing this
4 because we don't have the recreational data right now.
5
6 Any further discussion? Okay. I'll start roll call. I'll start on
7 my left this time. Tony Blanchard?
8
9 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yes.
10
11 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Angeli, yes.
12
13 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.
14
15 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Heather?
18
19 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.
20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.
22
23 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Unanimous vote. All in favor. No nays, no
26 abstentions. *Motion carries.*
27
28 Alright.
29
30 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** So, this is Sarah. When we're done with the
31 motion there, you could put the same alternatives for Saint
32 Thomas/Saint John, and go through the same process for them,
33 please.
34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Carlos, en el caso de San Tomas, ¿quieren la
36 primera, segunda o tercera?
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Saint Thomas?
39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Si, ahora van para San Tomas/San John. Pero
41 preguntale a Tony, que él es el council member de allá.
42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, it'll be for Saint Thomas/Saint John, spiny
44 lobster.
45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Cuál sería el preferred alternative?
47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Preferred alternative? I'll leave that to the

1 Saint Thomas sector.
2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?
4
5 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I'm asking for a five-minute break. I
6 need to think about this.
7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** All by yourself?
9
10 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** No. I Don't need help thinking for myself,
11 believe me.
12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** It's because we have a process. So, go ahead and
14 talk to the people. Digo, Mr. Chairman ¿usted aprobó eso o pasó
15 más? Yeah.
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Okay. So, we'll take a quick couple minute
18 pause here.
19
20 (WHEREUPON, A BRIEF RECESS WAS TAKEN.)
21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to get back to the Saint
23 Thomas/Saint John's OFL ABC ACL alternatives.
24
25 So, we're going to need a motion for the Saint Thomas/Saint John
26 spiny lobster.
27
28 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I won't necessarily see a motion, because
29 to be honest with you, I don't feel moving forward, at least not
30 in the direction the rest of the Council seems to want to move. My
31 approach is this, question number one, I think we need to revise
32 the ABCs and also have the same study done in Saint Thomas as was
33 done in Puerto Rico for the lobster recruitment before I make any
34 decision. That's my decision.
35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, I think we still need to address this.
37
38 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, I think that the motion should
39 be Alternative 2.
40
41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.
42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the promotion reads, "*The Council selects
44 Action two, Alternative 2 as the preferred. Update the Saint
45 Thomas/Saint John spiny lobster OFL and ABC values and set the ACL
46 equal to the recommended ABC of a 132,964 pounds. The ACL will
47 equal a 132,964.*"
48

1 Any more discussions? Blanchard.

2
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I have to agree to this alternative, and
4 I will give you the reasons why. Because this is the least damage,
5 in my opinion. So, this is damage control. But I would like to see
6 the same study that was done for recruitment in Puerto Rico, done
7 in the Virgin Islands before we make a final decision.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole, do you want to say something?

10
11 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, there are a few points of discussion I would
12 like to make. First off, as you can see in the document and the
13 draft, there are several fewer lobster fishers in the Saint
14 Thomas/Saint John district in recent years. And despite that, there
15 are increased landings.

16
17 I'm wondering if, as part of this motion, we could put in some
18 sort of clause that would protect us if we are going in a way that
19 we see landings are increasing a certain percentage consistently
20 over time to go back and look at recruitment, to go look back at
21 some of those unknown factors that maybe weren't incorporated into
22 the ABC at the time that it was assessed. And if so, that would
23 make this motion very palatable, and it would also help us protect
24 fisheries from accountability measures. It would help us protect
25 our stocks, and it would help us get better science on the table.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

28
29 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. I totally agree
30 with what Dr. Angeli just said. We could put a clause in there.
31 And to add to that clause, also, is our market because we are
32 market driven. And if our markets are doing well, our demands go
33 up, our numbers go up. When our markets are not doing well, the
34 numbers go down because the fishers scale back because we don't
35 export out of the Virgin Islands.

36
37 Over the last two years, we have seen an increase in landings. And
38 through discussions that I have had here shortly, because our
39 demands were up over the last two years, it is the reason why our
40 numbers have gone up. But I've seen prior to that, the numbers
41 down because we were still recovering from the hurricanes, and it
42 took a long time to build back up the restaurants and the hotels
43 and everything to start to get that demand for people to start to
44 come back to visit the islands, so the demand was lower.

45
46 Right now, with what's going on in the world, throughout the world,
47 with wars and everything, our tourism in the Virgin Islands has
48 greatly increased. I thought it might have been the opposite way,

1 but where the people can travel to these other places Europe or
2 wherever, I can name several places, they're coming to the
3 Caribbean Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico because we
4 are part of the U.S., and it's a safe haven for them to come and
5 enjoy their vacation still.

6
7 So, our demands right now are through the roof. So, all of that
8 means that, in some way, I agree, a nice clause to be put inside
9 of there for the buffer protection, I think it would be great. So,
10 Mr. Sabater, I know you made the motion. If you want to add that
11 clause, it would be greatly appreciated. And Vanessa second, if
12 you can support us in this, please. Thank you.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Whatever language you put there, it has to be
17 checked by Kate and the process that we have. Kate, do we have
18 some mechanism to have such a clause in this motion, or do we need
19 to have a substantive motion that includes that part?

20
21 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Well, the moving party and the secondary can
22 amend their own motion. I don't really understand what that clause
23 says, so I cannot help you with phrasing that. Because normally
24 the buffer is in the form of something-- yeah, something like
25 Alternative 3 or 4. So, I'm unable to help with that. But the
26 moving party can make their own changes.

27
28 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. So, maybe I'll have to have some folks,
29 especially science driven folks, help me a little bit with this.
30 But I think it would be something like we could keep this. The
31 Council selects Action 2 Alternative 2 as the preferred. Update
32 the Saint Thomas/Saint John spiny lobster OFL and ABC values and
33 set the ACL equal to the recommended ABC. The ACL would equal
34 132,964 pounds. But if landings consistently reach 2023-2024
35 landings and surpass those rates by 10% of those totals, the ABC
36 would be revisited through additional study-- or something that.

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Once you've set an ACL and you have it approved
39 in a management plan, you get the ball rolling. So, when you get
40 there, the ACL, you kick in the AMs, control measures. You cannot
41 stop it by saying, "No. Well, if we get there, let's see how much
42 we can get." That's why we need to make sure that whatever we put
43 here will-- [crosstalk]

44
45 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Mhmm. Mhmm. Mhmm.

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** --with the federal government. And that's why I
48 asked Kate, and she said that we needed to write something there,

1 and then she can tell us whether this will be acceptable or not
2 from the legal standpoint.

3
4 But I believe that what you're saying is that it will not be an
5 immediate AM kicking in when you reach the ACL for whatever reason.
6 But then you have to have the mechanism to allow you to do that.

7
8 María, you have a solution?

9
10 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I was just-- the way I interpreted it, and
11 Nicole, correct me if I'm wrong. When you say, "if landings
12 consistently reach 2023-2024 landings and surpass that by 10%,"
13 that doesn't mean that they're going to go over the ACL. Right?
14 So, you will still be under the ACL. So, that means it doesn't
15 trigger an AM, but it's showing a landings trend that is going
16 upwards. So, it needs some sort of verification and look into it
17 to see what's going on, and then the Council can ask the SSC to go
18 and revisit the ABC using perhaps an index of abundance or some
19 other tools that could be prepared for this matter. Am I correct?

20
21 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yes, correct. So, having something that in SEDAR
22 103 that would be specific to lobster abundance indices could be
23 one preferred option. But yes.

24
25 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, and then, again, I need some guidance here,
26 but perhaps instead of saying 2023-2024 landings, maybe say within
27 10% of the ACL or-- because you do want to fish to your ACL. You
28 just don't want to exceed it. So, perhaps you just want to say
29 something about-- yeah. Kind of like that. It's like, if we see
30 that the landings-- and I know this if this flies or not, but I'm
31 just trying to capture what Nicole is trying to say. --then this
32 will trigger something, some action from the Council, whether it
33 is to have the SSC look into it or something that.

34
35 So, we're not talking about accountability measures here. The way
36 that this is set right now, our accountability measures are not
37 changing. Right? You go over your ACL, if the landings are over
38 because of increased landing and not because of enhanced reporting,
39 etcetera, an AM will be triggered, and it needs to be applied. So,
40 that's a completely different thing. So, thank you.

41
42 Kate?

43
44 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni. Yeah. So, all the language
45 that's been added after the 132,964 pounds, everything else, that
46 would not be regulatory text. That would just be basically
47 direction that the Council knows this is what we've committed to
48 doing, which you could do in a separate motion. I mean, if you

1 feel you need to put all this in one to make it palatable, I
2 understand that.

3
4 But you could commit to revisiting the ABCs whenever you want. A
5 bit of an issue that you have right now is that the SSC has already
6 told you that you have adequate information suitable for management
7 advice. They're telling you what the ABC should be. So, not doing
8 something consistent with that runs afoul of the Magnuson-Stevens
9 Act. But anyway, like I said, you could keep them together, but
10 those don't necessarily have to go together.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Would that be like a catch target? Would that be
13 similar to a catch target, an ACT?

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, if I may, Mr. Chairman. The issue with this
16 is that-- I would go with what Kate said. If I were you, I would
17 have two separate motions just to make sure that you commit the
18 Council to do something when you get within that 10%. That's what
19 she's saying.

20
21 Let's say that when we get to that point, none of us will be here.
22 Either because we retire, get-- we are not going to be here. With
23 that motion, people sitting here will know what they are supposed
24 to do. With this other one, they can say, "Nah. We said that two
25 years ago. We won't do it anymore."

26
27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Yeah. Kevin?

29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Kevin McCarthy. So, we've
31 been chatting amongst ourselves back here, and let me offer this
32 up as a way that might take care of this, and you wouldn't have to
33 wrangle the language as much as you might. One option is you could--
34 - and I'm kicking myself for saying this. You could pause this. We
35 could go back, as we did with Puerto Rico, take a look at an index.
36 Because what you're really talking about when you're talking about
37 recruitment is an index of abundance. It's not the same thing, but
38 it informs the model about possible recruitment.

39
40 So, anyway, that jargon aside, we can put together an index for
41 Saint Thomas. We don't need to do it for Saint Croix. Saint Croix
42 is well at hand. You've already passed that motion. Things have
43 moved on. There are no guarantees about how this is going to come
44 out. So, let the chips fall where they may, but we'll put together
45 an index or maybe a couple of indices. We'll see what the data
46 looks like. And, also, there again, no promises. There are a lot
47 of things that you have to have. Like, it's not sufficient to say,
48 for example, catch per trip. That's not good enough because we

1 don't know if everybody now is fishing more traps per trip.

2
3 Right? What we need is they reported the number of traps they
4 fished. They reported the number of dives they made, whatever that
5 fine level of effort is. So, we'll give that a try. We'll do a
6 strict update of SEDAR 91.

7
8 This is exactly what we did for Puerto Rico. We'll do a strict
9 update of SEDAR 91 Saint Thomas. Have that ready for-- when do we
10 think the next SSC will be? Beginning of August, end of July?
11 Sometime in the summer, at the end of July. So, we'll shoot for
12 the end of July.

13
14 That will update what you're asking for in that second half of the
15 motion here. And I don't know how it's going to turn out, but
16 that's the best we can do. If that's acceptable to the Council,
17 then that's what we'll do.

18
19 Keep in mind we're in the middle of SEDAR 103. It's a lot of work.
20 So, thank Adyan ahead of time because it's all going to fall on
21 her. I'm going to help with the index construction. Stephanie
22 Martínez-Rivera will help with the index construction. But at the
23 end of the day, Adyan's got to take some time out from her otherwise
24 busy schedule to rerun this.

25
26 We'll do it. We don't know what the answer's going to be. And if
27 that works for the Council, we can make that happen. Under those
28 caveats. Strict update, and we'll see what happens.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Can I have John and then somebody from online?

31
32 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Yeah. So, I think, while I like Kevin's generous
33 offer of his staff's time, it does often take more time to get
34 these things through, particularly because it was going to take
35 constructing the index and then getting a revised model through.
36 So, it actually probably would be beneficial to take this action
37 and then have a stated desire to have this process that Kevin
38 outlined done fairly quickly so that something could be updated.

39
40 But I think we've got an ABC from the SSC already. So, I'm not
41 sure we've got a-- it's going to be hard to get something changed
42 right away.

43
44 So, perhaps the Council consider taking action and then saying
45 this is the desire that they would like to see in the request from
46 the Science Center and then from their SSC in a stepwise fashion.
47 Thanks.

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, Sarah?

2
3 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yes. I would-- actually, that fits. I was
4 going to remind the Council that in Framework Amendment 1, you put
5 a sentence in there, "Council intent would be to request the
6 Science Center provide an interim assessment by 2023 to update OFL
7 projections and set catch levels for 2024 and later."

8
9 So, you did put a clause kind of in there that asked the Science
10 Center to do something. So, I think you could do a similar kind of
11 thing here. It's a clause, but it's not attached to the alternative
12 to the motion that you just made.

13
14 So, I just wanted to put that, that you have done that before,
15 requested additional work from the Science Center. Thank you.

16
17 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, I agree
18 with what was just said by John and Sarah, that we move forward
19 with a motion and make a separate motion on what we would to see
20 from what Dr. Angeli said and what we said and put it off 2027 to
21 give, Kevin and his team some time since they got a lot on their
22 plate to go back and revisit this, and then we can bring it back
23 to the table if that works for the team.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard.

26
27 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I'll go with John's suggestion and Mr.
28 Magras' suggestion.

29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chair, just to move forward. Graciela, Liajay-
31 - ¿y Cristina está por ahí? Okay. Take the last part, where you
32 start with "but" take that out. Don't throw it away.

33
34 And then the motion will be-- I mean, the vote will be to adopt
35 this as is, and then we'll have another motion that will
36 incorporate that language plus what John was mentioning before and
37 Sarah.

38
39 So, Mr. Chairman, in order to be able to move forward, can we vote
40 on this one?

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We'll do a roll call vote. We'll start
43 with, Mr. Sabater.

44
45 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

46
47 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

1 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.
2
3 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.
4
5 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, yes.
6
7 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, yes.
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.
10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Unanimously.
12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** *So, unanimous.* No abstentions and no nays,
14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. no tienes que decir eso. Lo que tienes que
16 decir es "unanimous" and that's it.
17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So can
19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Can we get the other language that we just remove?
21 Okay. No, esa es. Okay, people. Este, límpiennla para que quite
22 "from previous."
23
24 Okay. Does that language reflect what we have been discussing? Do
25 we need to add something else to this motion at this time?
26
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, for clarification. So, I thought that we
28 were talking about-- There are two things that we're talking about.
29 One is if landings consistently reach 10% of the ACL, I don't think
30 they have to surpass the rates. I think they just have to get to
31 that point of the ACL, and then they can be revisited.
32
33 But, however, what Sarah was saying is a little bit different.
34 What Sarah's saying, there can be text included that says, "The
35 Council is going to request the Science Center to do an interim
36 assessment in 2027." I need to read the text.
37
38 So, those are two different things. One is telling you to do
39 something, an additional study, and I think the other one is a
40 little bit more direct and is giving directions to the Council.
41 "Hey, you don't have to wait until you get a 10% of the landings.
42 You just have to compromise that there will be an interim
43 assessment."
44
45 So, you need to decide what it is that you want to do. Maybe I'm
46 incorrect, but that was my understanding. These are two different
47 things, and the Council will need to see what will be more-- to
48 what you guys want to accomplish.

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, if I may. If we all understand what
3 the mechanism is, then the correct language will go along with
4 what María is saying. We have a commitment for 2027, and the Center
5 is going to address this, and we will review it in 2027. That will
6 give you some flexibility, and at the same time, it will achieve
7 what you want to do.

8
9 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I don't think that right now, if you look at that
10 by itself, it doesn't refer to anything. So, you have to say that
11 this refers to the previous motion or to motion such and such or
12 to this or that or that. Because right now, it stands by itself in
13 space in the cloud. So, it must be referred to whatever we are
14 referring to here.

15
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, Mr. Chair, this is just an example, whoever
17 made the motion can fix it. We're just putting it here because
18 this is what we have. This is the screen that we have available
19 right now. So, what is under there is something that is based on
20 what was said about the interim assessment that was done for
21 Framework Action 1. So, that could be a possibility.

22
23 So, what's on top is the 10%, so that's what needs to be fixed.
24 So, what do you want to do? And then give us a couple of minutes
25 so we can get the text right.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I guess you'll want to add in there, "Saint
28 Thomas/Saint John's spiny lobster alternative" or something.

29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, does the first one makes sense with what
31 we're discussing?

32
33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I think Nicole is the one that suggested this.
34 The only thing I said, "what does 'consistently' mean?" But if
35 Nicole is fine with that I think that's fine. But I think Heather
36 has a comment maybe related to the motions.

37
38 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks. Well, I did want to hear more from Nicole
39 about her thinking behind, right, the first-- so right now,
40 revisiting the ABC would be linked to an increase in landings. And
41 so, I did hear both. I heard that at the outset and then other
42 discussion about trying to incorporate a new abundance index into
43 the next assessment. So, I wondered about your thinking on those
44 two different options.

45
46 And then, also wondered if the SSC could really revisit the ABC
47 outside of new information, right, like an abundance index or an
48 update assessment. So, just wondering if we should combine those

1 two together or if the 10% increase, if you are asking that we
2 only do it in the event of a 10% increase, right, then we would
3 keep that in. Otherwise, take it out.

4
5 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. I think we should keep that in, and we
6 could say, "if Saint Thomas/Saint John's spiny lobster landings
7 consistently reach within 10% of the ACL, the Council will request
8 the SSC to revisit the ABC. In addition, the Council requests NOAA
9 Fisheries—" and then that whole second clause, "in all cases to
10 explore during SEDAR 103 the potential to incorporate a fishery-
11 dependent abundance index."

12
13 And then I guess we're working in parallel towards getting the
14 best available data, the best available science to inform this
15 Alternative 2. Does That clarify the thinking that we're working
16 parallel? Okay. Thank you.

17
18 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks, Kevin McCarthy. So, two questions. The
19 first one is in that first part, that first sentence. You just
20 passed the motion.

21
22 The Council just passed the motion that the ACL equals the ABC.
23 There's nothing that the SSC can do to make that higher. So, I
24 don't know what they would do to revisit the ABC other than make
25 it lower-- the ACL would end up being lower. That's the only
26 direction they could go.

27
28 So, I'm not sure what you want from them. I'm not on the SSC
29 anymore, so that's something [crosstalk].

30
31 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, we can clarify. So, yeah. So, Kevin, you're
32 suggesting that we clarify what it means to revisit the ABC.

33
34 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yes, what it means to revisit the ABC because if
35 it-- and then the next part is, it's sort of an order of operations
36 thing too. Right? So, in order to revisit the ABC, they would need
37 something from the Science Center to better inform that decision.
38 Because they've got all they're going to get, under the guise of
39 SEDAR 91. We're now going sort of outside the SEDAR process, which
40 is, I think, that second part. But--

41
42 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. You're right. So, the intent isn't there
43 in that first space. So, to revisit the ABC, we meant to revisit
44 data gaps and any additional studies that might be necessary in
45 order to account for why there are consistently higher landings.
46 And that might be socioeconomic data. That might be recruitment in
47 the fishery. That might be lots of different things. And so, that's
48 the intent. So, if someone could help us to ensure that that's the

1 intent of what we're writing, that would be useful.

2
3 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Can I? Okay, so let me see if I got this right.
4 So, what we could do as we mentioned earlier, can request an
5 interim assessment by x date to update the OFL projections and set
6 catch levels for 2027 and later years. I think that will-- this is
7 not new. This is something that was done for Framework 1 for the
8 spiny lobster.

9
10 The Council accepted the ABC recommendations, set their ACL, and
11 then they added that clause in there. There's going to be an
12 interim assessment that it's going to provide new projections, and
13 the expectation is that if there is new information that can be
14 used in that assessment, it will be used to provide new catch level
15 recommendations.

16
17 So, my recommendation is that instead of doing the second part,
18 just deal right now with the interim assessment. And we can-- and
19 this is a suggestion because I'm not a Council member, but, we can
20 send you the text right now. Sarah has it.

21
22 She's going to write it for you in the chat, and then you can cross
23 out the "in addition," and then we'll put the text that we're about
24 to send you. And then you guys can decide if that is something
25 that you want to proceed with or not.

26
27 And that, I think, will cover it. That will cover all the studies
28 and all new information and then gives clear guidance to the
29 Council and the Science Center as to what they need to do. If you
30 guys agree.

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, while they are fixing that, what will be
33 the next thing that you need from the Council today regarding this
34 topic?

35
36 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** That is a Sarah question. Sarah, Miguel is
37 asking what the next step is after this is done. We cannot hear
38 you if you're talking.

39
40 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Sarah, can you hear us?

41
42 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hold on.

43
44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** I didn't do it.

45
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** She needs to be admitted.

47
48 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** I can hear you, but I couldn't speak.

1
2 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We can hear you now.
3

4 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** So, can you hear me now? Okay. You've made
5 motions for preferred alternatives. So, the only thing left to do
6 would be to decide, would you like to-- are you happy with those
7 decisions and would you like to make motions to submit this to the
8 Secretary, with all of those clauses that we usually do, like the
9 staff to make minor editorial changes and the Chair to review it
10 and accept it? Would you like to do that today, or would you like
11 us to bring the more completed Framework back in August that is
12 going to include the chapter five and the chapter six? Both of
13 those require knowing what the preferred alternative is. So, we
14 can do those now and bring you back the full document and review
15 that in August if you'd like. So, that's the only remaining kind
16 of decision for today.
17

18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I agree with what Sarah just said.
19

20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We will move forward with what Sarah just said,
21 but we have to get this motion on the screen. María, is that what
22 we wanted, or are we still working on it?
23

24 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** I'm almost done. I'll send it to Liajay.
25

26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** We just put it in there, but please feel free
27 to correct it. Sorry. We're asking you to do a lot of things at
28 the same time. You just need to make sure that we have the correct
29 years.
30

31 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** And I was actually going to only put when we
32 would the interim assessment by and not put the OFL projections
33 because those can come out of the process, and I don't want to put
34 a limit on that now. So, I'm almost done. And then, I will send it
35 for your review. Sent it.
36

37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?
38

39 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Kevin McCarthy. So, could we scroll up just a tiny
40 bit? Oh, it-- oh, there it is. So, when we're saying this, "an
41 interim assessment by 2027," does that mean December '26, or does
42 that mean one year from now? Meaning the Council would see it in
43 their December meeting or the SSC would see it in their
44 November/December meeting, or the SSC would see it in their April
45 meeting next year. I just need a verification on that.
46

47 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** As written, it means by, and so your deadline
48 would be December 2027. So, up to the moving party whether that's

1 really reflective of the timing, but that's the latest. It could
2 be anytime earlier than that, but that's kind of your deadline,
3 would be December 2027.

4
5 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Could we put those words in there instead of "by"?
6

7 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Well, are you saying, it's not for me to
8 speak for the moving party here of what it should say, but is the
9 Science Center saying we're not going to be able to do this before
10 December 2027?
11

12 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I'm saying I just want to make sure we don't have
13 a moment where we're discussing what the word "by" means. I just
14 want to have a deadline.
15

16 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. So, it looks like-- okay. So, thank you
17 for the additional-- as the moving party, thank you for the
18 additional text, Sarah. So, it looks what this should say is, "for
19 Action 2, if Saint Thomas Saint John's spiny lobster landings
20 consistently reach within 10% of the ACL, the Council will request
21 the SSC to revisit the ABC. In addition--" I still think we need
22 "in addition," "Council would be requesting the SEFSC provide an
23 interim assessment," I would say, "in one year's time." Are we
24 saying by. I was thinking we were doing it within a year because
25 that would still give us--
26

27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Kevin is saying he'd rather have it by no later
28 than the December 31, 2027, and that he will pass the deadline.
29

30 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Go ahead. I don't
31

32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Kevin McCarthy. So, if you have the second one,
33 you don't need the first one.
34

35 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Then just take out that part. "The Council will
36 request the SSC to revisit the ABC." Right? And then you say, "the
37 Council intent."
38

39 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I don't even think you, right. Because we're not
40 going to know if it's 10% until October anyway, because of the
41 delay of data availability. So, I don't think you need that first
42 sentence at all. It's up to you.
43

44 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Please, don't remove It just yet.
45

46 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. I think that you could--
47

48 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I think what we want, though, is to signal why

1 we're doing this. And so, we're signaling here. So, it doesn't
2 have to be within 10% of the ACL. But, we could say for Action 2,
3 as we know that Saint Thomas/Saint John spiny lobster landings are
4 consistently higher than in the past, we are requesting the SSC or
5 the SEFSC to provide an interim assessment to update OFL
6 projections and set catch limits levels using updated available
7 information.

8
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Right. Yeah. Whatever your rationale is great with
10 me.

11
12 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay.

13
14 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** "Because Saint Thomas/Saint John's spiny lobster
15 landings have been consistently higher than in the past, the
16 Council requests the SSC provide an interim assessment." So, that's
17 one sentence. It begins with "because." Oh, sorry. "The Council
18 requests the Science Center provide an interim assessment." So,
19 that's a comma, and take out the "would."

20
21 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** That works for me.

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Liajay, Graciela, añádele "to provide," después
24 del "SSC." "To provide," en vez de dejarlo así, esnú'.

25
26 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** En vez de "provide," "to provide."

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Despues de "SSC," "to provide"

29
30 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** And change "set to inform" to "update OFL
31 projections and inform catch levels."

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Is that okay now?

34
35 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Thank you for workshopping this motion. It's
36 greatly appreciated.

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Teamwork.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We need a second.

41
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Who's going to second the motion?

43
44 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second.

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** The motion reads, "*For Action 2, because Saint*
47 *Thomas/Saint John's spiny lobster landings have been consistently*
48 *higher than in the past, the Council requests SEFSC to provide an*

1 *interim assessment by December 2027 to update OFL projections and*
2 *inform catch levels using updated available information. Example,*
3 *fisheries-dependent abundance index."*

4
5 Any further discussion? So, I'll do a roll call vote. I'll start
6 on my left this time with Blanchard.

7
8 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard, yes.

9
10 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Angeli, yes.

11
12 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo, yes.

13
14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

15
16 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

17
18 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.

21
22 The vote is unanimous. *Motion carries.*

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Unanimous.

25
26 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** This is Sarah. Real quick, I said that you
27 could do one of two things, to finish this up, and I wasn't clear
28 if the "yes" meant finish it now or bring it back in August. So,
29 can you just let me know which one you'd like?

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We have a bunch of things in the agenda. We are
32 way late. So, to answer, Sarah, do you want to continue and finish
33 this if we only need two actions? Or you want to go into Heather's
34 presentation before the pelagic and then tomorrow finish the
35 discussion. What is your pleasure?

36
37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, if I may, Mr. Chair, this is María. So, we
38 are done with this action. So, the decision for the Council is
39 that the Council will do final action and submit this to the
40 Secretary, submit it to NOAA Fisheries, or do they want us to
41 finalize the amendment and bring it back in August. And then the
42 Council makes a decision because nothing's going to happen other
43 than finalizing the analysis that is already included for these
44 numbers that are included. Everything else is going to happen
45 later.

46
47 So, that will be the decision. If you think that this is ready to
48 move forward, then that could be the guidance given to staff. If

1 not, then it can be brought back in August. So, that's the decision
2 to make.

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, ¿puede decir la idea tuya? Can you say
5 the-- Graciela has some ideas. So, go ahead.

6
7 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thanks. And I think that John mentioned
8 this earlier too, that the amendment can move forward. It's a
9 framework amendment. And you've already made the arrangements for
10 anything new that comes online. So, we already have that. If you
11 move forward now, then we can dedicate time to other matters.

12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, María, what will be the best way to move
14 forward? Motion?

15
16 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks. I also believe it's ready to move forward.
17 I just have a process question as a relative newbie. So, we have
18 public comments tomorrow. Like, should we wait until after public
19 comments on the amendment and then approve it for secretarial
20 review and implementation?

21
22 Or is this how it's typically-- Do we typically take final action
23 before?

24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. In the good old days, NOAA GC told us you
26 don't have a final action until you have a public comment period
27 announced. Right now, you say you have a comment period, but people
28 don't know what we are talking about today. So, it's up to you.
29 What is it that you want to do?

30
31 But in the past, we discussed this to death, actually. So, you can
32 say, "the Council approved to move this forward, give some license
33 to the staff, for some language corrections," things that, but
34 then we'll move forward with it. But you have to say that in a
35 motion so they can go ahead and do it.

36
37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, usually, well, what we do is this is
38 public comment, this meeting is public comment. If the Council
39 wants to move forward, then we get it done. Somebody can do a
40 motion. These are the typical motion that we always do for final
41 action. So, we can provide some assistance with that. We can put
42 what we think is that is-- but somebody has to provide the motion,
43 although we will help you.

44
45 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I will, move-- I will provide a motion that *the*
46 *Council moves to approve Framework Action 4, U.S.V.I. spiny*
47 *lobster, and submit the action to the Secretary of Commerce for*
48 *review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-substantive*

1 *changes to the Framework Action 4. We give the Council Chair the*
2 *authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule and*
3 *regulations as necessary and appropriate for implementing*
4 *Framework Action 4.*

5
6 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion is that the Council moves to
9 approve Framework Action 4, U.S.V.I. spiny lobster, and submit the
10 action to the Secretary of Commerce for review. We thereby allow
11 staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to the Framework
12 Action 4. We give the Council Chair the authority to deem any
13 modifications made to the proposed rule and regulations as
14 necessary and appropriate for implementing Framework Action 4.
15 So, we'll take that on a vote.

16
17 I'll go to my left with Blanchard.

18
19 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard, yes.

20
21 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Angeli, yes.

22
23 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.

24
25 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

26
27 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

28
29 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.

32
33 *All unanimous vote in favor of the motion.*

34
35 Alrighty. So, the next part of the agenda is, I believe, Heather
36 has some presentation to make before we move on to pelagics.

37
38 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, we recently
39 reviewed landings data relative to our ACLs, and the landings data
40 we reviewed were the three-year averages of the most recent three
41 years that we have, which were 2022 through 2024. Our preliminary
42 review of those data indicates that we are over ACLs for eight
43 reef fish species. Six of those reef fish are managed under the
44 Puerto Rico FMP. They are the crevalle jack, rainbow runner, cubera
45 snapper. Oh, apologies. One, two, three, four. Four reef fish under
46 the Puerto Rico FMP. Those four. And then there are two reef fish
47 under the Saint Thomas/Saint John FMP. It's Grouper Unit 4, which
48 includes black, red tiger, and yellowfin, and then also hogfish.

1 For the pelagics, the analysis shows that we are, under the Puerto
2 Rico FMP, over for wahoo and great barracuda. And then the last
3 overage was for spiny lobster under the Puerto Rico FMP.

4
5 So, for reef fish species, the accountability measure requires us
6 to send the data to the science center, and we ask them to take a
7 look and see if they think that the overage was caused by a change
8 in data, enhanced data, versus an actual increase in landings. So,
9 we're sending the reef fish data to them to analyze for that
10 reason. In the past and prior years, overages for those species
11 were determined to be caused by enhanced reporting instead of
12 actual increases in landings, and no corrective action was
13 required.

14
15 For wahoo and great barracuda, we're also sending them a memo to
16 take another look at those. We talked a little bit at the last
17 Council meeting about wahoo. So, we have, recently, implemented
18 new regulations for wahoo. They just took effect in 2025. And so,
19 the overages that we're seeing based on the 2022 to 2024 time frame
20 wouldn't have taken into account any reductions in catch that we
21 achieved from the regulations we implemented in 2025.

22
23 So, we'd to hear a little bit-- I'd to hear a little bit from
24 Council members as to whether they think it might be prudent to
25 wait and see how those regulations affect catches before taking
26 any corrective action for wahoo in case no further action is
27 needed.

28
29 For great barracuda, once we looked a little bit more into that,
30 it looks like the barracuda landings that we're seeing, the high
31 landings might be for a species other than great barracuda because
32 they're reported at the family level. From what we're hearing, the
33 commercial fishery doesn't really target great barracuda because
34 it's ciguatoxic. And so, we are also going to ask the Center to
35 take another look at those landings and give us their thoughts on
36 whether that's a reporting and classification issue versus an
37 actual increase in landings. The other thing with great barracuda,
38 when we looked back at when the island FMPs were developed, the
39 rationale that the Council used to incorporate great barracuda in
40 the plan was that it had it important to the ecosystem, not because
41 it was important to commercial fishery.

42
43 And so, we're also thinking that the other action we're working on
44 is to take another look at what stocks we're managing, actively
45 managing versus classifying as ecosystem species that great
46 barracuda might end up getting moved into the ecosystem component
47 species, which would also support no additional action on that.

1 And then finally, with spiny lobster, so that's the last one. And
2 I think given the conversation we had earlier today and the
3 additional questions that we have outstanding for the SSC. We've
4 asked them to take another look at it. And the fact that the
5 landings that we evaluated were from 2022 to 2024, but the
6 assessment showed that no overfishing was occurring during that
7 time frame. We'd like, I guess, to hear from the Council about the
8 need for any potential corrective action to address that.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard.

11
12 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I could just comment on wahoo. Me,
13 personally, I think we already have a size limit and a bag limit
14 on it. Okay? With an increase in size, you're going to also have
15 an increase in weight. And I know we are also struggling with five
16 small wahoo.

17
18 You probably have a wahoo that weighs more than those five small
19 that you were already catching. So, you are kind of selecting what
20 you're catching to a certain degree. I personally think just
21 setting bag limit on a fish like the wahoo and the dolphin should
22 be sufficient. You're talking about a fish that is here now.

23
24 And how many different countries are there in the Caribbean? 26,
25 30. So, they're in who else's waters in a couple hours from now?
26 And we're trying to manage that. The only way you're going to
27 manage something like that is by having the regulations throughout
28 every country managing those species the same way. Because what we
29 are going to lose here, they will catch it over there.

30
31 So, are we really protecting the species, or are we really fooling
32 ourselves thinking that we're doing so? So, that's my comment.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo.

35
36 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.
37 100% with Mr. Magras. The wahoo is pelagic.

38
39 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Blanchard!

40
41 **NELSON CRESPO:** Sorry, Blanchard. Wahoo is a-- well, they look
42 almost identical.[laughter]

43
44 The wahoo is a pelagic species. It's a seasonal species. So, while
45 we have now size limit and a bag limit for recreational, it's more
46 than enough. We don't need to implement any accountability
47 measures. So, exactly how Mr. Blanchard says, if we are now able
48 to catch only big fish, the weight is going to be higher.

1
2 In the past, most of the fishermen used to catch what we call the
3 pencils, those are the small wahoo, that maybe one wahoo weighs
4 two, three pounds. They used to bring 40 of them. If you compare
5 now, maybe they can bring 10 wahoo that is going to weigh more
6 than the 40 that they used to bring in the past. So, in my opinion,
7 we don't need to implement any accountability measure for the
8 wahoo.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

11
12 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I believe that we discussed the wahoo and the
13 mahi situation for, what, two years? And we discussed it back and
14 forth, and we came to some conclusions, and we voted for them. So,
15 I think we just put a lid on it. I mean, that's it. Why should we
16 bring something up again, which is in bed sleeping?

17
18 Thank you.

19
20 **NELSON CRESPO:** Julian.

21
22 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Well, I totally agree with what they are saying.
23 The size and the bag limits should be more than enough to protect
24 these species. They're pelagics. They're moving in and out, in and
25 out.

26
27 The Caribbean Islands to the East of us, as we call Down Islands,
28 the waters have been given to the Chinese and the Taiwanese people.
29 This is not making up anything. The waters were given to them
30 because they build infrastructure for the people on the land.
31 Schools, government buildings, fix their roads, etcetera,
32 etcetera. Did they realize how bad it was by giving them their
33 waters? The fish, all the pelagics, the tunas, everything.

34
35 Everything you could think of. Sailfish, marlin, everything.
36 They're harvesting everything. They have processing plants there.
37 They're shipping it out. We're getting the bits and pieces that
38 are left.

39
40 So, if we do have a good season, it's by some miracle that the
41 tides change, the pattern has changed, something good has happened
42 in our favor. Otherwise, on that, we're not going to see those
43 species we used to see them.

44
45 This is April. Today is April 21. We're in the height of the mahi
46 season here in the U.S.V.I. You see any numbers coming in? You see
47 any fish coming in? No. We're not. One or two fish. When we used
48 to catch hundreds, is it because of overfishing? No. It's because

1 the fish can't pass through and get to us anymore.

2
3 And like Mr. Sabater said, we had great, great discussions about
4 this, but because it's on the list as a managed species, we have
5 got to do something. Yeah. Well, we can do something. We can manage
6 it with size limits and bag limits and keep eye on it. Not that it
7 disappears. Keep an eye on it for the next five years, and let's
8 see what's actually taking place. I'm going to leave it there.

9
10 I want to go back to one of the groups of species, well, two other
11 species that were mentioned that we have overruns on. Grouper Unit
12 4. How long have there been seasonal closures in place for Grouper
13 Unit 4? Twenty-two years.

14
15 What do you expect is going to happen? In the Grammanik Bank, it's
16 been closed for almost thirty years. All of those species spawn
17 there also. So, outside of the seasonal closure, what do you
18 expect? Don't you expect your numbers are going to increase?

19
20 We see them. They increase, and we are catching them. And we should
21 be allowed to catch them because we have protected them for so
22 long and no assessments have been made. And none of the seasonal
23 closures that were put in place through this SFA back in 2005. And
24 those are the same species that we have asked for an executive
25 order to be removed.

26
27 We have three managements. Let's use Grouper Unit 4 as an example.
28 Tree management processes. We have the Grammanik Bank closure and
29 the Red Hind Bank closure where they're all inside of there
30 spawning. We're protecting them that way. We are protecting them
31 with seasonal closure, and then we are protecting them with an
32 annual catch limit. That's an overkill to the fishermen.

33
34 Your closures should be what's protecting these species right now.
35 And when the Science Center goes to visit what's going on, this
36 must be taken to great consideration. Fishermen have done their
37 job. They gave those closures in order to meet the 30% reduction
38 from the SFA, which was supposed to be 30% across the board because
39 we didn't have Island-Based Fishery Management Plans at the time.
40 And each one of the platforms ended up giving 30% reduction, which
41 ended up being a 90% reduction overall between the entire platforms
42 back in 2025.

43
44 Was that error revisited? No. Fishers took the hit for that.
45 Hogfish. Hogfish fall into the same group. They hang out in the
46 same area as where the groupers hang out during the spawning
47 aggregations. They spawn at the same time. They're protected in
48 those areas.

1
2 So, are you going to see increases? Sure. You're going to see them.
3 And I should have said something earlier when we were discussing
4 the lobsters. But when we look at the lobsters, we have to remember
5 to the East of the Saint Thomas/Saint John shelf, we have the
6 B.V.I. They have a three-month closure, year-round closure. Three
7 months they're closed. Where do you think all of their lobby and
8 all of their recruitment and all the lobsters are traveling to?
9 Into our waters. That also helps to stock our fishery.

10
11 So, all of these different things need to be taken into account
12 when we're looking at the process moving forward. Thank you.

13
14 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks. Just wanted to make one comment. I do think
15 it's important for us to look at the actual landings data to
16 support. So, we are talking a lot about things that could be
17 possibly happening, we don't actually know based on the data.

18
19 That is a mistake, and it's what leads to a lot of these questions
20 regarding the uncertainty. Right? If we look back and see in the
21 actual landings data, it's hard to follow which specific areas
22 we're talking about. If I saw it up there, I'd put it up. Right?

23
24 We have this data available, even if it's preliminary. For a lot
25 of these what's likely happening is you have a single year where
26 there is, a huge increase relative to a very small ACL. When that
27 happens, that is saying something different to a lot of the
28 information that we are hearing regarding these stocks, which if
29 they are market driven and you do see a large peak where it can
30 jump that high, that is different than the uncertainty that we've
31 been arguing about for holding these things at changes of ACLs of
32 zero. Right? So, this is direct evidence that contradicts certain
33 things.

34
35 Now, I'm not saying that that's the direction we need to head in,
36 but we need to honestly look at the data and evaluate it and make
37 realistic decisions because things will come back to bite us if we
38 were not actually looking at that. If you have an SSC that is
39 telling you something based on data and we disregard it at the
40 Council level and send it back, and then we look at that data and
41 it is saying the exact same thing, then that isn't effectively, us
42 describing that the data that is telling you something, we simply
43 don't want to listen to. And if that is the case, then we should
44 change the management structure. Right? We can come up with better
45 ways to do that, but that's not what we're doing.

46
47 We're spending a long time discussing and arguing over things that
48 aren't really making that sense. What I would recommend is that we

1 make a motion for that data to be presented at the next meeting
2 where we can actually look at changes in landings, identify if
3 there have been large jumps associated with those, and have
4 justifications as to why.

5
6 For instance, if that market has changed and there is an increase,
7 that is something that we have to revisit for the ACL, and that's
8 what we should be doing. But simply describing and saying why we
9 shouldn't change that is a mistake. It doesn't provide us with
10 good reasoning as to what we're supposed to be doing, which is
11 reevaluating that management structure.

12
13 So, if we see that it has changed and we think the data supports
14 it, we should simply say that and make the recommendation that we
15 look at changing those ACLs based on new data that's coming in
16 from the fishery.

17
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chairman, where are we regarding the
19 agenda item that we have in front of us?

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

22
23 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So just following up on Sennai's suggestion. So,
24 where we currently are in the process is sending the preliminary
25 comparison to the Science Center per the way that the
26 accountability measure is structured in the regs, right, to review
27 and let us know if they believe the overage was due to a change in
28 reporting, enhanced reporting, or an actual increase in landings.

29
30 Per your suggestion, Sennai, we could bring the results of that
31 back at the next Council. If we do, in fact, determine that any of
32 the overages were due to increased landings versus enhanced
33 reporting, we could bring that back at the next Council meeting
34 and get some Council discussion around that.

35
36 I do think that for the different species groups reef fish versus
37 pelagics versus spiny lobster, there might be different levels of
38 flexibility in terms of if there is an overage, if we could decide
39 no corrective action is needed based on a consideration of other
40 things changing markets and things like that. That might be true
41 for some groups and not others, but we could look at all that when
42 we bring it back at the next meeting. Does that sound reasonable,
43 María?

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Do we need a motion for that? We don't need a
46 motion for that. No. Okay. Cool.

47
48 Alrighty. So, we'll move to the next agenda item. On this topic

1 is, I guess, Saint Croix gets a gold star because they didn't
2 overrun any species at all. So, that's a good thing.

3
4 Revision of accountability measures for pelagic paper.

5
6 REVISION OF ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR PELAGIC STOCKS—OPTIONS
7 PAPER
8

9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hello again? This is María López. Okay. So,
10 this is completely related to what Heather was talking about.
11 Right?

12
13 This is exactly the situation that we want to make sure that what
14 we have in the regulations, what the Council decided to do, would
15 allow that type of analysis, that flexibility to be able to look
16 at landing trends, index of abundance, best available science. And
17 right now, explicitly, that's not included in our regulations.
18 Okay?

19
20 So, we talked about this last time. There were a lot of comments.
21 There were some directions that the Council wanted staff to take.
22 So, this is what we're going to be focusing on today. The idea is
23 for getting your input. How are we moving this forward? Okay?

24
25 So, please bear with me here. And if you have any questions, I'll
26 take them at the end. Okay. So, let's go to the first slide,
27 please. Okay.

28
29 So, this is what we talked about during the August meeting. So, we
30 have been discussing this for a couple of meetings now. So, we
31 talked about-- these are the triggers, the accountability measures
32 triggers, and corrective actions. We compare pelagic AMs with reef
33 fish AMs, noting the differences, how the pelagics have an ACT,
34 the reef fish doesn't have ACTs.

35
36 The reef fish have seasonal closures that would go into place if
37 there's an AM overage. For pelagics there's no such thing. There
38 is what Heather was mentioning before. If the landings go over the
39 ACT, then NMFS and the Council will decide if corrective action is
40 needed, etcetera, etcetera.

41
42 So, one of the other things I would like to discuss is that AM
43 corrective actions are undefined for pelagics when an ACT or ACL
44 is exceeded. What do you do? Okay.

45
46 So, we also reviewed Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements for ACLs
47 and AMs. We all know that this is a requirement for all managed
48 species under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. We also discussed

1 replacing the ACT with the ACL as the pelagic AM trigger because
2 the ACT was not a complicated purpose, based on past monitoring
3 when both ACTs and ACL have been exceeded. There are also no real
4 time commercial landings available or collection of recreational
5 landings by the Marine Recreational Information Program. So,
6 monitoring commercial and recreational landings to the ACT in
7 season, as you all know, is not possible at this time.

8
9 So, those are some of the issues that we discussed during August.
10 Then we discussed new measures and potential options. How the new
11 dolphin and wahoo size limits might help maintain our harvest,
12 maintain the harvest below the ACT or ACL, which is what Heather
13 was discussing before. Those are brand new; they were just
14 implemented.

15
16 We also explore adjusting triggers and other corrective actions
17 were discussed such as the closures in size limit changes and the
18 Council and other members from DAP. We had several discussions
19 about that, pros and cons, etcetera. There also was discussion
20 about how challenging this action is because of the seasonality of
21 the species and also because right now we're monitoring commercial
22 ACLs and those ACLs for some of those species are fairly low.

23
24 We also talk about how the matrix process, which is that process
25 that the Council is doing now to reevaluate the management and
26 conservation need for some of the species could affect the species
27 that we're currently managing under the pelagics. And we also
28 agreed at the end that AMs must be biologically appropriate for
29 each one of the species. Next slide.

30
31 I'm going to try to hurry up a little bit here. Sorry.

32
33 Okay. So, what did we discuss in December. We presented preliminary
34 options for two actions. The first action was to modify the
35 trigger. We talked about two things. First, replace that ACT with
36 an ACL as the trigger. So, if the ACT is not doing its purpose,
37 let's just use the ACL for monitoring purposes. Fine.

38
39 And then the second thing we considered was to add some text in
40 there to allow NMFS to review the best available signs to determine
41 if corrective action is needed. So, the purpose here is that we
42 wanted to make that trigger more flexible so we can fully
43 understand what's happening in the fishery before stepping in. So,
44 making sure that we only act when that evidence is clear, which is
45 what we were talking about before. Let's look at what's really
46 happening, so that there can be support for the decisions that
47 need to be made to protect the fish stocks. So, that's the
48 objective of that first action. Be able to provide that flexibility

1 for when the ACLs are exceeded. Okay? We can use landing trends or
2 indices of abundance, whatever is available to confirm if that AM
3 would be trigger.

4
5 Then we had to discuss the second action, and that second action
6 was a corrective action. Right?

7
8 So, this was the action that we are required to have a corrective
9 action if after all this evaluation, it is still determined that
10 a corrective action-- something has to be done to prevent that ACL
11 from going over. And I understand that this has been the problem
12 here, right, to be able to agree what would be good corrective
13 action taking into consideration the species, the pelagic species,
14 the seasonality and the variability and how dependent they are on
15 the environmental variables. Right?

16
17 Okay. So, what were the next steps that we decided to take in
18 December? We were asked to make a detailed comparison of all the
19 options. We were also asked to take into consideration that there's
20 that matrix process that would help the Council determine if some
21 of these species would remain under federal management or will be
22 removed. And we were also asked to refine options. Okay? So, let's
23 go to the next slide.

24
25 I'm going to go through all of this because we have already talked
26 about this, but currently for pelagic species it says the AM will
27 be triggered if the applicable landings, sector landings as
28 available, apply to Puerto Rico. We know we don't have recreational
29 landings, so we are monitoring the commercial landings exceed the
30 applicable ACT for that stock. If NMFS estimates that landings
31 have exceeded the applicable ACT for a stock or stock complex,
32 NMFS, in consultation with the Council, will determine appropriate
33 corrective action. This is kind of what we did today preliminarily.

34
35 So, we were talking about, okay, so it may be possible that the
36 wahoo in Puerto Rico went over its ACT. But then as Heather
37 mentioned earlier, one of the things is that the landings that
38 were used to make that determination, a preliminary determination,
39 because we still have to send it to the Science Center, they did
40 not incorporate the changes that were made in 2025 for size limit
41 and bag limits, right? And one of the reasons that those were put
42 in place is basically to constrain landings to protect-- for the
43 size limit to protect the fish so they can mature and also to
44 constrain the landing by using the bag limit. Okay? So, we don't
45 know yet what the outcomes of that are. Right? So, that's something
46 that is very related to the current AM that we have for AMs. Okay.
47 Let's go to the next slide.

1 So, in our current monitoring process, as soon as landings are
2 available, SERO Staff compares each pelagics stock landings to the
3 applicable ACT. If the landings are less than the ACT, then no
4 further action is required. If landings are more than the ACT,
5 then NMFS notifies the Council of the overage. And although we are
6 not required by the AM, this is not in the regulation, we typically
7 send a summary memo to the Science Center so they can tell us
8 what's going on with those landings. Is it due to increase or
9 enhance reporting, as you have seen from many of the risk species
10 that continue to go over every year? Or is it really due because
11 of increased landings? And then, NMFS and the Council discuss and
12 determine appropriate corrective action. So, let's go to the next
13 slide.

14
15 So, why are we proposing, and I say "we," meaning the Council. Why
16 is the Council proposing to modify pelagic AMs? Some species have
17 exceeded the ACT and ACL within the first three years of
18 management, triggering the need for NMFS and the Council to discuss
19 and determine appropriate corrective actions. Our current
20 regulations do not specify corrective actions for this AM, and the
21 existing requirement for the NMFS/Council consultation prevents
22 timely implementation of corrective measures.

23
24 We also have delays in landings data, which doesn't allow us to do
25 in-season responses to ACT overages, which is mostly how it's done
26 in other areas, too, where they have available in-season landings.
27 So, you can do an action that will actually constrain landings
28 during the time when you see that that's happening. So, that
29 requires that the Council reviews whether the ACT remains an
30 effective management buffer. Okay? So, let's go to the next one.

31
32 The goal. Due to their pelagic nature, develop a trigger that
33 adequately accounts for the expected variability in catch rates
34 and to explore actions that would effectively correct ACL overages.
35 So, there's two proposed actions. This is an options paper. There
36 are no decisions or anything. This is to obtain input.

37
38 The first one, as I mentioned earlier, modifies the AM trigger to
39 provide greater confidence that corrective action is required.
40 That would allow the Council to have the flexibility so we can
41 understand what's happening in the fishery, okay, before stepping
42 in. And then, Propose Action 2, define one more corrective actions
43 that could be implemented to confidently constrain catches in those
44 instances where the ACLs for pelagic species are exceeded and
45 corrective action is needed. Okay? So, in the case that it's
46 determined that the corrective action is needed because you don't
47 want to put your population in risk, right, then there has to be
48 a definition of what needs to be done, and that needs to be agreed

1 upon by the Council. Okay. Let's go to the next slide. Let's see.
2 Do I have the same one? Okay.

3
4 So, over here, I just want to mention this really quick. These are
5 some of the things that you mentioned last time. You want to be
6 able to minimize socioeconomic impacts on both the commercial and
7 recreational fishers as much as possible. That was super important.
8 You want to effectively constrain catch to prevent future
9 exceedances. And you also want to have measures that you can
10 enforce using currently available resources that are not
11 administratively burdensome or complex to ensure effective
12 regulatory implementation. So, that's kind of your wish list. Let's
13 go to the next slide.

14
15 This is the Proposed Action 1. I'm going to go through this. So,
16 one of the things that you asked was that we compare the pros and
17 cons of the options. So, I'm going to read these options, and then
18 the next slide is going to have the pros and cons.

19
20 Option 1 is to not do anything. Retain what you currently have,
21 right? We continue to evaluate landings relative to applicable ACT
22 based on the three-year average landings, which is what we
23 currently use, as describing the FMP. If NMFS estimates that they
24 have exceeded the applicable ACT, NMFS in consultation with the
25 Council will determine appropriate corrective action. So, that's
26 what we currently have that we need to modify.

27
28 Option 2 says, "Evaluate landings relative to the applicable ACL
29 based on the moving three-year average of landings." Nothing
30 changes there. However, if average landings, as estimated by NMFS,
31 exceed the ACL, apply the AM. So, this is very straightforward,
32 but it doesn't include a NMFS review process. Okay? So, this is
33 kind of your comparison, opposite of Option 3.

34
35 And then, Option 3, you do the same thing, which is-- let's go
36 again. Evaluate landings relative to the applicable ACL based on
37 the three-year average landings, which is what we currently do,
38 except currently we use the ACT, not the ACL. If average landings
39 as estimated by NMFS exceed the ACL, NMFS will consider landing
40 trends and any other best scientific information available in
41 determining if corrective action is necessary to prevent another
42 overage. Okay? So those are just two options.

43
44 Let's go to the next slide. What happened? No problem. I'm just
45 going to start talking about it while she gets that working.

46
47 So, what are the pros and the cons of what we currently have? The
48 pros of what we currently have is we don't have to do anything.

1 Right? There's not going to be any administrative changes, and
2 then there's some flexibility for case-specific corrective
3 actions, like you saw that earlier.

4
5 What are the cons of this? That the monitoring is based on the
6 ACT, not the ACL. And we just saw that that's ineffective. It's
7 not working very well because they're always reaching that ACT.
8 There's not really a buffer. If you go over the ACT, we have been
9 seeing that for those couple of species that went over the ACT
10 also go over the ACL. So, "it's really not letting us know, hey,
11 we're you're approaching the ACL." No, it's just not happening.
12 So, what happens right now is that that doesn't allow us to
13 implement corrective actions on time, which could be a problem if
14 that puts the population at risk. So, that's what we currently
15 have. That's the first row.

16
17 The second row is evaluating landings against the ACL. Again, this
18 one is the one that has no NMFS review. The pro is that you monitor
19 based on the ACL instead of the ACT. The cons are that there is
20 increased likelihood of mandatory corrective action because you
21 are not evaluating landings trends, okay? And then you also need
22 to make administrative changes.

23
24 Now let's contrast that with alternative three, which, again, you
25 evaluate landings against the ACL, not the ACT, but you have a
26 NMFS review. So, the pros. You monitor based on the ACL, and then
27 you have flexibility to consider additional data before triggering
28 an action. It provides flexibility for case-specific corrective
29 actions. You're not looking at this as a whole. You can see that
30 you had, like for example, if you have one year that you went
31 completely up, why did that happen? Because this is based on
32 landings, what you guys were talking about the market. You can see
33 what happens next year. We can see if there's a sargassum influx
34 and that increases your landings of a specific species. So, all of
35 those things could be considered as part of this review process.
36 What are the cons? Obviously, you need administrative changes,
37 which is why we're here. And then, there could also be delayed
38 implementation of a needed corrective actions if there's the chance
39 that this takes a little bit longer. Okay. So, that's action one.

40
41 I'm going to move to Action 2. Okay? So, any questions with Action
42 1 until now? We're not talking about corrective actions or anything
43 yet. We're just talking about the process. I will take questions
44 later then.

45
46 Okay. So, this is proposed Action 2. So, Option 1 is that you
47 retain your current AM, which does not specify-- but we already
48 talk about having a need to specify a corrective action. It is

1 part of what the MSA requires from us. So, last time we talked
2 about three or four different things, and these are just regular
3 management tools.

4
5 We are putting all of this in here and then we can discuss what
6 are the pros and the cons are of everything based on the actual
7 nature of the species, which is the pelagic species. So, one of
8 the options that we discussed last time is the seasonal closure.
9 It says, "In the year following a determination that the ACL has
10 been exceeded and corrective action is necessary, reduce the
11 fishing season for all sectors by the amount necessary to constrain
12 catch to the ACL. Any fishing season reductions would apply only
13 during the year following an ACL overage."

14
15 Okay. So, that's a seasonal closure option. I believe that we also
16 talked about if that were the case, if that's were something that
17 you would want to do for one species, for two species, for any of
18 the species because it doesn't have to be the same, then you need
19 to decide, if you were to do that, if there was a need after all
20 these analysis and it says that, "hey, you really need to do
21 something because it was determined and it was agreed that there
22 is a problem," then if you were to do a seasonal closure for one
23 of these species, when do you want to have it? And this is where
24 the seasonality comes by. Right?

25
26 You know that the species come in pulses. You know that you have
27 high seasons, and you have low seasons. So, then you have to
28 determine if that's what you wanted to do, what would be the least,
29 let's call it the least painful. Right? What will minimize those
30 effects if this has to happen? Okay?

31
32 We have done this in the past for reef fish. Before we used to
33 have December 31st as the last day of any closure if it needed to
34 be implemented. And then it was changed to September 30th because
35 in the U.S. Virgin Islands the Christmas season, the winter season
36 is important for some of the fisheries to stay open. That was
37 something that was decided a long time ago.

38
39 Okay. So, that's something that you could consider. Again, these
40 are just options. Let's go to the next one.

41
42 Another option is-- can you go to the next slide? Okay. Thank you.
43 Another option that could be discussed-- we discussed this last
44 time --is adjusting or establishing recreational daily bag limits
45 and commercial trip limits, dolphin and wahoo Puerto Rico, and/or
46 U.S. Virgin Island, and all other species in Puerto Rico--
47 remember, Puerto Rico has more species that are included in
48 pelagics --to constrain catch to the ACL following a determination.

1 Any measures would apply only during the year following an ACL
2 overage.

3
4 So, why is it both included in their bag limits and trip limits?
5 Because the option would need to be applied to both commercial and
6 recreational fishers for effectiveness and fairness, right? If
7 there is an imposition of recreational bag limits without a
8 commercial trip limit, and we're talking about AMs in here, right?
9 That will not constrain actual landings because, at least not the
10 landings data that is used to monitor the ACL, because as you know
11 we are monitoring the commercial.

12
13 Once the recreational landings data is available, as we talked
14 about earlier, that ACL could be determined for a recreational
15 sector, this can completely change. Okay? So, there's a couple of
16 options here. You can modify the recreational bag limits that you
17 have. You can set a commercial trip limit. You can implement those
18 other pelagic species that you don't have under the Puerto Rico
19 FMP. Yes? Under the understanding that there's already size limits
20 and bag limits implemented for dolphins and wahoo.

21
22 So, that will require an adjustment of the bag limit, but also
23 consideration of a trip limit. With the understanding, also, that
24 during Amendment 3, the Council, in general, decided not to
25 consider commercial trip limits. So, we are aware that this was a
26 discussion that was already happening during Amendment 3. Okay.

27
28 So, what are the issues with this? In terms of analysis, you have
29 to analyze a range of trip limit options or see what would be the
30 appropriate bag limit that will give you that reduction in landings
31 that you need so you don't go over again. And, again, all of these
32 things can be done, making it a little bit more complicated. Just
33 throwing that out there.

34
35 Okay. And the last one that we discussed, you go to the next slide.
36 We talked also about size limit, and we spent some time last time
37 talking about this a little bit. Adjust existing size limits or
38 implement new ones to constrain catch to the ACL for the year
39 following a determination. Any adjusted implemented size limit
40 would apply only during the year following an ACL overage.

41
42 So, the sub-options are only talking about what would be
43 applicable. Size limit for dolphin and wahoo, you already have it
44 in federal waters. You would have to adjust them. For other species
45 in Puerto Rico that do not currently have it, then, if you decide
46 that that's the corrective action that you want to take, if in the
47 event that it goes over and there is a need to do a corrective
48 action, then that's something that you could do.

1
2 Okay. So, from Amendment 3. Amendment 3 is the one that implemented
3 the dolphin and wahoo size limit and bag limits. There's analysis
4 there that was done to determine how much of reduction of landings
5 would come from implementing a size limit. And if you recall during
6 that, it was less than one percent for the proposed limit for '24.
7 So, if we're talking about it as a reactive measure, lowering
8 landings, reducing landings, then it's not entirely clear how much
9 that will reduce landings. So, that's something that should be
10 taken into consideration.

11
12 Okay. So, the last slide that I have here can you go to the next
13 slide, please? This is what you guys-- you requested a comparison
14 of all of these options, corrective actions that were discussed
15 during the last time. So, we put in here one, two, three, four
16 criteria. Stock protection. I'm going to read it.

17
18 For Option 2, the closure, stock protection high. That's expected
19 because you're stopping all mortality during that closure. Data
20 monitoring, you don't really need additional data because there's
21 no fishing activity. Socioeconomic activity has an impact but
22 compared to the other options that are there, it could be lower
23 because, ideally, you can plan around it, right, ideally.
24 Enforcement, it's easy to do a possession check. You either have
25 the fish, or you don't have the fish.

26
27 Let's go to Option 3a. Recreational bag limits. For stock
28 protection, low. You're limiting the harvest, but you could also
29 increase the discards, okay? Because, for example, you're fishing
30 and then you catch more than the number and then you have to
31 discard that fish. And we all know that some of these species are
32 not going to survive when you throw them back. Data monitoring is
33 high. It requires some robust catch estimation. Socioeconomic
34 impacts. They're high impacts because it will affect the year-
35 round value of the fish, particularly for charter fishing.
36 Enforcement. It is low. It is difficult to enforce this at sea or
37 at the dock side.

38
39 For commercial trip limits, stock protection is lower than others,
40 but it will slow harvest, okay? For data and monitoring, it
41 requires real time data. For socioeconomic impact, it may affect,
42 for example, market orders. Enforcement is low, it's difficult as
43 it requires more port rangers.

44
45 Lastly, size limits. Stock protection, low only reduces the
46 undersized catch. It has high requirements for monitoring, for
47 example, length data. Socioeconomic impacts, and this is something
48 that you already analyzed when you were doing Amendment 3, short

1 term loss, long term gain because of the protection of the fish.
2 And enforcement requires dockside intercept. Okay. So, can we go
3 to the last slide, please?

4
5 So, what is expected today? What can we do today? I know it's a
6 little late, so we need to consider if we will continue this
7 tomorrow or if we are going to talk about this right now. As I
8 mentioned before, this is an option presented. This is an options
9 paper.

10
11 For the Action two, it will be really good if we get-- This is a
12 difficult one, right? It'll be really good if we get input from
13 the Council members, from the DAP members as to what do they see
14 as feasible for corrective action given all the situations that we
15 explained here. We could also consider ongoing processes such as
16 the matrix, which is the stock evaluation, and new management
17 measures for dolphin and wahoo for deciding when to further develop
18 the action. Like, if this is something that we need to do right
19 now or if we want to wait until later to do it, until we have
20 additional information from other actions that are ongoing.

21
22 If we decide to move forward, then the IPT can develop a draft
23 amendment for the Council to evaluate. Okay? But before we do that,
24 they need to decide what options they need to include and how they
25 want to move forward. Okay? So, I hope that helps, and we are ready
26 to discuss it if you want.

27 28 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel. And then, Gerson,

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Instead of discussing it a bit. Can we just go
33 with the size limit and forget about the other stuff? Yeah.
34 Seriously.

35
36 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** I'm going to try to make it as less painful as
37 possible. How many of you guys-- this is the least painful way for
38 you --can go without work for three months. This fishery, not only
39 the pelagic fishery, but the fishing industry, I've been involved
40 with you guys for over thirty years. Maybe I'm exaggerating, maybe
41 twenty-seven years, and we have evolved from regulations after
42 regulations after regulation.

43
44 Every time we get a closure, for any species, I know you're doing
45 your job, but you're taking away money from my table. When we get
46 close for five months for conch, we go to pelagic. When conch
47 season opens up again, people go back to diving. The industry, the
48 fishing industry has learned to evolve, but you're pushing us to

1 a corner where I've been seeing that you're just opening up doors
2 for imports. Because when conch season is closed, imports of conchs
3 are coming in.

4
5 Now we want to establish and it's a species that is going through.
6 It's a species that doesn't stay here. A study was made a couple
7 years ago where they were tagging mahis and wahoos to see where
8 they were going in the Gulf. So, we are promoting closing or
9 seasonal closures for the Virgin Islands so these species could go
10 down to the gulf. These species grow, I think, an inch. Bery fast.

11
12 We have we have bag limits established. We have size limits
13 established to make sure that the babies get enough time to spawn.
14 When I used to do that kind of fishing, I used to see baby mahis,
15 maybe three pounds with gonads already on it. This species
16 reproduces, but we cannot afford to take more closures, more-- You
17 guys need to look for other alternatives of making money because
18 you're taken away from our tables.

19
20 I think a pelagic species like this, you should just take it out
21 of your protected species list because you're not doing anything
22 to help this species to help himself, because the currents that
23 bring this species to our waters can turn in any direction, and we
24 don't have them. This is the month that we usually catch 10
25 monster, 30 pounders in the Lang Bank area, and we do not see them
26 because we have this big industry up here catching them with nets
27 and landlines.

28
29 I feel that you guys are protecting the species for other people
30 to harvest and other people, other countries to benefit from it.
31 I don't think you guys are doing something to protect the species
32 for us. You might be doing your job, and I don't want to use you
33 as reference, but the way I see you guys are doing this is take it
34 away from my table and putting it to foreigners. I think you guys
35 have done a lot in the twenty-eight years that I've been involved
36 with you guys, that you guys have protected the resource enough
37 that you can say, "Let me just study, let me just monitor, and let
38 fishermen, work with a little 15% that they got left of the ability
39 to fish."

40
41 I remember when this process started. When the annual catch limits
42 were established. Our industry catches lobster, conch, reef fish,
43 pull pot, if we see mahi, we pick it up, we go after them. And a
44 lot of that data wasn't used because the models that you guys were
45 using in the states were only for one species at the time. So, we
46 lost 75% of our data. We had we were catching I think it was
47 260,000 pounds a conch, and then we got 50,000 pounds from 260,000.
48 And we survive around that.

1
2 On top of that, we have five-month closures for our conch. We
3 learned to survive on that. We cannot afford to lose more. I think
4 you guys have done your homework. I think you guys can pat yourself
5 in the back and say we have done our homework, and give us a break.

6
7 No more closures, no more taken away from us. When the 7,000 pounds
8 of mahi-mahi was established for Saint Thomas, I told Julian,
9 "Julian, that number cannot square in my mind." I have a fisherman
10 here, Mr. Maldonado. When I told him 7,000 pounds, he told me "I'll
11 catch that in a month." One fisherman, he'll fish alone. And you
12 established an annual catch limit of 7,000 pounds for Saint Thomas.
13 Those numbers cannot be right. Never in my lifetime I've seen an
14 industry that have so many shutters running catching fish, and
15 they could survive with 7,000 pounds of mahi a year. No way that
16 could do them bad.

17
18 So, you guys need to sit back, relax a little bit, and look for
19 other ways of finding funds to support you. Because I know you
20 cannot stay home for three months. My funds don't allow me to stay
21 home for a month with the bills that I have, more or less three
22 months. So, it's not going to be less painful for me to give you
23 my ability to catch something when I cannot catch conch or when I
24 cannot catch hind because we have a season for that.

25
26 We are moving around, and it's thin the ability for us to move
27 around. And I think enough is enough. You guys have done a great
28 job protecting this resource, and I think that should be taken
29 into consideration. Don't add new things to what you guys have
30 already done.

31
32 I give you a round of applause because in the twenty-seven, twenty-
33 eight years I've been around here, you guys have protected this
34 resource. Study it. And let us continue living with that 15%
35 ability of fishing that we have because we have a lot of beds, and
36 we cannot afford three months of less painful, more hardship on
37 us. Thank you.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

40
41 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, the challenge that we
42 face is if we decide that these stocks are in need of federal
43 fishery conservation and management, then we're required to
44 establish annual catch limits for them based on the best scientific
45 information available. And we're required to constrain catches to
46 the limits that we set. Our goal with this action is to-- so we've
47 heard we've heard a lot of concerns about unnecessarily restricting
48 catches for pelagic species based on ACL overages.

1 Our goal for this action is to, a, look at how we can develop a
2 more flexible trigger, a trigger that will allow us to consider
3 more information in determining whether corrective action is
4 needed. So, that's goal one so that we can consider the kinds of
5 things you guys are talking about. If there is an overage, right,
6 if corrective action is required to address the overage.

7
8 Goal two is that-- so right now, there is no corrective action
9 specified. If we get a trigger in place that provides people more
10 confidence that corrective action really is needed, while there's
11 really a problem in the fishery for these reasons, we've looked at
12 all the available data. Everybody agrees we need to do something
13 to protect these stocks, right, then this is the corrective action
14 we'll take. And we need it to be specified because we can't decide
15 on the fly, and then it takes two years to get it in place.

16
17 The alternatives to this-- and remember, this isn't just dolphin
18 and wahoo. This is all the pelagic species in the plan. Right? The
19 alternative to this is-- so, María's second bullet is about the
20 ongoing processes such as the matrix. If we believe, as a Council,
21 that we can effectively control harvest of dolphin, wahoo, maybe
22 other pelagic species with annual catch limits because of their
23 migratory nature and the impacts of other countries on the stock,
24 then we have an opportunity through the matrix action that Sarah
25 is going to review with us later to move those stocks out from
26 under federal fishery conservation management.

27
28 We could put them in the ecosystem component species, still have
29 a couple of regulations on them to protect their ecosystem
30 function, right, but not try to manage them with catch limits if
31 we don't think that's effective. The other, I think, option we
32 have or thing we could explore is-- I don't know within SEDAR 103.
33 If we determine, no, we really do need to manage them with catch
34 limits, but maybe the catch limits aren't set at the right levels.
35 Maybe we could look through SEDAR 103 to see if there's additional
36 information that we could use to increase those catch levels.

37
38 Those, I feel like, are the options that we have. What we don't
39 have the flexibility to do is just to ignore overages of the catch
40 limits that we have in place.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard.

43
44 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Let me try to simplify things
45 because I think sometimes we overcomplicate it. Question number
46 one can this be moved to the management plan where, just like
47 Heather has stated, there's no accountability measures. We just
48 study them. That's question number one.

1
2 Because I believe any way you twist this or turn this, we're
3 getting on the wrong road. I don't believe that this species should
4 be managed like the rest of the species, and that's the problem we
5 have here. We try to put everything in a box and think it will fit
6 because we want it to fit. It doesn't work that way. You can't
7 expect the lobster to act like the wahoo. You can't expect the
8 yellowtail to act like the lobster. It just don't work.

9
10 So, to simplify things and making regulations or going down a road
11 when you don't feel like it's the right road to go down only
12 because you have the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which I understand,
13 that we have to follow it, but just because this states that, it
14 does not mean we're not going down the wrong road. I know we'll
15 catch some heat for this; we'll call it what it is.

16
17 If we are really managers, we have to do what is right. We have to
18 go down the right road even though sometimes the right road ain't
19 what everybody else says. And I don't believe you could twist this
20 or turn this any other way, where you could make this walkable,
21 that you could get a reasonable ACL or that you could even study
22 or manage these fish properly.

23
24 When this first came up years ago, and I was at the Council, I was
25 a Council member, and Roy brought it up about the dolphin. There
26 was no way I wanted this dolphin, this study into this dolphin
27 because I know it just doesn't make no sense. The numbers were not
28 there to begin with because this is not really a species that a
29 commercial man target. In Saint Thomas I'm talking about now. Now
30 the recs do, but we don't have any recreational data.

31
32 So, who is it going to fall back on? It is going to fall back on
33 our numbers. So, if we catch 10 fish calculated at 100 pounds,
34 right, that is what our ACL is set at. That's the numbers we're
35 working off of to set the ACL.

36
37 So, I don't see no way or form we could manage a species that is
38 here now and in somebody else's country in another hour. If we
39 don't have the same guidelines that go for us, go for them. And
40 then I would say, "I could understand that" but we don't. And we
41 can't make them follow our lead just like we don't have to follow
42 their lead.

43
44 So, putting all of this aside, let's put common sense into play
45 here. This ain't working. I only agree with some of this because
46 I have to follow the standards too. But when the standards ain't
47 meeting the standards that I think they need to follow, well, let
48 me vote on it. Because then, I mean, I am following somebody else

1 down the wrong road, and that don't work for me. I am here to give
2 my input, and that's what I'm here to do.

3
4 I know some people are going to get rubbed wrong, but you know
5 what? That's life. Let's get over it. But to the end of the day,
6 the right thing is still the right thing. I don't believe any
7 management plan that we have for this wahoo business and the
8 dolphin is working. I don't see it working.

9
10 So, let's try to fit it into the management plan like Heather
11 suggested and study it. But to say you'll manage it with an ACL,
12 I can't see this working.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel, and then Julian, and then John.

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I have a personal opinion, but like a
17 correction, I have to officially disagree with myself. In this
18 case, I agree with you 100%, by the way. I believe that Heather is
19 giving us an opportunity to have something elegantly getting out
20 of this predicament. Remember, we have 14276. We're supposed to
21 drop some of the species that we have. If we have a good rationale
22 for it, put it in the ecosystem category.

23
24 She also said that we should be responsible for those species in
25 a way to manage the species without having to have an ACL. So, if
26 we-- I'm talking about the dolphin and the wahoo. If we have the
27 dolphin and the wahoo with a size limit and bag limit, that's what
28 we have now. But if we put it in the ecosystem category, would
29 that work? Or if we have a management measure, do we still need to
30 have an ACLs and all the other acronyms.

31
32 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, I always want to caution when we talk
33 about ecosystem component species, it reflects a decision that
34 this species is not in need of federal conservation and management.
35 Right? So, then there's a tension. If you're, on the one hand, are
36 saying, "Not in need of conservation and management, but we still
37 want regulations." It's not impossible to do it, but those
38 regulations, if you find a need to regulate a species that is an
39 ecosystem component species, it needs to be tied to its role in
40 the ecosystem, as Heather said. She actually used those words.

41
42 So, if that species provides an important ecosystem function for
43 other species that you manage, you need to identify what those
44 functions are, and then you can have management rules in place to
45 protect that function. I'm aware that among the reasons there was
46 a recreational bag limit for dolphin and wahoo, it was this
47 perception that recreational fishers were catching, like they had
48 extra. I'm not sure that would fit within what I'm talking about

1 in terms of protecting the role of a species in the ecosystem.
2 That's it.

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. That's the point from the beginning. We have
5 been working with dolphins and the wahoo for more than thirty
6 years, internationally and nationally and here. In the case of the
7 dolphin and wahoo, it was an allocation issue between the
8 commercial fishers and the recreational fishers. That's where the
9 bag limit came in. And that's where the local government, some of
10 them were talking about it, and they have--

11
12 So, the question is, can we drop it and let other people worry
13 about it? Because listen, we do not do anything to protect the
14 dolphin and the wahoo when the other 30 countries don't do the
15 same. We have what we call the gauntlet fishery. The gauntlet
16 fishery is the principle by which each county grabs whatever is in
17 front of them and lets the other ones worry about it. We have been
18 doing that for the last hundred years, for the dolphin and the
19 wahoo.

20
21 So, can we drop it? And then can we do it in an elegant way that
22 will comply with MSA and make some people happy with the 14276?
23 Roberto? I mean, Mr. Chairman.

24
25 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a question. Are the restraints that we
26 have on the wahoo and the mahi here, are they the same ones they
27 have in the Southeast? You know, the Carolinas, Florida, etcetera.
28 Are they the same? Do they not have any restrictions? What is the
29 status over there concerning the mahi and the wahoo? Because
30 otherwise, we're not doing anything.

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Sometimes we go, three Councils, the Gulf,
33 the South Atlantic, and the Caribbean, look at this possibility of
34 having a co-management regime for the three of them. The whole
35 Southeast Region will have the same management measures, but it
36 was dropped by one Council, and then the other two Council decided
37 we have other things to do with our money. And that was the end of
38 it.

39
40 I work specifically with some Caribbean countries to do the same
41 thing. With the FAO and a bunch of other people. We came to the
42 conclusion that without having all countries having exactly the
43 same management plan, the same management measures, it would
44 jeopardize the opportunities to maintain the stock forever.
45 However, we didn't do anything, and the stock is still there.

46
47 I mean, those things haven't read the book. They're supposed to
48 disappear. They don't disappear. They come by every year.

1
2 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Do they have a bag limit and a size limit in
3 Florida, Southeast?
4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I don't know. I don't know.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think they do.
8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** don't know whether they have it. I believe that
10 they did. Ellos lo tiene María?
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.
13
14 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** There's regulation applicable. They also have
15 accountability measures that apply if they over the ACL. This is
16 not exclusive, obviously, to the Caribbean. In every single region,
17 if the species is managed under a Fishery Management Council, they
18 will have ACLs and AMs.
19
20 It's just that they-- in the South Atlantic, for example, they
21 collect the data in-season. They also have recreational data, and
22 most of the landings are recreational. So, their accountability
23 measures, and I could read it from the regulations, they have that
24 combination. Like, if the commercial goes over and the recreational
25 too. So, things that we could do. We could do many more things if
26 we had recreational data, right, like on how to better address
27 this. Is just that we don't have it.
28
29 So, believe me, the first thing I did was let me see what other
30 regions are doing to address this problem because they are managing
31 the same species. It's just that there are certain limitations
32 that we have that they don't have. So, yeah. So, it's a problem.
33 Right?
34
35 **ROBERTO SABATER:** My question is, do they have, right now, a bag
36 limit and a size limit? Any other place besides--
37
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** They have regulations. I have to look it up,
39 but if you give me an opportunity, I'll read them to you.
40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian and then John.
42
43 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I had to laugh. You know, considering the ongoing
44 process such as the matrix is very interesting. From the time I
45 saw it, before Heather even said the first thing, it makes a lot
46 of sense. We're here going back and forth, and we've been doing
47 this for two and a half going to three years. We've been asking
48 for the same thing. Remove them or manage them by bag limits and

1 size limits. I don't care who has investment in stocks for the
2 importation of wahoo and dolphin into the Caribbean. Not worried
3 about them. I'm worried about the people who are here.

4
5 We need to continue harvesting them. And just Miguel made a
6 comment, and it's an excellent comment. Have they disappeared
7 without any management in the other areas? No. They're going to
8 continue coming back because they are migratory.

9
10 What's going to stop them from coming to our waters is the boats
11 that are fishing them with the trammel nets, and they get them
12 down the islands from us. That's what's killing us right now.
13 Otherwise, they would have been here in big numbers.

14
15 We are not overfishing something that you can't overfish. We
16 continue beating this to death. E.O. from the president, remove
17 it, kick it out. We don't need it. We've been saying so from day
18 one. There was no reason for these two species to be in the
19 management process.

20
21 When we identified the 32 species through the SSC from that day,
22 and I am talking about more than seven, eight years ago, it was
23 said back then they did not need to be managed. Andy Strelcheck,
24 Roy Crabtree said right here at the tables, they don't need to be
25 managed, but still we move forward and put them into management.

26
27 We need to remove them, get them out of there. Let's move on with
28 more important things. There are so many more important things,
29 but every time I come to these meetings, hear snappers, groupers,
30 wahoo, dolphin, lobster. Five of the top-- Oh, and conch. Six top
31 species that are being imported into our islands on a daily basis.

32
33 Every time we put a new regulation, right here, in our markets the
34 next day. So, who really got the investment in stocks? It's not
35 us. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here fighting. I would be like, "yeah.
36 Shut it down." I got investment in the stocks coming in.

37
38 We really need to consider what we're doing here and stop wasting
39 time. Thank you.

40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, I want to answer Roberto. In the
42 South Atlantic, they have a bag limit of 10 per person/per day of
43 dolphin fish. They have a vessel limit, 54 per vessel/per day,
44 excluding head-boats. They have the size limit, a minimum size
45 limit in federal water, but Florida has a 20-inch fork length
46 limit.

47
48 **ROBERTO SABATER:** What was that?

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Fork length, in the case of Florida. And then
3 also the commercial has 4,000 pounds round way trip limit, and
4 that's 75% of the annual catch. If you move to the Gulf of-- excuse
5 me. --the Gulf of America, they have a bag limit of 10 per person,
6 and they can combine it with reef fish and others.

7
8 So, to answer your question, yes, they do have it. They are similar
9 to what we have here, and they also have the Caribbean-- you know,
10 the different size limits that we have.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** John?

13
14 **JOHN WALTER, III:** So much of this conversation is we invoke the
15 South Atlantic as something that the South Atlantic has been
16 wrestling with, and the South Atlantic is embarking upon a
17 management strategy evaluation for exactly the same reason, that
18 so much of either the productivity or availability of the species
19 is driven by external factors. It's either what nature or foreign
20 fleets allow into the waters of the South Atlantic, which is the
21 same issue writ large for the islands here, probably even on a
22 greater basis in terms of the area is smaller here.

23
24 So, the South Atlantic is trying to develop an index-based
25 management procedure. Essentially, when the index goes up, the
26 catch limit goes up. When the index goes down, the catch limit
27 goes down. That's essentially the kind of trigger that Heather was
28 talking about to be able to say, is there a need for accountability
29 measures? If the ACL is gone high above the ACL, it's probably
30 because there were a lot of dolphinfish locally available to each
31 island. If they aren't catching it, it's probably because the
32 dolphin fish aren't available. If there was an index that would
33 say they went over the ACL because of a lot of availability, that's
34 not a conservation problem.

35
36 Could that then allow for, "Okay, we don't need to impose the
37 accountability measures?" So, it's essentially using that index-
38 based approach to trigger or not trigger accountability measures.
39 South Atlantic is going to use an index basically to adjust the
40 catch limit up and down so that you, in good years of availability,
41 don't bang up against the catch limit and have unnecessary
42 closures. And in a bad year when there's not a lot of dolphin, you
43 actually spread out the opportunity among the states so that
44 Florida doesn't catch all the fish before Georgia, South Carolina,
45 and North Carolina.

46
47 So, that's essentially the goal there. And then to use tactical
48 measures perhaps bag limits or regional management if they want to

1 go there to ensure that in low abundance years, everyone gets some
2 opportunity. In high abundance years, you don't actually hit
3 painful closures.

4
5 We probably don't need to go that far here for this to get something
6 that would at least be a trigger to say, "do you need to impose
7 the AMS?" If that's something that would be useful to explore,
8 that's probably a process that you could pay attention to the South
9 Atlantic process and see if you could borrow something from it.

10
11 The other comment, which I think is really pertinent to a lot of
12 the Executive Orders, is addressing the elephant in the room,
13 really, which is what's going on outside of waters of U.S.
14 jurisdiction for dolphinfish. And I think that's something where
15 if this Council does have high concerns about and/or knows what
16 might be going on in other waters, I think that's something the
17 Council could think about because the U.S. is taking action with
18 other fisheries in the international fora.

19
20 Right now, that would be, I think, the Western-- or WECAFC, right
21 now, has got dolphin fish. It's not a fully functioning binding
22 RFMO right now, in terms of it doesn't have teeth or anything like
23 ICCAT does, where ICCAT management is binding. But, again, if
24 that's a concern, that's something that could be raised. It
25 certainly is a concern of the South Atlantic Council because
26 there's a lot of concern about what foreign fleets might be doing.
27 And the fact that most of the mahi that come into the United States
28 are imported. Now they do come from Ecuador and Peru, primarily in
29 the Pacific.

30
31 So, to summarize, would an index-based AM trigger be useful? In
32 which case, it would perhaps tell us, "No. You don't need to apply
33 it then because it's just an abundance thing." Thanks.

34
35 (Part of Dr. Walter's comments are inaudible on the audio
36 recording.)

37
38 --AM, pay attention to what perhaps is something that could be
39 borrowed from one of the indices that South Atlantic will be
40 testing. And there are indices from tournaments in Puerto Rico.
41 There's long line fishing in the Caribbean, that can be used to
42 produce an index to say, "yeah, there's a lot of dolphin fish this
43 year because the catch rates are high" or "There's not a lot."
44 Thanks.

45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I think that's a perfect example of the kind of
47 flexibility that we were looking to build into Alternative 3. I
48 think it was. Right? The flexibility trigger that we had included

1 in this paper. We would need to pair it with corrective action
2 should that index indicate that it hasn't gone up, right, because
3 there's more dolphin fish available.

4
5 I guess I'm curious to hear from the other Council members, the
6 territories. Not to put you on the spot, what you think about,
7 further flushing some of this out in this options paper or-- Okay.
8 Thanks.

9
10 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López for the record, Puerto Rico
11 DNR. Heather, thanks for the opportunity, and Mr. Chairman. What
12 I believe is that this might be a good example for an issue that
13 is above the local government and the federal government. As you
14 just said, many other countries will be utilizing-- will be using
15 this resource. Therefore, either we all convince ourselves to do
16 some protection, or we line it up for another endangered species
17 eventually. The question is, do we want to eat sea turtles? No.
18 It's an endangered species.

19
20 Is there a reason for it being protected. Puerto Rican sea turtles
21 go back to Nicaragua. A lot of countries will eat them. The ones
22 that we protect here are food in Nicaragua and other places. It's
23 the same idea for me. That's my opinion.

24
25 I cannot think, well, we are not going to do anything because it
26 might be eating in another country. No, no. We have to do something
27 exactly because of that. Not right now in the locality, but
28 internationally. Like in the example of sea turtles.

29
30 For example, we have an Ecological Corridor Committee. It is some
31 name that. I think that's the name. We have Cuba, Dominican
32 Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and others. They get
33 together every year, probably twice a year, and they talk about
34 migratory species. No one is talking about fish. They talk about
35 marine mammals, they talk about birds, sea turtles. No one is
36 talking about fish. Maybe the Council, maybe NOAA, maybe we all
37 together can go there and try to get them some ideas to together
38 protect the species that are internationally used.

39
40 That is my position.

41
42 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. So, thank you so much. I think we have an
43 opportunity here to evaluate the use of the matrix and determine
44 which species we actually want to manage. We have quite a few
45 species to manage and really not enough capacity to do the types
46 of assessments to properly do that management.

47
48 In the case of dolphin and wahoo, I do think this is an issue that

1 is above the territory, that is above even the federal government,
2 and is a state department issue, frankly. And so, if there is a
3 way for us to respectfully and constructively engage, I think that
4 is a place that we might all want to be at this time.

5
6 This other issue of imports of seafood from other countries,
7 especially during our closed season, is an issue that is, I think,
8 of the utmost importance for us to identify mechanisms to avoid or
9 to put restrictions into place. I do think this idea of
10 international trade, there are mechanisms. I know that this
11 Council, Miguel, goes to some of these, ICCAT, lots of these
12 different coordinating bodies that are binding or nonbinding.

13
14 We have other mechanisms as well. Ricardo and I both are now in
15 contact with the CITES Standing Committee with U.S. Fish and
16 Wildlife Service, and we've successfully been able to provide
17 information so that things like sea cucumbers, queen conch aren't
18 listed on an appendix that would further restrict their trade, or
19 they're allowed to be on appendices that would allow research and
20 other things. And there may even be opportunities for us to
21 mitigate some of our CITES issues. But all of this requires trust
22 and partnership and real engagement in issues in constructive ways.

23
24 And so, I think for this specific issue, we might not want to ask
25 us to go further into an options paper. Maybe right now is the
26 time to take a pause in this, and for us to think about what other
27 mechanisms we have in place and are going on in parallel so that
28 we can identify and prioritize what we really want to do and which
29 species we really need to manage and could effectively manage.
30 We're really small bodies of water when we look at the entire
31 Caribbean, even the South Atlantic. Are we putting a dent in
32 population of mahi and wahoo worldwide?

33
34 And so, let's ask ourselves where we can be most constructive and
35 put our energies and our very restricted funding and other types
36 of scientific inquiries in there, and into those spaces and not
37 provide further burdens on fishers who are, frankly, the one
38 mechanism that we use consistently to manage species. So, if we
39 can restrict those kinds of burdens on fishers; if we can
40 prioritize species and do some really good work on fewer species
41 that we can go more in-depth on, I think we'll be able to raise
42 all of our management goals and actions.

43
44 And I like this idea that Nickey had earlier. It was this, we've
45 done a lot of good work, and we've been conserving species. And
46 so, now is the time to really think about what we want to conserve.

47
48 I'm just kind of going on a little tangent so I'm done because

1 it's really late, but I see other people have things they wanted
2 to say.

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We're not going to finish this today. So, I
5 propose that we cut it here and pick it up tomorrow or some other
6 time. The thing is we have already discussed all this, and we came
7 up with the idea of having size limits. It started on July 25th,
8 2025. So, right now we have our size limits and bag limits. That's
9 it.

10
11 Like I said, if everybody agrees, that's okay. The issue is when
12 we start talking about ACL and all that and putting close seasons
13 and all that. So, if we agree that this is okay and we have done
14 enough, that's okay. It's just that thing, that monster behind our
15 door saying we have an ACL, and you have to stop fishing and doing
16 everything if we reach the ACL.

17
18 In this case, that measure doesn't make any sense, really. But you
19 already approved of this. It went through the Secretary of
20 Commerce. Everybody was happy. And I've been told to tell Jannette
21 here to put out an emphasis on the dolphin/wahoo regulations that
22 were approved in 2025, with their outreach and education.

23
24 And we need to do that until somebody tells me, no, forget about
25 it. This is not a rule. But my role now is that I have to follow
26 this. So, I mean, if that's where we are with the dolphinfish and
27 you want to do something else or drop it altogether, that's a whole
28 conversation.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

31
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Kevin McCarthy. So, I'd just remind everybody in
33 case you're not remembering that, under WECAFC, dolphinfish are a
34 priority species.

35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep.

37
38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** They're going to be managing at much greater
39 spatial scales than this body is tasked with. So, just something
40 to keep in mind.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?

43
44 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Let me just give one final comment. I
45 agree with WECAFC. But WECAFC don't control all the countries in
46 the Caribbean Basin. So, that don't mean everybody is falling in
47 line. That's my last statement.

1 My other statement is I think we need to table this because we are
2 not getting no place.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo.

5
6 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, again, Puerto Rico DNER. I
7 just want to clarify that, in my position, I completely agree with
8 Tony, with everybody here, and what they are talking about. But,
9 again, you all said that the problem is the industrial fisheries
10 of another countries, far away countries coming to the Caribbean
11 waters. Those should be the targets. And I don't think that we can
12 do that alone. We need the other Caribbean countries in order to
13 fight that.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, what do we do?

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Cierra la reunión y terminamos mañana y hablamos
18 mañana porque tienes--

19
20 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I mean, I feel this is a really
21 good stopping point for this. I'm hearing general agreement around
22 the table that we should pause work on this particular action.
23 María's going to try not to smile. The species matrix action that
24 we're going to talk about tomorrow is really, I think, the perfect
25 place to pick this back up when we look at the effectiveness of
26 federal conservation and management and how we want to spend our
27 limited resources.

28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Excellent.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Excellent. Okay. We'll do that.

32
33 Okay. So, we're going to recess until tomorrow morning. We have a
34 closed session immediately following or five minutes after
35 everybody leaves.

36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, a las ocho y quince.

38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** No a las ocho y cuatro.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** 8:15 tomorrow.

42
43 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** 08:15. Yeah.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Eight, one, five.

46
47 **NELSON CRESPO:** A las seis de la mañana. [laughter]
48

1 (WHEREUPON, THE MEETING RECESSED FOR THE DAY ON APRIL 21, 2026.)

2
3 - - -

4
5 APRIL 22, 2026

6
7 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

8 - - -
9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Good morning, everyone. This is the
11 continuation of the 189th Caribbean Fisheries Management Council
12 being held at Saint Croix Buccaneer Hotel, April 22, 2026. We're
13 going to start with the roll call. I'm going to start on my right
14 with Mr. Sabater.

15
16 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Director.

17
18 **JOHN WALTER, III:** John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

19
20 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, NOAA's Office of General
21 Counsel.

22
23 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, NOAA Fisheries.

24
25 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Diana Martinó, Council Staff.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.

28
29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.

30
31 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, Puerto Rico DNER.

32
33 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, Councilman.

34
35 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López, NOAA Fisheries.

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela García-Moliner, Council Staff.

38
39 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Liajay Rivera García, Council Staff.

40
41 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Cristina Olán, Council Staff.

42
43 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Sí, okay. Thank you. Vance Vicente, good
44 morning. SSC.

45
46 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Jannette Ramos-García, Outreach and
47 Educational Advisory Panel Chair.
48

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, Ecosystems-Based Fisheries
2 Management Panel, Chair.
3
4 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, Saint Croix
5 DAP Chair.
6
7 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning. Julian Magras, DAP Chair, Saint
8 Thomas/Saint John.
9
10 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson crepo, DAP Chair,
11 Puerto Rico.
12
13 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries
14 Science Center.
15
16 **ADYAN RÍOS:** Good morning. Adyan Ríos, Southeast Fisheries Science
17 Center.
18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, U.S.V.I., Division of Fish and
20 Wildlife.
21
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.
23
24 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** María Irizarry, Council Staff.
25
26 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Cedric Taquín, DAP Member, Puerto Rico. PescApp.
27
28 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Licenciado José Rivera, CEO PescApp.
29
30 **SPEAKER:** Mayte Rivera, citizen.
31
32 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Good morning. Martha Prada, IRA
33 Coordinator.
34
35 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico,
36 Fisheries Liaison.
37
38 **ALBERTO FORT RIVERA:** Alberto Fort, Council Staff.
39
40 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** We're good.
41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Online.
43
44 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Mr. Chair. Sorry. We have to also
45 read the-- Alfredo Sefíl, Jesús Rivera-Hernández, John Walter,
46 Kayla Ishida.
47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Cristina. The first thing on the

1 agenda this morning is the new app for fishers, dealers, and
2 consumers. Okay. You got it?

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What they are going to
5 present today, by the way, the Council doesn't necessarily endorse
6 the application. That's a statement that I have to make.

7
8 Cedrin Taquín, as you know, is a member of the District Advisory
9 Panel of Puerto Rico. He's been a friend for a long, long time.

10
11 Attorney José Rivera, put together an application that might help
12 fishers, consumers, and dealers of fish in Puerto Rico and the
13 U.S. Virgin Islands. So, I asked them to give the presentation
14 here today. The application is bigger than just the market. It can
15 include anything related to the data that we collect in the U.S.
16 Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. But at this time, they are going
17 to concentrate on the market side of the application.

18
19 José, where are you?

20
21 **NEW APP FOR FISHERS, DEALERS AND CONSUMERS OF U.S. CARIBBEAN**
22 **SEAFOOD—J. RIVERA/CEDRIC TAQUÍN**
23

24 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Hello. You hear me? Perfect. Right.

25
26 So let me introduce myself. I'm really excited to be here. I think
27 this is a very important moment for us and for the fishing,
28 artisanal fishery industry in the U.S. Caribbean.

29
30 Let me introduce myself. My name is Licenciado José Rivera. I am
31 attorney at law in Puerto Rico. I specialize right now in
32 governmental relationships and social impact projects. I've been
33 in a few industries from now, but I think it's important for you
34 to know why I'm here. I'm not a fisherman. I do not own a
35 restaurant. I am a consumer. But I am a friend of this character
36 right here, Cedric Taquín since 1996. We are high school buddies.
37 We graduated from Hatillo, Puerto Rico in 1999. And we have been
38 friends for almost thirty years now.

39
40 The reason I'm here is almost poetic. We caught up in a gastronomic
41 event almost six months ago. While we're catching up about, you
42 know, what you're doing with your life, I know he has my favorite
43 restaurant, for having the best local fish in Puerto Rico, is
44 MenTa, in Hatillo, you have to go there. It is in a beautiful spot
45 in the North part of the Island. And I was talking to him catching
46 up. "What were you doing right now?" I say, "Oh, man, I'm doing a
47 lot of things. But right now, I'm invested. I'm in a black hole
48 trying to understand and learn about this new revolutionary

1 technology, AI.
2
3 So, it was in a black hole trying to understand the capabilities
4 of this new technology. And I was really deep into education and
5 research about what were the capabilities of this new technology.
6 I remember he said to me, it was a thirty-minute conversation
7 during the event. "I have been thinking about an idea for two
8 decades, and I think you could be the one I'm looking for." So, he
9 started explaining his thoughts, his idea. That was a thirty-
10 minute conversation. I got, that night, to bed really late.
11
12 I remember waking up at 6am in the morning with a jolt.[gasp] I
13 cannot stop thinking about what Cedric was telling me about
14 yesterday. I knew at that moment that it was not only-- it was a
15 great idea. This was not something that Cedric was just throwing
16 out. It was a clear understanding of the problems and the obstacles
17 of the fishing industry, the way to solve them, a deep and profound
18 knowledge of regulations, and a deep love for the sea.
19
20 I knew at that moment that what he was talking to me about was
21 actually his legacy. What he's been doing for two decades in his
22 restaurant. He wanted to try and create something to help the
23 fishermen, to help the restaurants that are making the things
24 right, that are supporting the local fishermen, that know their
25 fishermen by their name.
26
27 So, I got up. I sat down at 6am in the morning, barely two or three
28 hours of sleep. I start working on all these new technologies. And
29 the rest of the story, I think, is Cedric to talk about. But first,
30 introduce yourself, and then finish the story.
31
32 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Okay. Good morning, everybody. Well, thank you.
33 That's a very nice, nice introduction you gave of me. My name is
34 Cedric, as my friend said over here. A lot of you guys have known
35 me as a DAP Member for the past, I don't know how many years, quite
36 a few years we've been here.
37
38 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** One interruption. This QR code, if you want to
39 see the app right now, it's in its beta version. It's not public.
40 It's just for better use. If you want to scan this, you can just
41 go to the main page of the app just to see it.
42
43 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** So, anyways, I'm going to pick up where he-- a quick
44 introduction of myself. I'm a chef. I'm a fisherman. I've been a
45 commercial fisherman for quite some years. I've been a help on
46 commercial fishing boats, recreational fishermen since I was born
47 from my parents, from my grandparents. So, I have the ocean and
48 the fish very close to heart.

1
2 As a matter of fact, I wanted to be a marine biologist for most of
3 my youth, but, I eventually made it into culinary arts, and I
4 figured out I'd be better with my hands and with my feet than,
5 than as a biologist. So, I went into culinary arts, and,
6 eventually, I managed, a little bit indirectly, to combine my
7 passion for marine biology and education with my culinary arts
8 expertise. And this was a turning point I had at my restaurant
9 when I opened it seventeen years ago, when I had certain fish
10 species on my menu and I was obviously buying local because that
11 was my philosophy for my restaurant.

12
13 After a couple of weeks with the menu, I stumbled across the first
14 time where I couldn't get hold of certain species. I couldn't get
15 some silk snapper, is the chillo, which is very famous. And then,
16 after that, I couldn't find the dorado. And I was like, "wow." I
17 have these items on my menu, and I can't buy them. I had some last
18 week. I had something before. My restaurant just opened. The people
19 want fresh fish, and I couldn't buy any. And, obviously, I didn't
20 want to go out to the supermarket or call a supplier.

21
22 I was like, "my restaurant is going to be serving local fish." But
23 it was the first time I realized you can't always have local fish.
24 You can't always have the species when you want them, when they
25 are. So, I realized I have to start working with what's available.
26 I was fishing, while I opened my restaurant, I was catching
27 kingfish. I was catching blackfin snapper. Yeah. Blackfin snapper.
28 I was catching blackfin tuna. I was catching these lesser-known
29 species, and I wasn't serving them at my restaurant.

30
31 I figured people don't know what this fish is. It's not common. I
32 wanted to stick with the common stuff with the things that, back
33 in the day, you kind of knew they were easy to sell, the easy
34 sellers. So, one of those days, I remember, I didn't have any fish
35 for lunch, but I had a couple of kingfish in my car. On ice because
36 I'd give them away. I'd sell them cheap, whatever. And that was
37 the day that I realized, "Well, you know what? I'm going to have
38 to fillet one of these bad boys, and I'm going to serve it. I'm
39 going to put a little cream sauce on it. I'm going to salt and
40 pepper it. I'm going to sauté it really nicely" and I started
41 serving kingfish.

42
43 People were just going crazy over this kingfish, which is something
44 that normally people would eat in steaks with the bone, with the
45 skin, maybe forced to eat it for religious holidays, maybe
46 something that was in a on the beach, in a vitrina with something
47 dry. We all know that kingfish isn't top fish, but I started
48 treating it like top fish.

1
2 That's when I started realizing there's a market for these lesser-
3 known species. And another thing is that I'm catching them, I'm
4 saving money, I'm surviving over here because, obviously, opening
5 a restaurant is quite an expensive hobby. That's kind of where I
6 had a click moment where I'm going to just work with local with
7 whatever I can catch, whatever I can find, whatever the fisherman
8 brings me, and I don't have to worry about what people want. I'm
9 going to offer and I'm going to sell what I think is fresh and
10 available at the moment.

11
12 But, obviously, I had to educate. So, that's where I started
13 feeling that I had all this knowledge of my fish, the species, the
14 inner feeling that I wanted to be a marine biologist all my life,
15 which never happened. But then here, I'm in front of a table, and
16 I'm explaining to people what a kingfish is, what a mutton snapper
17 is, what a lionfish is. All these other species that nobody had
18 heard about or maybe they had but they didn't really-- they weren't
19 familiar with. And then I realized that they still didn't know
20 what it was, so I started putting pictures up on the wall. It was
21 a nice way to decorate my restaurants. I was putting my catch up
22 on the walls on frames.

23
24 Whenever I talk to somebody about a mutton snapper, or about a
25 blackfin snapper, or about a black snapper or about any other
26 species that weren't the popular red fish; they'd be like "Oh.
27 Well, what is it?" "Well, here it is." And they were like, "Oh.
28 That's a wahoo." And I'd be like "No, that's a kingfish." And then
29 I showed a mutton snapper, and they be like "Oh that's a chillo"
30 and id be "No, that's a mutton snapper. Look at the dot."

31
32 And so, I started realizing that if the person has the fillet in
33 front of them, if he sees the fish and he hears me talking, they'll
34 learn. Next thing you know I had customers coming in and saying
35 "Hey, do you have any mutton snapper?" "Do you have any this?"
36 They weren't asking for chillo. They weren't asking for dorado.
37 They weren't asking for lobster. They were interested in these
38 lesser-known species. For me, that was that was a moneymaker
39 because it's obviously cheaper fish. It's available. And as the
40 seasons were changing, I was changing my menu.

41
42 I immediately got rid of my menu, got rid of the ones that said
43 dorado or chillo or whatever, and I put catch of the day. And for
44 the past sixteen, seventeen years, I've had catch on the day on my
45 menu, and everybody knows. You go to MenTa, and you might not know
46 what you're going to eat, but you know it's going to be local, and
47 you know it's going to be fresh. And maybe there's a time, and it
48 has happened, where you come to MenTa, and I have no fish. Why?

1 The sea's rough, the boat broke.

2
3 So, there's all these reasons that we know that finding local fish,
4 consistently, is hard. It's very hard. And as a consumer, it's
5 hard. You go to places, you think it's there, it's not there, they
6 ran out. They're giving you one thing for the other. There's a lot
7 of fraud. We all know about seafood fraud. So, for me, it was very
8 special to feel that I was educating my customers. They were eating
9 what I was serving. I was making money with it, and it was just
10 kind of a win-win. And thank God, to this day, seventeen years
11 later, MenTa's still open, and I'm still serving whatever the
12 fisherman brings.

13
14 So, anyways, coming back to coming back to the big idea over here.
15 A couple of years ago with, Dr. Wessley Merten from the dolphin
16 research program, he was working on a program to measure catch per
17 effort, and I was giving him data for my catches. And we're kind
18 of working together to get the FADs going in Puerto Rico. And we
19 started working together, and we figured out that we have these
20 boats with GPS on them that are fishing. They're showing us their
21 track.

22
23 If I buy fish from them, we have a track. We have a fisherman. We
24 have a restaurant that's serving it, we have traceability. So, we
25 managed to make a little project about traceability that was very
26 cool, but the huge problem is that I'm asking fishermen to put a
27 GPS on their boat, show me where they're fishing, and we're going
28 to show that to everybody. Obviously, you said something about
29 that. Yes. Somebody here said something about having a GPS on their
30 boat and showing the numbers. Nobody wants that as a fisherman,
31 and I knew that. I was like, I had one on my boat, but I wasn't
32 too happy about that either.

33
34 But, anyways, a hurricane came around, and that project just
35 finished. We never went anywhere with it. But it was there, and it
36 was cute. I always wanted to have something that would-- I wanted
37 to have a traceability program going.

38
39 The people that know me, that follow me on my Instagram, on my
40 Facebook, whatever. They know I'm fishing. They know what's
41 happening with my fish. But there's all these other places that
42 don't know, all these other people that don't know who I am. And
43 I wanted a marketing tool for restaurants, like me, that were
44 sacrificing time, money, energy, and working solely local seafood
45 or something local. Doesn't matter. It could be just a lobster or
46 just one fish or whatever. But as long as you're buying seafood
47 from a local certified licensed fisherman, I wanted some kind of
48 seal of approval.

1
2 I wanted something that people could say, "Hey. Look at that sign
3 over there." Like, on bottles of wine from Europe or the mustards
4 or whatever. I wanted a seal, something to give to customers, and
5 some guarantee that their product is fresh. Not that the restaurant
6 says, "Hey. We have fresh fish. We have fresh lobster. We have
7 this and we have that." That's easy. Anybody can say that. But how
8 can we design a system where that information is out there, and
9 customers and consumers can know with at least a big percentage
10 that there's some truth in that. And that's where PescApp comes
11 from.

12
13 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Let me jump in a little bit. I gave you a QR
14 code in a blank paper here. This is what happens when a fisherman
15 delivers fresh local inventory to a restaurant. Every item the
16 restaurant receives from the fisherman creates a unique QR code.
17 That QR code is the traceability for the consumer. They know the
18 history behind the plate; behind the fish they are eating.

19
20 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Let me just jump in one second. Because I have to
21 say this because I want you guys to understand how we got here.

22
23 So, how do we get to this application? How do we give the consumer
24 the best knowledge possible that this fish is locally caught, and
25 we give a personality and the customer can see that this is a
26 person that got up in the morning, went fishing, caught it. So,
27 what we have come out with-- my idea here was how about we have a
28 data driven platform where the data that is offered to the consumer
29 is one given by the fisherman.

30
31 So, we're going to have the fisherman telling the consumer where
32 his fish is, where his fish is going to be sold, where you as a
33 consumer can go and have his product. It's not the restaurant
34 saying I just bought fish. I have a restaurant. I say it all the
35 time. I bought this. I bought that. I put the picture up, whatever.
36 Anybody can do that. But I wanted some--

37
38 I mean, with this system, with this idea of having the fishermen,
39 having this platform where the fisherman is the one that says, "I
40 just sold a 100 pounds of queen snapper at MenTa. " And as soon as
41 he sends that text out, the consumers receive a text. We have fish
42 at MenTa and you can actually steer the customers in that
43 direction.

44
45 It was this idea I gave José that night, I was like, he was telling
46 me about his working with apps. Was doing this. I was like, "Hey,
47 man. I have an idea." And I told him the idea, and I blew his mind.
48 And this is crazy because it started as something small like this,

1 and he just started figuring out different ways, and we just
2 started adding on to it, and it got very complicated.

3
4 It's very complicated in the sense that there's a whole bunch of
5 cool features to it. But in essence, this is an app where the
6 fisherman's going to have an account. He's going to log the fish.
7 The restaurant is going to receive a notification. The restaurant
8 has barely anything to do with this app. The restaurant cannot
9 advertise itself. The restaurant is present. He has his features,
10 but he will only be advertised when the fisherman notifies that he
11 has sold fish to that restaurant.

12
13 Then we have a bunch of other features that happen. So, here we
14 go.

15
16 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** This is the most complete and complex in terms
17 of it being multi-regulatory, multilingual, marketplace,
18 educational platform, traceability, compliance embedded
19 application that serves as a marketplace and connects all the main
20 actors of the artisanal fishing industry. From agriculture of the
21 sea, from the fishermen to the consumer, passing through all the
22 fishing markets, restaurants. And then eventually, government
23 could have access to all this data that's created as part of the
24 transactions.

25
26 I want you, Cedric-- we have to respect their time, and this is a
27 very-- I give you a lot of deliveries, so you can know, if later
28 on, you have specific questions, we could answer any question maybe
29 after this brief. But I think at the moment, it's important to
30 respect time.

31
32 So, I want you to talk a little bit about this, and then we can
33 pass through directly so you can see the app working. So, you can
34 ask questions about the real app. Can you talk about this?

35
36 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. So, basically, with this app, the fisherman
37 has his marketplace. He has his little profile. He can expose as
38 much as he wants, and he can limit it as much as he wants. He has
39 his profile.

40
41 He has pictures. He can have connections to his website, to his
42 social media and whatever. And, basically, with one post, you could
43 be doing two actions. We all know that fishermen, commercial
44 fishermen need to report their catches and hand them in monthly.
45 With this tool, we figured out that it would be cool that when the
46 fisherman makes his log, he's going to have his dashboard with all
47 his information. And in one step, you can advertise the restaurant,
48 and then you also do your homework as a fisherman.

1
2 So, basically, we have structured data in real time. There's no
3 cost for enforcement, and there's an automatic compliance and
4 complete traceability. Just posting and advertising the
5 restaurant. Obviously, as they advertise the restaurant, the
6 restaurant gets visibility. He sells more fish, then he needs to
7 buy more fish.

8
9 So, you kind of have to do your homework, but in a good sense,
10 you're advertising at the same time. So, we consider it a win-win
11 situation here.

12
13 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** This is 100% free for the fishermen and for the
14 consumers. So, we are hopefully wishing to have the endorsement of
15 the Departamento de Recursos Naturales and the equivalent
16 Department of Planning and Natural Resources here in U.S. Virgin
17 Islands. Because with endorsements, as a certified provider, we
18 can have in one click, in ten seconds, the fisherman from his phone
19 can do both things at the same time, and it's optional. It's
20 voluntary compliance.

21
22 If we are certified, the fisherman could have, in one action,
23 market his inventory for the consumers, for the restaurants, for
24 the fisheries. And at the same time, he can comply with his
25 statutory responsibility. So, I think we have thirteen minutes
26 left in the presentation. I think we should go directly to the
27 app. Can you connect here as a fisherman, please?

28
29 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** I cook. I fish. I talk fish. I'm sorry if I'm
30 nervous. I haven't stood up in front of a bunch of people like
31 this that aren't customers of mine.

32
33 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Since culinary school twenty-five years ago!

34
35 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Twenty-five years ago, I had to do a presentation.
36 I hated doing presentations in front of people. When I graduated
37 from culinary school--

38
39 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Please, connect, Cedric.

40
41 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** What?

42
43 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Connect.

44
45 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** He's been talking about this for two decades.
46 So, imagine if I let him-- that's it. Okay. That's it. Alright.

47
48 Mirror it.

1
2 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Dios mío. Espérate. Help. I feel like the fish under
3 the boat and my light is not out. What do you need?
4

5 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** So, Cedric is going to represent a fisherman.
6 So, I just want you to know how easy and user friendly the
7 application is. It's GEO located, so if you are you have your
8 location set up, it's going to identify if you are in Saint Croix,
9 San Thomas, Saint John, Puerto Rico. Alright?
10

11 Right now, Cedric just entered. This is the main-- let's travel a
12 little bit. Vamos un poquito abajo. Para abajo, right there. This
13 is the bottom. This is this is it.
14

15 Log my catch. Everything you're going to do is touch that bottom,
16 but I need you to understand all the other things you have. Go to
17 the main panel. Main panel. Arriba.
18

19 So, you have active catches, what you have in your own inventory
20 available for restaurants, or consumers. The fishermen got the
21 option to tell it, "I want to sell to the customers." Or "I want
22 to sell to restaurants." or "I don't want to sell. I have my own
23 customers, but I just want people to see that I'm here."
24

25 We want to make fishermen visible. We're going to give them the
26 value they deserve, their story. You have the active catches. Go
27 here. Go a little-- un poquito arriba, here.
28

29 My allies, any restaurant that is in our platform is invisible
30 unless he's got an affiliation with a fisherman. The fisherman is
31 the one that approve the visibility of the restaurant. Every
32 transaction has to be through a fisherman. So, this is important.
33

34 You have allies. You have communications like Instagram, Facebook,
35 WhatsApp. Delivering restaurant, the fisherman doesn't have to
36 make a transaction directly. He just knows the restaurant. He
37 already has a business relationship with the restaurant. He just
38 hits this button. Once he posts his catch, he hits "delivers it to
39 the restaurant," and he delivers it directly. The restaurant
40 receives a notification, "You have this pending delivery. Does the
41 restaurant accept?" Two posts are generated in our Instagram's
42 community wall. One from the fisherman announcing that he just
43 delivered to a restaurant x amount of pounds of fish, and another
44 post for the restaurant saying, "Hey. I just received local catch
45 from this fisherman."
46

47 Life at sea. This is our lifestyle. We want to promote the
48 lifestyle, the history of the fishermen. This is where they post

1 the pictures of the boat, the sunrise early in the morning, the
2 deck, lifestyle, so people can follow the fishermen. And when you
3 post, like in Instagram, people that are following you are going
4 to receive, "oh, there's something happening with tony right now.
5 He's fishing at five in the morning, taking some local lobsters."
6 So, we are promoting the life.
7
8 My catches, restaurant orders, direct orders. Let's go to make a
9 catch, Cedric. Let's report the landing.
10
11 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Okay. Log my catch.
12
13 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Log my catch. Just arrived from the sea.
14
15 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Just arrived or I have inventory ready to sell. So,
16 just arrived. Yes, sir. I was fishing at night. It has daytime or
17 nighttime.
18
19 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Do you see the documentation matches all the
20 requirements you need to have to report the landing.
21
22 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** We're fishing in Arecibo. We docked at Villa
23 Pesquera. We go next.
24
25 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Next.
26
27 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Wait. Sorry. That's my phone. My phone's gotten--
28 it's not working.
29
30 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Yeah. iPhone 13.
31
32 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** All right. So, what are the species? For example,
33 let's say you bring in cartucho, which is a queen snapper.
34 Quantity. I caught-- I wasn't too good, but I did catch 67 pounds.
35
36 Next.
37
38 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** You can upload a picture of the catch you just
39 caught.
40
41 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yep. I have, I caught it obviously with línea y
42 anzuelo, hook-and-line. Price is optional, guys.
43
44 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Price is optional.
45
46 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** He doesn't have to have his prices. His prices vary
47 from restaurant to restaurant, whatever. But if you want to have
48 your marketplace, if you want to have your prices available--

1 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** If you want your consumers or restaurants to see
2 your price in the marketplace, you put it. It is optional.
3 Restaurants only see restaurants' prices. Customers only see
4 customer prices.
5
6 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** This isn't the case that a fisherman doesn't have
7 customers. He just likes to advertise, and whoever comes buys
8 whatever. That's fine.
9
10 It just feels weirder like this. I get nervous more with this than-
11 - okay. So, anyways, so the prices are there. That's optional, we
12 want to add that to the report. Then we will go next.
13
14 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** You have the option here. If you only want to
15 use the marketplace and you don't want to report because you
16 reported it by eReporting or by manual logging.
17
18 You can also only have compliance. If you don't want to be in the
19 marketplace, and we have the endorsement, of course, you can go
20 directly and just register your landing.
21
22 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** So basically, I'm going to go marketplace only?
23
24 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Go to-- yeah. No. No. Do both.
25
26 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Both. Yeah. We'll do both.
27
28 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** And publish.
29
30 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** And we're going to publish. Boom.
31
32 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** That's it. Ten seconds.
33
34 All the compliance is there. If you have fishermen companions doing
35 it with you, you can edit the boat. You can edit your--
36
37 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Separate the fish amongst fishermen. If there's
38 three commercials on the boat and [crosstalk]
39
40 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Everything is considered from the perspective of
41 a fisherman. So, this is very important. This is not a Silicon
42 Valley. It is an app made by fishermen and chef.
43
44 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Puerto Rico Valley.
45
46 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** So, I'm going to present someone to you, right
47 there, the beautiful woman right there, is my wife, Maite. Maite,
48 I want you to connect. She used to have a restaurant in Fajardo a

1 few years ago. Know her guys
2
3 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** She went to the Culinary Institute of America with
4 me. We went to school together. We've been together for a thousand
5 years. Things-- these guys hooked up again, but she's a graduated
6 chef from the Culinary Institute of America. She's a sommelier,
7 and she went towards the wines department.
8
9 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** This is Maite.
10
11 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** You can't take the chef out of the kitchen.
12
13 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Look at-- look at the picture. Me and Maite, the
14 time we met Cedric. 1996. This is Maite. Go to the main panel.
15
16 This is the restaurant dashboard. This is where the restaurants
17 are looking for where the local fish is. I want local fish in my
18 restaurant. So, where is it?
19
20 She can go directly. She has to be affiliated to a fisherman. It
21 doesn't work. If you're not visible, you have a fisherman that has
22 to pass through. So, she has eleven fishermen, she got El Anzuelo,
23 which translated in English means The Hook.
24
25 It's the name of the restaurant. She got 11 fishermen already
26 affiliated to her.
27
28 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Your lucky girl.
29
30 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** She has the Freshometer. Freshometer is something
31 really, really cool. I'm going to explain it to you a little bit,
32 sooner. She got the marketplace. She can go just directly to there
33 and just right, Maite just search for-- what do you catch right
34 now? Cartucho?
35
36 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. Cartucho or dorado.
37
38 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** What do you catch right now?
39
40 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. Cartucho.
41
42 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Can you find cartucho? Atun, for example. You
43 can search by species, you can search by zone, you can search by
44 fishermen. So, you know what real time catch is available. So,
45 Maite, close this. I just wanted them to know. Close this.
46
47 Go back. Go to the bottom, slowly, to the bottom of this. They can
48 change their Facebook wall, their menu, their pictures. The

1 restaurant can change the picture of the catch that the fisherman
2 delivers to her, but only in their post. Not in the post of the
3 fisherman, but in the post of the restaurant. So, go ahead. You
4 can promote your restaurant. Go ahead.
5
6 This is publication. Cedric, I want you to make a delivery to El
7 Anzuelo, but not right now, in a moment. We have delivered ten
8 pounds of cartucho you just caught, real fresh.
9
10 I want you to know. This is really life. It's happening right now.
11 Yeah, ten pounds of cartucho.
12
13 You're ready with what you just caught. You caught 100 pounds?
14 Alright. You can have payment terms, COD cash. The transaction
15 doesn't matter. You can do it through the app, but you can just
16 have the transaction the way you are used to having it. So, this
17 is absolutely optional. And then please complete the delivery.
18
19 Ten seconds. You already delivered the catch. So, Maite, I want
20 you to refresh. Look at that little beautiful--
21
22 **MAITE:** Little alert is going to tell me [crosstalk]
23
24 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Cedric Taquín just register a delivery to the
25 restaurant. Go to the main panel and just receive the-- go. Scroll
26 down. Go. Right there. Right there.
27
28 You have the confirmation. You could modify it. You can make some
29 notes. You can tell something to the fisherman. Just confirm it,
30 please. That's it. In this moment, right now, it's been generated
31 real time. Real life is going to be generated.
32
33 The two posts are going to upload and update the interactive map
34 where people know where the catch is right now. And at the same
35 time, her restaurant is public. Let me connect.
36
37 This is it. This is PescApp. Well, I am a consumer right now. So,
38 you have fishermen, restaurant, and a consumer. I want to know
39 about the Freshometer. Sir, can you explain a little bit what this
40 is? This is an interactive mode. It is basically a proprietary
41 algorithm. It doesn't exist. Explain it Cedirc, please.
42
43 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. So, the Freshometer is basically when a
44 transaction is made, there's a QR code that's generated, and the
45 restaurant can print it out or can have it on their menu, have it
46 on their websites. A regular customer can come to the restaurant
47 and just kind of see the QR code and scan it. And as soon as he
48 scans it, he's going to run into the Freshometer. The Freshometer,

1 I don't know how this happened. I don't know how this works, but
2 I know what it does.
3
4 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** It's a secret.
5
6 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. He's not going to tell me. But I have recipes
7 I'm not going to tell him either. Anyways, we have the frequency
8 here of arrivals, of purchases. It measures the consistency of
9 purchases.
10
11 So, you have fishermen or you have restaurants that buy fish maybe
12 once every six months. That doesn't go well with a Freshometer,
13 but maybe we can train restaurants to buy fish six times a month
14 perhaps, and then that divides more and gives you a little bit
15 more action, so you have more frequency with the purchases. And it
16 measures also the amount of inventory. Uh-oh.
17
18 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Don't worry. Don't worry.
19
20 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** The amount of inventory and the variety of species
21 that the person is buying. This is so a restaurant can actually
22 make this look better by calling his fishermen more, buying fish
23 maybe less quantities but more frequently, varying the species
24 they're buying. Maybe some restaurants only buy lobster, only buy
25 this. And they're going to do well on the Freshometer because it's
26 going to say they have fresh fish, but the numbers aren't going to
27 move a lot because there isn't the variety.
28
29 So, this is going to be kind of a little bit of an incentive for
30 restaurateurs.
31
32 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** You can enter here without logging. This is the
33 way to let people play with the app. So, you know exactly the
34 variety, the frequency. It's an algorithm. The frequency and the
35 inventory available at the restaurant.
36
37 If you are not a restaurant here, for example, Mermaid, the app is
38 going to tell you that Mermaid is not at PescApp. Are you a
39 restaurant owner, you buy local catch, you have a fisherman in
40 your allies. You can enter here. But if not, it's going to show
41 you who are the restaurants that really have the local catch
42 guarantee seal near to you, and we're going to traffic the public,
43 the consumers to your restaurant.
44
45 So, I want to show you directly what is going to happen when you
46 are a customer. This is what you see when you're a customer. You
47 have directly the local catch. Every available species that are in
48 the marketplace, they have the AI intelligence embedded to give

1 you recipes. If you want to know, for example, how to cook it, you
2 have cartucho, fresh catch. What do I do with the cartucho? It
3 just generates an immediate recipe for you to cook it. It's one of
4 the good features.

5
6 What else do you see? You can see the post. Look at the pictures.
7 That was yesterday right here on the beach. Beautiful sunset, one
8 of the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen. Social catch,
9 cartucho available for El Anzuelo. You have everything. You can
10 filter this for fishermen, for restaurants, for fish markets.

11
12 What else do you have? Do you have an interactive map that you
13 could see live inventory. Where are the restaurants that have
14 inventory? Where are the fishermen? Where are the fish markets?
15 What do they have available? You can order directly to the
16 fishermen. You can order directly to reserve those 2 pounds of
17 chillo for next Friday, because maybe you'll see the chillo today,
18 but you can't go to the restaurant till maybe Sunday. So, you can
19 reserve it right here. You can filter by species, by zone, by
20 users.

21
22 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** José, let me interrupt really fast. So, one of the
23 one of the things that I that I really wanted, and I really enjoyed
24 about this for the fishermen is, for example, my fisherman catches
25 bottom snappers. He catches a lot of queen snappers, the silk
26 snappers. I tend to buy whatever is like a pound or a pound and a
27 quarter up. So, there's a lot of these smaller fish that I'll buy
28 sometimes, but not all the time because they're not best sellers.

29
30 With this app, the fisherman has the option. He's my fisherman. He
31 only sells to me. Very rarely does he find other customers. He
32 doesn't know people, whatever. But in this app, when you're in the
33 circle of this app, the restaurants, the other restaurants that
34 are in the app that are also buying from local fishermen are going
35 to have access to see this excess fish inventory that some
36 fishermen, the bycatch, the whatever, the smaller fish, maybe even
37 the larger fish.

38
39 For me, I don't want it, for example, but maybe there's somebody
40 else down the road that really wants it and is really interested
41 in that product. So, the lovely part about this app is that
42 eventually, there's going to be-- the restaurants and the
43 pescaderías and consumers are going to be aware of all this other
44 floating fish that's out there, and it could incentivize a
45 fisherman to go out there and fish because they know they're going
46 to have a place where they can market it, and they can sell it,
47 and not necessarily just rely on their few customers.

1 So, it's really a nice way to broaden and open up the market for
2 these lesser-known species because the consumers are going to be
3 able to go after certain species.

4
5 I know very well that there are customers in Puerto Rico that only
6 want to eat certain species. I know people that want to eat, for
7 example, the cabarilla. They want to eat queen trigger
8 fish. They want to eat all these species that are very hard to
9 sell, and I don't know that, in many cases, restaurants buy them,
10 process them, and try to sell them as something else because, for
11 example, the pez puerco, which is a triggerfish, it's called the
12 pez puerco in spanish. It's tough as a restaurateur to try to sell
13 people a filete de pez puerco. It's something that's tough.

14
15 So, basically, you just make fish nuggets, whatever, and sell it
16 as something else.

17
18 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** We're almost out of time, Cedric.

19
20 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** But here you are going to be able to let people
21 that actually know what pez puerco is, they want to eat pez puerco,
22 be like, "Oh my god, there is pez puerco at that restaurant," which
23 is a triggerfish, and go specifically to that triggerfish. You
24 open a market for these lesser species. And that is just
25 fascinating.

26
27 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Really quick. Talk about the glossary, the
28 educational platform, please.

29
30 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. We're combining marine biology. I think that
31 a huge part of selling better seafood in the future, better the
32 market for fishermen, better the market for restaurants, and better
33 the market for consumers is education. For me, if I had not
34 educated my customers on these lesser-known species or even on the
35 known species, on the seasonalities, on the vedas, why can't we
36 eat chillo during these months? I have people coming, "Oh, I want
37 chillo." "We don't have chillo." "If you want chillo, you are going
38 to have to come back in January." "Oh, what do you mean? I had
39 some yesterday." "Well, you either had some illegal fish, or you
40 had something that wasn't a real chillo, because chillo's been in
41 veda or the season's been closed for the past month."

42
43 So, over here, it's very important, I think, that we educate the
44 consumers, and that'll be, at the long run, the best way to
45 eventually sell seafood. There's no other way to save seafood and
46 make correct decisions on the moment of eating seafood because the
47 consumer isn't educated.

1 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** This is the last part. I'm sorry if I extend it
2 by just five more minutes. This is one of my favorite features of
3 this app. I am consumer right now. I'm seeing what El Anzuelo has,
4 for example. I'm eating in El Anzuelo. So, I have a little tag
5 here that says, "Dish story." Do you see it right there? "Dish
6 story." If you're in the restaurant, the restaurant could have a
7 QR code on the menu or on the table.

8
9 You go to the QR code. This is the QR code for the restaurant. If
10 you scan this, it's almost the same thing you got in the QR code
11 over there. The consumer is going to see each species that has
12 been delivered by a local fisherman, develop or create a
13 specialized and individualized QR code. So, when the consumer wants
14 to know the story behind the dish, you have to go to the cartucho,
15 if they're ordering cartucho, o carrucho, o foncini, and they're
16 going to scan the history of the fish. When was it caught? Deliver
17 where? When did it arrive at your plate? What species is it? The
18 amount, the fisherman, the license. You can go to see the fisherman
19 profile.

20
21 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Obviously, the fisherman always puts what he wants
22 the public to see. The fisherman can simply have his face, no face,
23 whatever. It's his job. This is his marketing tool. The tools are
24 there, but the fisherman can do whatever he wants there.

25
26 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** You can thank Cedric directly. You can follow
27 Cedric directly, and you can make the reservation for the
28 restaurant.

29
30 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** A very cool thing about this app for a consumer,
31 for example, I have a restaurant where I buy any species my
32 fisherman brings me, and I can buy fish a Monday, a Tuesday, a
33 Thursday, a Saturday. And I'll have customers walking on a Friday
34 and be like I saw on Instagram that you brought some lionfish on
35 Tuesday or a couple of days ago. I'll be like, "Oh, sorry. We sold
36 out already."

37
38 So, with this application, the day that I received the lionfish,
39 for example, you're in your house, you get a notification, "Oh,
40 there's lionfish at MenTa. I can't go to MenTa for another three
41 or four days," for example, because you live an hour away or
42 whatever the reason is. You can actually reserve directly with the
43 restaurant. They're obviously participating in this. You can
44 reserve, and you can separate whatever species you want, whatever
45 quantity you want for the day you want. So, this is a way to-- and
46 it happens to me a lot, where people come expecting there to always
47 be tuna or to always be lionfish or whatever, and you have to
48 explain to them that we're working with seasonality, etcetera,

1 etcetera. This way, they can always be on top of what they want to
2 eat.

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. You are over your time, but there are two
5 important things there. How do you think this application could
6 help with the sustainability of the fisheries? And second, can
7 this application be used to certify that what I'm eating as a
8 consumer is a local fresh fish?

9
10 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** All right. Sustainability is full because the
11 fisherman is advertising whatever species he has, and he can
12 advertise lesser-known species. He can advertise underdogs. He can
13 advertise whatever because we're opening markets of all these
14 different species, and we're giving accessibility and the data to
15 restaurants to buy these other species, to play with them. Let's
16 play with some lionfish. Let's change this. I've been working with
17 a grouper for years. Let me try some snappers.

18
19 So, in the sense of sustainability, the fishermen and the
20 businesses are going to work together and advertise themselves.
21 So, that's a pretty cool part.

22
23 Your other question, how is-- you asked the guarantee of how do
24 you know, as a consumer, that you're eating a 100% fish? It's
25 impossible. I'm not going to go into your fridges. I'm not going
26 to be going into restaurants. There is still a very small level of
27 trust that has to happen here.

28
29 But the trust that this will give is that if that restaurant bought
30 10 pounds of lobster and you make it on time, you're eating 10
31 pounds of lobster that he bought from a commercial fisherman. If
32 he bought 10 pounds of lobster from a commercial fisherman and, on
33 the other hand, bought a 100 pounds of imported, that is the hard
34 part of traceability is that it's going to be impossible to
35 eventually be in everybody's fridges and every business.

36
37 So, there is a level of trust. And how does that trust happen?
38 Well, as a consumer, you're going to go to a restaurant, and maybe
39 that lobster is going to be tough, or maybe something's going to
40 happen and you'll be like, "Well, they're advertising over here.
41 It says 10 pounds. I see there's a 100 people here." Red flags
42 perhaps. Red flags for consumers, maybe one thing doesn't match
43 with the other.

44
45 Amongst fishermen they can be like, "How come that restaurant
46 always has silk snapper? We haven't been fishing in two weeks
47 because it's been windy." So, there's some red flags that happen.
48 We do have something in place over here that when reports might

1 look shady or something, it's something that'll eventually happen.
2
3 But really, Miguel, there is no way to absolutely be 100% sure
4 that a restaurant or a or somebody is going to be giving genuinely
5 what it is. This, in my opinion, is one of the ways you can at
6 least track whatever's being sold at the moment.
7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** How about what--
9
10 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** If something happens behind that, It's tough.
11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** How about certifying whether the fish is local or
13 imported.
14
15 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Certifying whether the fish--
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Is local or imported?
18
19 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Then again, it's a commercial fisherman. He's got
20 his responsibility. He fishes. As a restaurateur, you should know.
21 I mean, there's some level--
22
23
24 That's where education comes. The restaurateur needs to know. He's
25 got pictures over here. He's got videos. He's got contacts. He's
26 got whatever. So, you kind of train them a little bit, and it comes
27 to trust with your fishermen.
28
29 This is a trustworthy business. The data's there. The information's
30 there. The tools are there. There's always going to be a little
31 bit of-- I mean, there could be some cheating involved or whatever,
32 but over here is going to be very difficult.
33
34 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Let me wrap it up just a little bit. Just if you
35 have any other question. Everything that happens in the app goes
36 right here. This is PescApp analytics. This is a platform where we
37 make alliance with researchers, scientists, agents, government
38 agencies, regulators, and policymakers. Everything that happens
39 here is embedded in a secure platform where you would have access,
40 specifically with all the zones that they use to establish the
41 regulations, NOAA and CSM.
42
43 You have captures, you have species, you have geographics, you
44 have compliance, you have everything here. But the most important
45 part, it's multilingual also. The most important part is this new
46 technology. This is an ai called Marina. It's a bot that lives
47 inside the data, and it has the knowledge of everything that
48 happens in the app on identifying data. You cannot know

1 specifically for fishermen, but you have every data conglomerate
2 here.

3
4 For example, if I go here and I just want to look at a prompt right
5 here, "give me a report for NOAA of the queen's snapper and silk
6 snapper for the last three months and give me a projection of the
7 total catches for the next six months based on the previous data."
8 I just go to Marina and just put the prompt right here. She's going
9 to go directly and she's going to instantly have all the knowledge
10 of what happened in the movement of the data. And that's going to
11 take you to all the reports directly, instantly.

12
13 This is a cherry off the top. This is what I've been doing. I truly
14 believe this is going to change the model of sustainability and
15 artisanal fisheries in not only U.S. Caribbean, but this could be
16 the gate to enter all Caribbean, to start talking about
17 compatibility and regulations, to start talking about
18 conservation, to start talking..

19
20 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Education.

21
22 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Education. This is the way to enter. I truly
23 believe that Cedric has one of the greatest ideas in modern times
24 of change and restructuring the artisanal fishery economy.
25 Questions?

26 27 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do you think that this could also be part, or can
30 include the continental U.S. in the future?

31
32 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Artisanal coast, artisanal fishery.

33
34 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Well, this is based on the small model of my small
35 restaurant working directly with fishermen. I do not know if you're
36 inland in the United States somewhere, how they receive their fish.
37 I know that this is something that's going to work very well when
38 there's that direct, one to one with a pescadería, with a small
39 group of people, and with a fisherman. So, on a larger scale on
40 the mainland, I can't get into that. I don't know what the flow
41 is.

42
43 I made this for us island people.

44
45 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** But definitely, it's a model that you can
46 implement anywhere that you have an artisanal fishery economy.
47 Anywhere that you have an artisanal-- a relationship we the
48 fishermen and the small fish markets are directly with the

1 consumers and the restaurants. This is a model you can implement
2 all around the world.
3
4 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** This app gives a personality to the fishermen. So,
5 on a larger scale, I don't know how many fishermen have bigger
6 pescaderías, but this is something where there's a very direct
7 relationship between consumer, restaurant, pescadería, and
8 fishermen.
9
10 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** So, this is it. Any questions, please?
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?
13
14 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a question. You're talking about the
15 fisherman directly with the restaurant.
16
17 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yes.
18
19 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Where do we put the local pescadería or the co-
20 op or anything like this?
21
22 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Every fisher has their own their own dashboard.
23 The way that flows is different from the fishermen. When the
24 fishermen are affiliated with a small fish market, with a licensed
25 fish market, the fishermen just log on, publish the report, the
26 report landing, but it's not going to be public. The fish market
27 has to receive it. They're going to validate it. Once the fish
28 market validates it, the fish market is the one that's going to be
29 promoting with all their fishermen as allies.
30
31 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** So, the fish market works a little bit as a
32 restaurant. He's going to receive the information of his eight,
33 ten, twelve, fifteen fishermen. He receives that data, whatever.
34 He checks it, looks good, and we send it. And he gets advertised
35 like a restaurant.
36
37 So, the pescadería acts or has a similar role as a restaurant. As
38 well as we're advertising the fishermen from the pescaderías at
39 the pescadería.
40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony.
42
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard. Well, I got you one thing.
44 I don't think I've ever been quite entertained I was entertained
45 this morning with this presentation here. Maybe you should get
46 into the entertainment. But, anyway, I do see a lot of potential
47 with this whole thing here.
48

1 I mean, I'm not saying it's a fix at all, but I do see a lot of
2 potential with it. And Cedric, that's a good friend.
3
4 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Mhmm. He's good.
5
6 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** He's the best one.
7
8 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** He's the better version of me. He's taller, he's
9 strong.
10
11 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** He's the best cook.
12
13 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Okay. Question. Anybody else? Question over here.
14 Yes, sir.
15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?
17
18 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Nelson Crespo, for the
19 record. I love it. I think it's a great tool for the communities,
20 because I receive, in my house, many people that want to buy fish.
21 Because I am a reseller, most of the time I don't have fish for
22 the public.
23
24 With this application, people around, many tourists in my area can
25 find where they can get fresh fish. That is excellent.
26
27 Also, I think that maybe it can be another tool to help DNER do
28 the correction factors if they think it's appropriate. It can also
29 help our scientific friends have another idea to evaluate the catch
30 and have it not only in papers, but you know, the reality of what's
31 going on around.
32
33 I think, like Blanchard says, it has good potential. It's going to
34 be very helpful.
35
36 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** We appreciate your words.
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
39
40 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. Julian Magras, for the record. So, like my
41 fishermen said, I think it has great opportunity. In my area, the
42 difference is we deal directly with the public. We don't have fish
43 houses.
44
45 Myself, I buy from five fishermen, and I resell to the entire
46 public and to all the restaurants. So, I'm trying to figure out--
47 the app is excellent. How do we include it getting out to the
48 public? Right now, I am using Facebook, and that's it. because I'm

1 overwhelmed already with the quantity of orders.
2
3 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yep.
4
5 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I'm advertised in a few of the hotels to the guests
6 that are coming. Right now, I'm being put in the Airbnb's in Saint
7 John. So, it's a huge gray number similar to what you guys got. I
8 would just want to see how we can reach out more to the public.
9
10 I understand that fish markets buy a lot of fish that the fishers
11 catch. But in my area, in the Virgin Islands, we deal directly
12 with the public, and we don't have a co-op or a fish market directly
13 like that.
14
15 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** So you would be--
16
17 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** But this is excellent.
18
19 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yeah. You would be a pescadería. You would have--
20 a fish market. We have four ways to get here. And you basically,
21 if you will receive during the day 300 pounds of five or six
22 different species, you're going to sit down for ten minutes. Pfft.
23 Not ten--
24
25 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** Ten seconds.
26
27 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Sixty seconds because, you got x amount of whatever.
28 You're going to set that up. Boom. And how do your customers know
29 about this? Well, that's where the advertising campaign comes in.
30 This is part of our project. We have the tool. Now we need people
31 to know about this.
32
33 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** That is why we are here.
34
35 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** I mean, this is a little baby that needs to get the
36 word spread out. We're going to go to restaurants. We're going to
37 go to fishermen. We're going to nautical clubs, and we're going to
38 have-- I'm putting stickers everywhere. So, the idea is that you
39 want the community to grow.
40
41 It's going to grow-- you know, the more posts that come in, the
42 more people, it's a snowball. Right now, it's a snowball that has
43 no snow. I mean, there's a little bit in there.
44
45 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** We have the project. We have the heart. We have
46 the compromise. We are looking for guidance. We need to have--
47
48 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Jeannette from Sea Grant is already excited about

1 the education process. Because this is an education process.

2
3 **LIC. JOSÉ RIVERA:** We need help, guys, to get endorsement from the
4 agency. We need help to find the funds, the grant to launch the
5 first phase. The first phase of this project has to be the
6 onboarding and educational process with the fishermen and the fish
7 markets. That comes along with the restaurants also.

8
9 But then the second phase is the integration of the agency. And
10 the third phase is the full commercial launch for customers. So,
11 the people in the U.S. Caribbean know if you want to have certified
12 guarantee where the local fish is, where you can eat local fish
13 from local fishermen, it's PescApp.

14
15 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** We have a question over here.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

18
19 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks, Kevin McCarthy. So, my question is,
20 do you see this as an opportunity for fishermen to make more money?
21 And here, let me explain. So, there's several ways to do that.
22 Right? One is I just catch more; I sell more for the same price or
23 whatever the price is. Another way to do it, another marketing
24 idea is, "Okay. Now I can demonstrate it's local, it's fresh, it's
25 sustainable because the Council has a stock assessment that says
26 it's sustainable, therefore, is that worth more money?

27
28 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Absolutely. Yeah.

29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Right? So, I think it is.

31
32 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yes.

33
34 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I'm wondering, is this a mechanism, so then
35 the fisherman doesn't have to work harder to make more money.
36 They're selling a product that has some kind of--

37
38 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Well, that's kind of the idea. I have a small
39 restaurant, and I have the choice. I can order food. I mean, I can
40 order my seafood in a box, sometimes cheaper, frozen from God knows
41 where, or I can work with local fishers.

42
43 Local fishers, we all know that prices are more expensive for the
44 local product than the imported product. Why? Because cost of
45 production on the island is expensive. Look at the fuel prices
46 right now. And I am paying a very high price for my fish. If it
47 goes up a little bit more, it might come to a point where it's
48 unsustainable in the sense that my customers aren't going to pay

1 for it. So, it's-- we're in line-- I don't know if it's always
2 been like this, but right now, we're at a point where to sell local
3 seafood is a risky business, and I'm in a risky business right
4 now. I'm stuck with it. I'm in for it. I'm in for the long run,
5 but I realize how other restaurants could probably be like, "Let
6 me just order this stuff. Let me go safe. Let me order the same
7 sizes. Let me have consistency in the product. Let me have an IQF,"
8 whatever.
9

10 So, this is going to be the factor that is going to give the added
11 value and let people know he's got fresh fish. It might be a little
12 bit more expensive but look at all the process. Look at the
13 fishermen; he got up early.
14

15 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I'm especially thinking about where you've got
16 tourism. Right?
17

18 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Yep.
19

20 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Where you've got tourism, maybe you've got local
21 customers that have this price. But maybe the tourists have a
22 different price.
23

24 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Sure. Are you referring to selling filets or
25 restaurant food? I wish I could sell it more expensive to the
26 tourist, I can't. I have the same price for everybody.
27

28 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Well, sure. In a restaurant, you do. Right? But
29 when you've got--
30

31 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** The market. Yeah.
32

33 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** But when you've got a business model where you're
34 selling directly to, like the guys here who are selling direct,
35 but then you sell to a restaurant. Maybe that's a different price.
36 I'm just thinking of other ways for these guys to make more money
37 than to just have to always catch more.
38

39 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Indirectly, they're going to be making more money
40 because they're selling top dollar. We're marketing their product.
41 I maybe sell-- I'm going to sell fifteen, twenty, 30% more per
42 week, so I'll be calling you more frequently.
43

44 As a fisherman, maybe you have one that'll be like, "Hey, buddy.
45 Go back fishing. I need more fish." So, it's just kind of a you
46 scratch my back, I scratch yours, and slowly but surely. But the
47 whole idea is that I really wanted people to know, why is my fish
48 expensive? Why is my fish not always available? Why does my fish

1 vary a lot? And I think that with this, we can solve a lot of those
2 problems.

3
4 With this, we can have people see where it's coming from, where it
5 went, how it got here, and the fisherman can just play with it.
6 And he's got everything from just having his face on there or
7 nothing, or he can just have the full-- all his list, all his
8 species, all his prices, all his contacts, and just be as
9 aggressive as he wants with this. And that's free for the
10 fisherman. Yes, sir? Okay. Yeah.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** John?

13
14 **JOHN WALTER, III:** John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center,
15 for the record. I would've used this app the last two nights that
16 we ate here because we were looking for fresh seafood. Local
17 seafood. So, I could say that it would have been valuable to us.
18 I think this is a really good thing.

19
20 You mentioned that you, potentially, might need to seek funding,
21 and I would say that there is potential for Saltonstall-Kennedy
22 Grant, which is the grants to support the seafood industry. So,
23 pay attention to see if those grants post this year, because this
24 would be, probably, a good project that would be applicable to
25 that. And then garner the community's support for it, so that is
26 something that is likely to resonate. Which seems you've gotten
27 support from a number of the fishing industry leaders here. So,
28 thank you.

29
30 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Thank you. Thank you very much. Yeah. You see, it
31 would have been cool if we had this for tourists on this island.
32 I would have loved to go straight to where-- where's my friend
33 over here? Gerson's lobsters are at. Where are Gerson's lobsters?
34 We don't know. Maybe he could tell us.

35
36 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Bombay.

37
38 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Bombay, why didn't you tell us two nights ago? We
39 would have gone over there. Did she? Yeah. We didn't even
40 advertise. So, let us advertise for you. Just post. Yeah. I'm
41 sorry. I'm sorry. I'm just excited.

42
43 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Thank you for this presentation. I'm going
44 to be the last comment. So, as a commercial fisher in the industry,
45 I have been doing this since 2011, and we have been looking for
46 this. We're always talking about needing to put the technology on
47 the hands of the fishermen. We need to help them to market better.

1 We know that the market right now is very hard for us. It's very
2 hard for sales, but this is a great tool not only using our regular
3 social media, it's also to be connected. All the restaurant, all
4 the fishermen's, the fish markets, altogether, and also with the
5 education and better management of our fishers. So, I think this
6 is a great tool.

7
8 You have all my support. Our Commercial Fisherman Association in
9 Puerto Real, we have around 150 members in there. So, we're open
10 to this process and testing this. I know it's going to be a great
11 tool, and I really appreciate your time on this.

12
13 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Thank you. Thank you for having us. Any questions
14 or anything? Anybody else?

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. this-- wait, wait. So, this is the end of it,
17 because otherwise we're going-- but this was a great presentation.
18 What the Council can do-- what we did was to bring you here to
19 talk to the people.

20
21 Take home messages. You have support. The Council can help you,
22 not with advertising, but we can publish anything that is neutral
23 that will be towards sustainability of the fishery, using
24 underutilized species, and promoting local fish. This is great.

25
26 The other thing is Saltonstall-Kennedy, I told you this before,
27 but they have a schedule. That's probably one of the best avenues
28 for securing funding for what you have. The other one is Sea Grant.
29 The program Sea Grant, I told you to meet with Dr. Rene Esteves.
30 They can help you with the outreach and education materials that
31 you need.

32
33 Jannette Ramos, she's the Chair of the Outreach and Education
34 Panel. Anything that converts into what we are supposed to do, our
35 responsibility, which is promoting sustainability of the fishery,
36 etcetera, we can help you with that. In the case of the Liaison
37 Officers, we have two. Maybe in the near future, we'll have a third
38 one in Saint Thomas. That's the person that you can contact to
39 help you with the distribution of information of what you need.
40 So, thank you for coming here.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I want to thank you all for that. That was
43 real good. Many times, I have wanted to eat a triggerfish or a
44 queen snapper and find them at local restaurants on Saint Croix.
45 So, if I can google and see which one has it, perfect. Thank you.
46 Thank you very much. Yes.

47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Next on the agenda.

1
2 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Thanks, everybody.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, next on the agenda is the Recreational Angler
5 Partnership, RAPID. No opportunity.

6
7 **RECREATIONAL ANGLER PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT DIRECTIVE (RAPID)–**
8 **NOAA FISHERIES**
9

10 **TIM SARTWELL:** Good morning. Can you all hear me?

11
12 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.

13
14 **TIM SARTWELL:** Excellent. Thank you. Thank you for inviting me here
15 today to discuss RAPID, known as the Recreational Angler
16 Partnership Improvement Directive. My name is Tim Sartwell. I'm
17 currently serving as a Special Adviser for Recreational Fisheries
18 to the Deputy Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. That
19 sounds like a fancy title, but I'm just working on Dr. Neil Jacobs
20 and Laura Grimm's recreational fisheries priorities from NOAA.
21 Prior to that, I did sit fisheries and was the Deputy Policy
22 Adviser for Recreational Fisheries. So, just expanding my
23 portfolio for the current time.

24
25 I want to thank Dr. Jacobs and Genio, particularly, for their
26 leadership in recreational fisheries issues and for providing me
27 with the opportunity to work with them directly on RAPID and their
28 other priorities.

29
30 So, what is RAPID? And it's just not another NOAA acronym. Our
31 vision is that RAPID will lead the transition from the current
32 MRIP system to a new recreational fishing data enterprise that
33 improves trust and confidence in recreational fishing data and
34 management. The resulting ecosystem will be built on a strong state
35 federal partnership and combine all available and approved
36 recreational catch and effort data for use by assessment scientists
37 and decision makers.

38
39 The transition will require partnership throughout the process and
40 will result in clearly articulated roles for NOAA, States,
41 Territories, and Interstate Fishery Commissions. We seek to
42 empower our partners and states to develop and use data systems
43 that fit their needs and support them to ensure our fishery
44 mandates under the Magnuson-Stevens Act can still be achieved.

45
46 One thing I do want to be clear on is that the current MRIP data
47 collection systems will continue. They'll continue to collect data
48 as we go through this transition process, and some of the

1 underlying surveys may exist in the future. Right now, we are in
2 open process, and we are going to work with our partners to develop
3 what the new recreational data enterprise looks like.

4
5 I see the interstate commissions as playing a pivotal role in
6 helping to collect, organize, and produce trusted recreational
7 fisheries data. With that role, I have developed a small steering
8 committee to help guide and support the RAPID transition. The
9 steering committee consists of Gregg Bray, the Assistant Director
10 of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Fishery
11 Information Network Program Coordinator for the Gulf States. Also,
12 Alex DiJohnson, he's the Deputy Director for Recreational
13 Fisheries Data at the Atlantic Coast Statistics Program under the
14 Atlantic States Commission. I also have Dr. Luiz Barbieri, the
15 Section Leader for Marine Fisheries Research at the Florida Fish
16 and Wildlife Research Institute. Doctor John Hare, the Science
17 Director for NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and doctor
18 Evan Howell, the NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for
19 Scientific Programs. Those five individuals with myself will help
20 navigate and coordinate commission state level activities and
21 facilitate the regional workshops and truly help build the
22 strengthened state federal partnership.

23
24 I'm excited to work with this talented group and the expertise
25 they provide. We've had one meeting so far, and their energy and
26 optimism on improving recreational fishing data, it really is
27 infectious. I'm excited about where this goes. And as I just
28 mentioned, we will be doing regional workshops across the country
29 to help design the new partnership, including a workshop in the
30 Caribbean so we can work with you all there to understand your
31 needs and how we would to design a data collection program for
32 recreational fisheries into the future.

33
34 As many of you have heard, hopefully, Dr. Evan Howell say before,
35 "we envision a national standard regional flexible approach to the
36 partnership." NOAA can help provide standards and support to ensure
37 recreational data is statistically valid while the states and
38 territories can implement surveys that meet their needs as well as
39 the National Standards. The workshops will help us identify the
40 capabilities and needs on a regional basis for how recreational
41 data can be collected and recreational harvest estimates be
42 produced. I'm working with the Atlantic State Commission to procure
43 a neutral facilitator to help us navigate these discussions and
44 bring everyone together around a shared partnership vision.

45
46 These workshops will occur starting late summer, early fall if
47 everything moves quickly. I'm hoping that everything can move
48 quickly. I've got the commission excited to do this, so I think

1 we're in a good spot.

2
3 I'm also planning on having an angler industry workshop, most
4 likely a hybrid so as many people can participate as possible to
5 get more direct ideas on how anglers think the nuts and bolts of
6 data collection systems should work. A lot of these regional
7 workshop discussions will be in the weeds, program management,
8 roles, responsibilities, resource needs. But I want to ensure that
9 we are transparent with this process and that fishermen also have
10 an input into how their data is collected and their fisheries
11 managed.

12
13 Finally, I do want to mention that the 3,000,000 investments that
14 Dr. Jacobs announced at the boat show in February is moving out
15 the door to commissions. There's about \$2,000,000 going to the
16 Atlantic States Commission, about 650k to the Gulf States. And
17 this is really to improve sampling and precision around some of
18 the high-profile species in those regions. The remaining money is
19 supporting an increase in the effort survey to improve precision
20 for effort estimates and then the funding for the RAPID
21 facilitator.

22
23 I've been asked many times before, what makes this process
24 different? How is this MRIP envisioning, reenvisioning different
25 from what's happened before? My first answer is leadership. Dr.
26 Jacobs, Deputy Undersecretary, Laura Grimm, Genio, Evan are all
27 leading this process from the top of NOAA. They brought me in to
28 help implement their vision, but improving recreational fishing
29 data has never had as much momentum behind it as it does right
30 now. Second is the partnership focus. We can't do this without our
31 partners and buy in from everyone involved in recreational
32 fisheries. I've already started conversations with the
33 commissions, like I've mentioned before, and they're all excited
34 to help support the process and the realignment.

35
36 Finally, technology. That last presentation was very interesting.
37 There was so much interesting technology deployed there, but
38 technology makes change unavoidable. We cannot continue to operate
39 as we always have as technology screams as we just saw in that
40 last presentation. We'll embrace the new technology and figure out
41 the best way to utilize it to improve not just recreational, but
42 all fisheries management. And this has been a cornerstone of Dr.
43 Jacobs and Secretary of Lutnick's vision for NOAA.

44
45 So, that is it for my opening remarks. Again, thank you again for
46 having me here. I much would prefer to be in Saint Croix with you
47 all in person than on the rainy day I have in Washington DC right
48 now. But I welcome the Council's input and discussion on how to

1 best champion the RAPID initiative within your respective networks
2 and will stay to answer any questions you may have about RAPID.

3
4 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Thank you. Any questions?
7

8 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks, Kevin McCarthy. Hi, Tim. We chatted
9 briefly when you were down at the Science Center. I'm looking
10 forward to the meeting in the Caribbean.

11
12 As we discussed then, we work very closely. The Science Center
13 works very closely with our partners at DRNA and at DFW in the
14 Virgin Islands. We do have ongoing efforts. I'm involved and
15 several other folks in the region are involved in the regional
16 implement implementation teams. So, looking forward to continuing
17 those conversations.

18
19 Every region is a little unique, and certainly that's no exception
20 here in the Caribbean. So, yeah, it's great that you'll be holding
21 a region-specific meeting, to sort out the challenges and the
22 opportunities in the Caribbean. So, looking forward to that.

23
24 **TIM SARTWELL:** Thanks, Kevin. Yeah. I couldn't agree more. Every
25 region is different. Every region has its challenges.

26
27 So, we're going to try to devise a system that can be regionally
28 flexible to allow those nuances and those data collection systems
29 to collect the data that's needed.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more-- Graciela?
32

33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, Tim. Graciela García-Moliner
34 for the record, Council staff. So, as we spoke earlier, we're in
35 full support of the Science Center efforts towards providing us
36 with data collection for the U.S. Caribbean. We are different from
37 the three islands that we have, and we have management plans that
38 are different for each of those regions. So, it gets a little bit
39 more complicated than expected.

40
41 But we would really much-- we're really much in need of that
42 recreational data. And more than anything else, real-time data,
43 because we're still dealing with annual catch limits here, and the
44 recreational catch of many of the species that are also shared by
45 the commercial fishers are lacking data since 2017. So, to us,
46 this sector is extremely important to gather that information and
47 bring it up to speed, as it is for the commercial sector.
48

1 So, we're looking forward to a RAPID transition and gathering the
2 data for the local fishers. Thank you.

3
4 **TIM SARTWELL:** Yes. Thank you. And, heard loud and clear. I know
5 Kevin just mentioned southeast is working on it. You guys have an
6 amazing advocate in Genio, and I know it's one of his priorities
7 to get more data in the Caribbean as well.

8
9 So, I hear you, and I will do my best to bring a quick transition
10 and support that.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Tim? Okay. Vanessa?

13
14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you. Vanessa Ramirez, for the record. As
15 commercial fisherman, we know in Puerto Rico we don't have, sadly,
16 data from the recreational sector, so we're very interested to see
17 this process move on, especially because we know that there's a
18 lot of more recreational fishermen that are using the area,
19 especially, at least, on the west side where I live and I fish. Do
20 you have any timeframe, as to when we could maybe see this start
21 or how our fishermen in the recreational sector in Puerto Rico can
22 know about this? Because most of them don't even know that this
23 exists. Thank you.

24
25 **TIM SARTWELL:** Yes. Thank you. Yes. We are getting feedback that
26 there is confusion, or maybe not even awareness that this process
27 is working. So, I'm working with our communications team right now
28 trying to get more information out.

29
30 I don't have a definitive timeline for you, but there is more
31 information coming. My desire is to be as open and transparent as
32 we can as we move this forward. So, we will lean on the Council to
33 help us disseminate this information, and we'll work with our
34 networks through the Southeast Center or Southeast Regional Office
35 to help make sure everyone's aware of where we're going.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

38
39 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Kevin McCarthy, just one last thought, and
40 credit where credit is due. So, Grisel Rodriguez, in particular,
41 with DRNA in Puerto Rico, has been sampling recreational fishers
42 for coming up on two years now. Now the struggle there is having
43 enough people in the field. So, she's got two port samplers and
44 working with us and with our CIMAS colleagues.

45
46 We've been taking those data, those preliminary data, and designing
47 a survey that allows her to maximize the use of those two port
48 samplers. In the meantime, although she's got money to hire

1 additional port samplers, there's some bureaucratic struggle
2 there. So, we're working with her, to try and move the money in a
3 different way. This is money that's coming from Interior. It's
4 sport fish restoration money focused on the recreational fishery.

5
6 So, things are happening here, especially in Puerto Rico. So, I
7 think we've got a good base to build on, especially as this RAPID
8 transition moves forward. So, I just wanted to make sure
9 everybody's aware that things are happening, particularly with
10 Grisel's group in Puerto Rico.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

13
14 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, team, also in the U.S. Virgin Islands,
15 they do have the recreational fishing license online. So, they are
16 working on that aspect of the fisheries. Also, requesting voluntary
17 data from the recreational fishers, which is a really big step,
18 and it's all online. So, those efforts really should be part of
19 the-- if there is any funding available to continue those efforts
20 and to actually be able to analyze the data that's coming in, that
21 would also be very much appreciated. Thank you.

22
23 **TIM SARTWELL:** Yeah. Thank you for flagging that. I was unaware of
24 that voluntary data stream. But these are the types of things that
25 make the regional workshops so important, so that we know what
26 data streams are out there, how we can support them in the future,
27 and how we can best use them. So, thank you for flagging it. I'll
28 follow up and figure out what we can do, learn more about that
29 program.

30
31 Was that for all of the U.S.V.I. or specific islands?

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole?

34
35 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. Thanks. Nicole Angeli, Virgin Islands
36 Division of Fish and Wildlife. We've had a mandatory recreational
37 fishing license mandated since October 2022 and are working with
38 the company Brandt to deploy that recreational fishing license.

39
40 At this time, harvest and sport fish logs are voluntary, so the
41 data collection is actually voluntary, but we get quite a bit of
42 data. Any support for data collection efforts for coordinating
43 with the federal entities so that we can ensure that data can be
44 easily transferred to NOAA would be really supportive. We are the
45 first territory with mandatory recreational fishing licenses.

46
47 **TIM SARTWELL:** Great. Thank you so much. And you and I can have a
48 direct conversation after this meeting. Thank you.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Tim.

3
4 **TIM SARTWELL:** Thank you all. I appreciate it. And please always
5 reach out if you have questions. My email's there at the bottom of
6 that slide. Happy to work with you all whenever needed.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks a lot.

9
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next on the agenda is the Caribbean IRA-
13 Funded Projects.

14
15 **CARIBBEAN IRA-FUNDED PROJECTS UPDATE—MARTHA PRADA, CFMC IRA**
16 **COORDINATOR**
17

18 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Good morning. I wanted to share with you
19 the update of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council progress
20 on IRA projects. Maybe this presentation will not be as funny and
21 entertaining as my antecessors, but we have a lot of interesting
22 information to share with you today. Next.

23
24 As you may be aware, the Council was awarded in the summer of 2024
25 with six technical projects under this IRA initiative. All of these
26 projects are expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2027.
27 So, I have been reporting progress at the Council meetings since
28 December 2024, about how this initiative and entire set of projects
29 are advancing. So, far, we have expanded approximately 31% of the
30 \$2.6 million allocated under this initiative to the CFMC. We are
31 running a little bit behind schedule since we have less than one
32 year to finalize all expenditures and complete all the technical
33 outputs.

34
35 So, let's see how, overall, these projects are progressing. We
36 have two that were presented to be completed in two years' time.
37 Those are advancing very smoothly, and we have no expectations of
38 having any problem with that. Other projects are making steady
39 progress. Some of them may be a little bit behind schedule, but
40 not too far. Unfortunately, we have one project that has not been
41 able to initiate its implementation.

42
43 So, I will go quickly over the six projects that we are
44 implementing right now, starting with the one that focuses on
45 understanding how extreme events may be affecting the fishery
46 ecosystem and the fishing community. In the last quarter of this
47 project, the storybook was completely redesigned. Texts were also
48 simplified following recommendations from the four workshops

1 conducted in Puerto Rico. We also conducted two workshops in the
2 U.S. Virgin Islands, one here and one in Saint Thomas. And we
3 received additional local ecological knowledge that right now we
4 are in the process of, again, updating text on this storybook.

5
6 So, upcoming work under this project is to organize a final series
7 of virtual workshops. Those virtual workshops were not initially
8 included in the project. However, in order to maximize
9 participation in the fishing community, we are now going with
10 this strategy. At these virtual workshops, maybe following
11 recommendations, participation will be expanded to other
12 stakeholders. Until now, only fishers and teachers have been
13 participating actively in this project.

14
15 Our second project is to understand how changing environmental
16 conditions and fishing pressure may be impacting dolphinfish
17 distribution. This is a very interesting project. I don't want to
18 read everything that is being conducted under this project, but
19 it's a very active project. It's compiling existing databases on
20 environmental factors as well as different datasets on fishing
21 information and is complemented with satellite tags and
22 conventional tags.

23
24 So, far from the 31 satellite tags that were initially proposed,
25 21 have been already deployed, and a total of 324 conventional
26 tags have been also deployed. Information from species movements,
27 species growth rate, the relationships with sea surface and the
28 water temperature, currents, and so many other environmental
29 parameters and fishing parameters are going on right now.

30
31 These two slides, for instance, illustrate that the analysis at
32 the end will consider different subareas for the purpose of
33 identifying the distribution patterns. These areas more or less,
34 coincides with other sub-areas on their highly migratory species,
35 but in addition it includes the gulf area. These graphs, for
36 instance, illustrate more than one and a half years of information,
37 color coded by monthly on seven of the species movements from
38 satellite tags.

39
40 So, I cannot spend a lot of time on each of the projects. But if
41 you are interested, we can exactly provide a specific time and set
42 up encounters to share with you more in detail.

43
44 Another interesting project is the one that evaluates
45 vulnerability of 25 selected priority species on how they react to
46 changing environmental conditions. This perhaps is one of the most
47 technical projects that the Council is implementing, and already
48 the team have structured a series of matrixes per species. On each

1 matrix, they are compiling all the life history information
2 available that is associated with experts scoring on 13
3 quantitative exposure factors plus another three qualitative
4 factors. And so, they are evaluating sensibility, rigidity, and
5 validation on these responses on these species upon, probably,
6 future changes. Those, for instance, for each of the species and
7 for each of the parameters there are thematic maps, there are
8 statistical analysis, and so on.

10 For future work, the team is, trying to understand better how the
11 scoring made by experts that are variable in nature are
12 illustrating some of the parameters, and they are also preparing
13 in-person workshops here in the U.S. Virgin Islands and in Puerto
14 Rico to share the scores that experts have made validated and
15 updated in the cases necessary in order to generate the final
16 analysis. At the end of this project, each species will have like
17 a summary of all of the information and evaluation of their
18 vulnerability to those environmental parameters.

20 The other project is now evaluating on trying to better understand
21 how the vulnerability and changes in the environment may be
22 affecting two species on their recovery plan. Focusing mostly on
23 those live stages that are usually outside the fishery, which are
24 the early live stages and the reproduction. Those two species are
25 the queen conch and the nassau grouper, and the study area is the
26 Southwest section of Puerto Rico.

28 Illustrated in the maps are the 12 stations. On those 12 stations,
29 at least once a month, a combined group of fishers and experts
30 visit the area, conduct underwater visual services, the surveys,
31 and record, and fill in information on water quality and habitat
32 quality. So, at the end of this project, it's expected to produce
33 very valuable information to complete the recovery plans for those
34 two species.

36 Their project already had a workshop in Puerto Rico and is planning
37 to conduct another workshop here in Saint Croix. So, more maybe by
38 October or something along those lines. When the timing is
39 approaching, the team will contact everybody here to plan and
40 organize all the details.

42 The next project is about identifying planning management
43 scenarios under three different potential climate change. Minimum
44 changes, medium changes, or maximum changes, and how the different
45 islands may adjust some kind of regulation depending on the current
46 conditions.

48 So, far, the team is evaluating three main dimensions,

1 environmental change, governance structure, and socioeconomic
2 aspects. Under each of these variations, several parameters and
3 factors are being considered. Under the three potential climate
4 change scenarios the responses are being evaluated. As a result of
5 this, the project has, right now, completed its science analysis,
6 but the process is an eight-step process. The science analysis is
7 only the three step, and we have another five steps to go.

8
9 This is an example of the current conditions and maybe how the
10 currents and seawater temperature maybe in the future change for
11 spiny lobster and red hind, which are the two selected species
12 that are being considered.

13
14 And we have this project, the one that is not able to start
15 implementation. We have been conducting a lot of conversations
16 with the team, the local team here in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We
17 understand there are several factors that situation is happening
18 right now. Majority of these factors are outside of their control.

19
20 Also, the Caribbean Fisheries Management is being asked to report,
21 in five days from now, to NOAA, in writing, to report what our
22 strategy will be to use these funds. They gave us a green light to
23 reallocate the funds through the approved proposals if that is the
24 case we need to face. But in five days from now, the Council has
25 to present this plan to NOAA. So, most probably, a scenario that
26 I can share with you is that they may be forced to reallocate those
27 funds through executing proposals and projects. We don't know. We
28 are not 100% sure that will be the case, but until now that is the
29 most probable scenario that we are facing.

30
31 And to conclude my presentation, I am inviting you to look at the
32 last two bulletins. In those bulletins, the CVA project, the
33 vulnerability project, and the climate scenarios are presenting
34 the updates with greater detail. So, that is very nice. Those
35 bulletins have been developed in combination with the project
36 Responsible, my role as a coordinator and the support of the
37 Council staff. They are available in English and Spanish. And
38 right now, all of the projects have at least one bulletin available
39 online.

40
41 Thanks to Michelle Walsh, Verena, and Laura that are other IRA
42 coordinators in the region we have structured a series of
43 workshops, talks, short talks to present IRA projects to the
44 different teams at NOAA level. We have presented once one project,
45 and all of other projects have been scheduled with this NOAA
46 calendar. So, I guess, all of you have been invited to participate
47 in those very short presentations. It is just to share with them,
48 directly with the PIs and make questions and understand how

1 everything is connected and, in a way, coordinated.

2
3 Finally, I recognize that some of this project contains a lot of
4 technical information. Not necessarily everything is understood by
5 everybody within the Council, I am now in the process of starting
6 the coordination with DAPs and OEAP, asking them if there is a
7 need for them or desire to learn more about specific projects. So,
8 we can accommodate in your regular calendar a presentation on a
9 specific project so you can have the opportunity to better exchange
10 information in addition to the workshops or in addition to the
11 bulletins or whatever. So, if you have more doubts or want to learn
12 more about those projects, I will be in my following two months
13 coordinating with you and finding out a calendar, if it's
14 necessary, to present specific advancements on specific projects.

15
16 That's all that I have to say now and thank you for listening. Any
17 questions? Thank you.

18
19 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Martha. Miguel.

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a question, but you mentioned that with one
24 of the projects we need to we are running against the clock in
25 order to save that money. I just received an email from Dr. Angeli,
26 and it seems the way that they operate is similar to Puerto Rico.
27 You have to have a number. You have to have the okay to use the
28 funds and everything. Finally, they got it, and they got it on
29 April 21st.

30
31 So, do you think then that we can report back to Kelly? We don't
32 need to unplug the money. We're going to continue because that way
33 we will have something to show to federal government. These are
34 the milestones of the things that we are going to do to work on
35 this project. And we have a deadline of March 30th, 2027. So, do
36 you think that you can do the whole thing by that time?

37
38 Because that way, when we receive your report, we can pass it on
39 to Kelly Denit, who's in charge and waiting for that report. That
40 way we save that money, and we don't have to redistribute the
41 funding. The key part here is that we need to commit to the
42 milestones or the deadlines and everything. Otherwise, they're
43 going to unplug it.

44
45 The thing about IRA is that whatever money you don't use, it goes
46 back to the treasurer. That's very difficult because that's a
47 presidential order, for those monies. So, I'm glad to receive that
48 from Dr. Angeli. I believe that Martha and you will have a lot to

1 talk about in the next couple of days.

2
3 Once we receive that, Martha, what will be the next steps regarding
4 the U.S. Virgin Islands?

5
6 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:**

7
8 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Well, we need to have written new timeline
9 a new outputs calendar, and we must follow that. If we are not
10 able to follow strictly that new proposal, it will be difficult
11 for us to oversee and coordinate. So, once we have that in written
12 and we evaluate it and present it to NOAA, I'll need to be in close
13 contact with you on coordination and providing support in any way
14 possible to help you to move forward.

15
16 The project was originally proposed for one and a half years. It
17 was reduced by one year and now will be reduced again for almost
18 seven months of implementation. That doesn't give us any time to
19 lose. So, as soon as possible, we need to really start seeing steps
20 of us moving in the right direction.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole.

23
24 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Hi. Yes. Good day. It would be useful to have
25 all of the requirements that you're requesting from us in five
26 days in a written list because you've said them to me a few times.
27 But I think if we have a written list, then we can ensure that we
28 have everything for you.

29
30 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Okay. I can again share with you. And now
31 that list will increase because, that list that I shared with you
32 was for the first three months, and now we need to add, an
33 additional couple of months just to have in mind that the things
34 that you propose in your accommodated timetable, can be effectively
35 developed.

36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Well, what is it? Dr. Angeli, I believe
38 that Dr. Habtes will also be the person to coordinate with, you
39 and Martha, isn't it?

40
41 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. I think we could just continue having that
42 same group that we met with, which would be Martha, Carlos,
43 yourself, Dr. Habtes, and myself. And we can include commissioner
44 Oriol in there. If we had a written chain of correspondence, it
45 would be easier for us to respond appropriately.

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Martha.

1 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Any other questions on any project?

2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

4
5 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I'm a little lost with the whole presentation. But
6 the comment that I have to make is about the workshops that were
7 that took place in Saint Croix and that took place in Saint Thomas.
8 My comment is they were poorly organized, and I think attendance
9 at those meetings was not there from the fisheries because we found
10 out a couple of days before the meeting, and the key players were
11 not involved. In Saint Thomas, there weren't any fishers. In Saint
12 Croix, I know Gerson was there, and I don't think there was any
13 other fishers but the team of the university and a couple other
14 people.

15
16 I think when we are doing these workshops we need to have the key
17 players involved in order to get the best outcome that we need. It
18 was a very tense situation. It was last minute. It was on a Friday
19 afternoon. So, the timing was all done wrong.

20
21 If communication comes through, even if-- let's say the DAPs. It
22 doesn't have to be the DAPs. But if it came in the right way, we
23 could have had that room filled with fishers and farmers and other
24 people from respected agencies on the proper day of the week and
25 at the proper time. So, that's the only issue.

26
27 Finding out a few days before the meeting when we received the
28 emails and then showing up and it's like no one is going, it
29 becomes difficult. It became stressful for Martha and her team,
30 and it was stressful for me and my team. So, it ended up-- it
31 wasn't a good productive meeting. That's the only concern that I
32 have.

33
34 If we're going to be spending this kind of money, I think we need
35 to ensure that we are using the money properly. So, what do you
36 say? They offered the fisheries \$40 to come to the meeting. The
37 fisheries started on the last day, that's three days. You know?
38 We're going to leave the boat on Friday afternoon to come to get
39 \$40. They didn't want to hear that.

40
41 For me, I don't need the \$40, but I would have like to have it
42 organized where we could be people there and people could've
43 answered the question and be part. Because the DAP really spent a
44 lot of time. All the DAPs, the SSC, and the Council spent a lot of
45 time identifying the projects for the IRA, and a lot of hours went
46 into that. If we really want to get the true outcome for this
47 project to present the final report, we need to have it organized
48 properly. That's my only comment.

1
2 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Yeah. We had a person from here that was
3 responsible for recommending the team in Puerto Rico for how to
4 follow the logistics and everything. There were some lessons
5 learned from both sides. Communications were done perhaps not one
6 month in advance, but, what, ten days a week, perhaps. And maybe
7 we did receive the wrong recommendation.

8
9 We were recommended to organize this workshop at least with
10 fisheries on a Friday afternoon, considering that there were some
11 markets going on in the mornings. And so, it wasn't the best advice
12 we received, but what we can do once you are already on board and
13 plan with ahead of time with this small project team.

14
15 In Saint Croix, we had participation from 11 fishers. There was
16 timely communication and support from Gerson and Kai and other
17 guys. Liandry also helped us a little bit and fishers. Really there
18 were not so many in the end, but all of the ones that came were
19 really active participating, proposing things, and they evaluated
20 the workshops really nice.

21
22 That's why, following this situation, we are now thinking in
23 organizing these virtual workshops, trying to maximize this
24 communication. But the storybook that will be produced through
25 this project will support the continuation of this conversation.
26 This is an initial phase, and the exercise is expected to be
27 continued. And thank you all for your support.

28
29 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Heather?

30
31 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of clarifying
32 questions. So, am I hearing-- I think that I'm hearing that we do
33 think that we can do the project, that one project here, the DPNR
34 one that has not been initiated. Because I also saw in the
35 presentation that we were going to discuss strategies for
36 reallocating the funds.

37
38 So, just trying to make sure I understand, we want to continue
39 with the current plan.

40
41 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. I think there's a misconception of not
42 initiating this award. As part of our timeline for year one Q2,
43 which was January to March 2026, we sent complete contract setup
44 and initialization in DPNR budgeting systems. We're exactly on
45 time for that. The second item, advertise and hire an FEP technical
46 writer and researcher for January to March 2026, we have done that.

47
48 For plan and host the EBFM TAP FEP drafting meeting, that was the

1 only item in Q1 that we have not done, and that's because we were
2 waiting for this initiation of the contract set up in our financial
3 systems, which has now happened because we couldn't get started on
4 the award until the budget was available to us. So, of the items
5 that we sent in December, only one of the three we were waiting
6 on, and we're ready to now go with that.

7
8 So, the project has been initiated, and we've been consistently
9 working. And, honestly, the amount of paperwork it takes to put
10 these things into place and the amount of time I've already spent
11 on it is large. And that's all in kind that DPNR has spent on it.
12 I haven't charged anything to these awards. We're just working on
13 this. So, I want to just address that misconception of what has
14 happened or not, and we can certainly put that into our reports.

15
16 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Maybe this is a communication--

17
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. They say that we didn't receive a
19 penny for this, but we also didn't receive a report. And that's
20 what Washington is concerned about.

21
22 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Exactly.

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** They did all that, but we didn't know anything
25 about it, and they were supposed to report to us. Now we are
26 talking to Dr. Angeli, and she has graciously put all this
27 together. I think that it will be a go for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

28
29 So, the concern that Washington has is that we went through a
30 struggle to get that money. Also, we went through a struggle to
31 keep that money, especially when they changed the administration.
32 And that's the only concern. But now on record, we have Dr. Angeli
33 and Dr. Sennai Habtes here, and I believe personally that the
34 project could be done within the time allocated. And we don't have
35 to redistribute. But as Martha said, we have to have the
36 milestones, as we have to report to Kelly. And we have to say,
37 this is what is going to happen, and these are the dates and times
38 that is going to happen.

39
40 This is an election year. We don't know what is going to happen in
41 2027. But I was talking to Dr. Angeli, and as much as possible,
42 they will do that they need to do to fulfill-- not only this, but
43 all the-- because Nicole has a lot of other things that I thought,
44 and they're really trying to put all this together and make sure
45 the Division fulfills all the mandates and also be on schedule
46 with all the projects they have.

47
48 The Division is on soft money. It's different from Puerto Rico

1 where you have allocated money for all this. That's why we are
2 sympathetic with all the things that they go through. Sometimes in
3 a state you have 20 people doing one thing. They only have one or
4 two. So, we thank you for that and Martha will follow this.

5
6 Regarding the other project. The one where we will have the virtual
7 meetings. If we have a chance to have an in-person meeting with
8 the fisheries, Martha and I will work to see if that could happen.

9
10 The other thing I want to mention is that this is not a Council
11 money necessary. That money is passing through us. The leaders of
12 the projects are the ones in charge, and they're responsible for
13 undertaking everything that they have in the proposal, as we all
14 know.

15
16 But, luckily, we have our coordinator pursuing all this, making
17 sure that we do not fail in any of the milestones that we put
18 together for the IRA. Somebody asked me about the future of IRA.
19 From the get-go, they told us that this was a one-shot deal. Once
20 the IRA funding is finished, you cannot say, for example, "We need
21 to continue with a, b, and c." That's it.

22
23 But some of the results of the project will be useful for a long
24 time, because we have a road map for outreach and education that
25 we can use. We have other things that we can use.

26
27 I want to thank Dr. Angeli especially and also Dr. Habtes, he is
28 there, for their effort to put this together. And, Martha, you
29 have your orders to continue working with it, and I want to also
30 take this time to recognize the work that Martha does. I always
31 said I'm an SOB with luck, because whenever I have a problem, I
32 find somebody that can solve it for me. I was pulling my hair,
33 trying to figure out, I don't know where I'm going to find an IRA
34 coordinator. So, I asked her. She said, "Yeah, I can do that." So,
35 we were lucky to have you here, and I take this opportunity to
36 thank you for all the work that you have been doing. Beyond what
37 you're supposed to do.

38
39 Then we'll continue the communication not only with Dr. Angeli,
40 but all the other project leaders so that we can make sure that we
41 are on time for everything that we have here. And we can report
42 then. At the end of this month, we have to report to Washington
43 about the outcome of everything that we're doing and the update.

44
45 At every Council meeting, you will hear a presentation. That's
46 something that we agree on. And NOAA Fisheries told us that this
47 is the only way that we will be able to, on the record, have an
48 update of all the other projects that you have. So, you will see

1 this until March 27, 2027, which is the last day that they gave us
2 for all the projects that we have.

3
4 The other thing that they asked me to say here. Okay, you finished
5 the project. What is going to happen next? So, all the projects
6 have suggestions for continuation of some of the activities,
7 especially outreach and education. That's something that the
8 Council can do. Other things that are coming out of the project,
9 we are telling people, "You can prepare proposals for Saltonstall-
10 Kennedy Grant and other sources of funding. That's something that
11 was told to us by Kelly Denit's office.

12
13 So, I think that we are on time. And thank you a lot, Martha, for
14 your work and Dr. Angeli for helping us put all this together.

15
16 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Martha. Next on the agenda, we
19 have the 2026 Annual Catch Limit Monitoring. That's coffee break.
20 We're going to take a ten-minute coffee break.

21
22 Wait. Hold on. We're going to make a little adjustment to the
23 agenda. Graciela.

24
25 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Coffee break, and we need to make some
26 changes to the agenda. So, we are going to have, probably, first
27 the Executive Order 14276 for discussion with the Council, then
28 we'll have the evaluation of managed stocks' needs for conservation
29 and management by Sarah. And then we can go into the Mariculture
30 report and then the Outreach, etcetera. The rest of the agenda
31 will remain as is. Okay?

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And, also, during the presentation by Jannette,
34 Outreach and Education, we are going to include presentation by
35 Mr. Funk.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Okay. Thank you. We're going to take
38 a quick, ten-minute break. Okay.

39
40 (WHEREUPON, A BRIEF RECESS WAS TAKEN.)

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to continue with the agenda and the
43 changes that were made. So, next up is the update Council
44 priorities under EO 14276. That'd be, Graciela?

45
46 **UPDATE COUNCIL PRIORITIES UNDER E.O. 14276 RESTORING AMERICA'S**
47 **SEAFOOD**

1 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, we're going
2 to review the comments that the public comments, that were received
3 during the extended comment period. If I can have the next one,
4 please. Okay.

5
6 So, just a short timeline for you. I mean, we had the request for
7 the Council input regarding Executive Order 14276 that came on
8 August 27. The letter from the Council was sent on September 23rd,
9 2025. And the letter, you have a copy of that, and you have a copy
10 of the big table that was sent with the priorities that the Council
11 put forth. Then they put a notice out of to extend public comment
12 period until December 15th, 2025.

13
14 April 22nd, today we are reviewing those comments that came in. We
15 have a deadline of April 30 for the CFMC revisions, if any, for
16 the information that was sent to Mr. Piñeiro. And then out of all
17 the public comments that came in, and they were, I think, over
18 158 individual or, specifically, individual comments, seven had to
19 do with the Caribbean. If I can have the next slide, please.

20
21 So, this follows the order that you had that you had seen before
22 on the table. So, what you are going to be seeing here is the
23 priority ranking that the Council provided. So, priority number on
24 the left-hand side of the table. The action or the changes that
25 the Council was suggesting were priorities for the work that we
26 do. We'll put a column that says, talks about the ongoing efforts
27 to fulfill those actions. And then the additional input is the
28 input that came in through the public comments between December
29 1st and December 15th.

30
31 So, the first one is that we separated all of the islands because
32 it's a separate process for each of the islands. So, this is to
33 review the species that are currently managed, that it's already
34 ongoing. And you'll be listening to the next presentation by Sarah
35 Stephenson on the evaluation of management stock needs for-- wait
36 the title is Evaluation of Managed Stocks' Needs for Conservation
37 and Management. So, you are already-- I mean, the Region and the
38 Science Center and the Council are already working on that.

39
40 So, the additional input that came in from those public comments
41 was for Puerto Rico specifically and for Saint Croix to actually
42 remove spiny lobster from federal management. So, that's one of
43 the comments that you have, and the Council, it's in its matrix,
44 we'll be reviewing whether that's going to be part of the of the
45 changes.

46
47 So, one of the comments actually has to do, two comments, with the
48 SEDAR process. And that has to do because SEDAR just happened when

1 all the public comment was open. So, seeing what was happening
2 with SEDAR 91 spiny lobster, people were concerned and actually
3 wanted to include the aspects of the social and economic sciences
4 into the SEDAR process. So, that's part of what the comment was.
5 So, I wonder if it's-- I much rather go through each of the pieces
6 of the table and have the discussion now. So, if there is anything
7 that you need to say regarding this ranking, I mean, that's a top
8 priority for the Council right now.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

11
12 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you, Graciela. With so much
13 additional information that we have of the assessments of the
14 lobster and the yellowtail snapper, etcetera. Do you think it's
15 time to reevaluate what Tier number we should address the stock
16 assessment? For example, if there can be an upgrade, that means a
17 lower number in the tier number. I don't know. Just a question.

18
19
20
21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, the control rule has four Tiers.
22 We are mostly in Tier 4, which is just basically commercial data,
23 landings data, catch based data. We have improved in terms of
24 lobster, for example. We have improved in terms of some of the
25 life history information that we've put forth. And we have improved
26 because the SEDAR is looking at alternative methods to deal with
27 the reference points for the species that we manage. So, in that
28 sense, we most likely would have to review if SEDAR 103 gives us
29 a different way of approaching our management than the control
30 rule would have to be reviewed.

31
32 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you, Graciela.

33
34 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, we'll move on. I don't hear
35 anything else. So, can I have the next one, please?

36
37 Okay. So, in this case, we've been talking a lot about
38 compatible/incompatible regulation, about redundant regulations,
39 about assessing the results of the MPAs that we have in place,
40 etcetera. So, these are grouped together because they are of
41 interest to both the stakeholders and the Council, and we have
42 moved forward with some compatibility, for some species and for
43 some of the islands. So, as you heard yesterday from Dr. Angeli,
44 they are working on a plan for the Virgin Islands. They're working
45 on the same for Puerto Rico. So, that's ongoing. Okay? So, we do
46 have this communication open.

47
48 The other thing that is happening is that, for the first time, we

1 have had a water reef conservation program working on in Tourmaline
2 with the fishers alongside the scientists. So, right now they're
3 in the process of planning what we call the exit meeting. So, they
4 were part of the evaluation of Tourmaline, and now they're going
5 to be part of the analysis and the conclusion and the presentation
6 to the Council in terms of what they have found in Tourmaline.

7
8 So, people are asking for these areas to be open again. They were
9 originally set for the production of the red hind spawning
10 aggregations, but the Council prohibited, in Abrir la Sierra and
11 Tourmaline, all fishing. So, that means that the water column is
12 closed, that the bottom tending gears are prohibited from those
13 areas. So, we will have new information that was not available
14 before, but that project doesn't end until September 2026. We
15 probably won't have it until the Council meeting in December.

16
17 So, the comments that we received, some of them really are not the
18 purview of the Council, but they are here because people are
19 requesting that parts of the monuments, of the Coral Reef Monument,
20 get open to fishing. So, they are included here, and that's, for
21 example, the North and West portion of the Buck Island Reef
22 National Monument. So, that's something that we have been talking
23 about the addition of all these areas that are closed to fishing
24 and have been closed for so long. So, that's part of the evaluation
25 that needs to take place.

26
27 Now, it's not the jurisdiction of the Council. That's under the
28 Department of Interior. So, that means that at some point we have
29 to sit at the same table and talk about it, because the Department
30 of Interior has a no-take regulation for all species where they
31 have the monuments and the parks. So, that percentage that Julian,
32 I think, was talking about yesterday of the 30% that have been
33 lost here and there from these areas that are closed, I mean, they
34 add up to quite a bit of submerged lands that are not available
35 for fishing.

36
37 So, the other issue that has to do with the MPAs is that they would
38 to see, or at least one comment said that they would be interested
39 in implementing only seasonal closures and do away with the MPAs.
40 So, again, that's something that the Council has to discuss because
41 right now you have the two things. You have seasonal closures for
42 a number of species. You have an MPAs that are for the protection
43 of the red hind specifically but prohibit all other fishing. So,
44 these are the issues that the Council needs to address.

45
46 So, we had ranked them at that time, the bottom two as they need
47 to be talked about now and looked at now. The compatibility because
48 it's ongoing and there is already much compatibility among the

1 local governments and the federal government. So, that got a rank
2 of two. Ranks are one, two, and three. So, one is very important.

3
4 And finally, as I mentioned, Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra. So,
5 instead of protecting the spawning aggregations, there was a
6 suggestion, to protect the juvenile habitat. Now most of the
7 juvenile habitats for the species that we manage would be within
8 the state or territorial waters. So, that's really-- I mean, and
9 they are part of the FMPs that we've had in place because they are
10 mentioned as essential fish habitat, as areas of particular
11 concern, but we really cannot do anything about it. So, the
12 juvenile habitat, except for the deepwater snappers, which would
13 be, for example, Tourmaline Bank, has a report of juvenile blackfin
14 snapper happening there. Other than that, most of the other
15 juvenile habitats are in shallow water on the insular platform in
16 the state waters. Okay?

17
18 So, those were the comments that you received regarding these kinds
19 of regulations. If we can open the floor for discussion, we can
20 take notes and see where the Council wants to change the ranking,
21 give us more direction about how to address that situation, and
22 request from the local governments that we continue discussion of
23 compatibility, etcetera. Mr. Chair?

24 25 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any comments so far on this, Julian?

28
29 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, as it as it pertains to the MPAs for Saint
30 Thomas/Saint John shelf, we don't want-- like the MCD, we don't
31 want it to be reopened. The fisheries already agreed to that. We
32 want to keep that closest bin. It's a 14 square mile closure, and
33 we feel that it continues to stock our entire shelf with all the
34 different species. It's not only for the red hind. As it pertains
35 to the Grammanik Bank, I would also like to see that kept closed
36 for bottom gear year-round, and the seasonal closure during the
37 spawning aggregation time.

38
39 But what we would like to see is Grouper Unit 4 removed from the
40 entire seasonal closure. Keep the Grammanik Bank, keep the Marine
41 Reserve District, the MCD. Keep that in place but be allowed to
42 fish outside of those closed areas instead of having an annual
43 catch limit, having seasonal closure, and having complete closure.
44 It's three different ways of protecting the same species, and I
45 don't think we need to have that overkill.

46
47 It's been closed. Those species have been protected for over twenty
48 years, and I said so yesterday. I think it's time for us to be

1 able to harvest. We're going to be looking at, of course, the ACLs.
2 Of course, the landings are going to go up because we're now going
3 to be able to catch during that period of time, but they're going
4 to still be protected through the MCD and through the Grammanik
5 Bank closure. That's what I would like to see for Saint
6 Thomas/Saint John. So, Mr. Blanchard, you want to help me out
7 there?

8
9 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I would have to agree with Mr. Magras
10 because I think we have given up enough. We had given up for a
11 long time because this grouper bank was closed, and it was
12 originally the grouper bank, which is now the Hind Bank. It was a
13 very small area before where the grouper used to come up and spawn.
14 Then it was extended and became the Hind Bank. Now we went to the
15 Grammanik Bank.

16
17 I agree with him. I think we got overkill here. I don't see why,
18 if you are keeping us out of the areas that these fish are spawning
19 on, why can't we catch them outside, why can't we have a seasonal
20 closure taken away. Because they are there to breed for three
21 months or whatever. The area is closed.

22
23 So, for me, I think we overkill. I think we are not asking for too
24 much. Because, really, if we got asked what a stock building-- how
25 long it takes to rebuild a stock. As far as I remember, it takes
26 ten years. We done got double that time. So, I mean, how much
27 longer? I could be a dead man before this ever get raised, if it
28 ever gets raised.

29
30 Because it looks like once we set a target, once we got this in
31 mind about this fish whatever the fascination is, right, we can't
32 let it go. It's like a dog with a bone. So, I think we need to
33 lift some of this, give us a break, and leave us to make money.
34 Because everybody else seems to be making money when they import
35 it in our off season.

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, some of the issues that specifically
38 need to be considered when you open up seasonal closures or open
39 up area closures is that there should be a monitoring type of
40 program in place because you are going to be overrunning your ACLs
41 for those species that you're opening up to fishing, and that at
42 some point will need to be accounted for. So, all that is part of
43 the information that we provided on the table.

44
45 So, if you're going to do x, you have to make sure that when you're
46 doing x, you're doing a monitoring program of this sort so that
47 your ACLs will not be overrun. You have to make sure that the
48 seasonal closure covers for the recovery of that species. So,

1 that's part of what's in there for the Science Center to look into,
2 and that's where we're trying to put our priorities on the same
3 level so that all that information can be collected on time if
4 management changes. And people are not-- Fisheries are not-- If
5 the ACL is overrun, it's overrun because, yes, your population has
6 been increasing rather than for other reasons.

7
8 So, those things are considered in the plan of how to address these
9 issues. But the first thing is an assessment of whether these MPAs
10 and the seasonal closures have been working.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian.

13
14 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Just to add to what Graciela just said also,
15 we would be even willing to have a size limit on these groupers.
16 So, it's something to consider also. Just like we did with the
17 parrotfish in Saint Croix. We left the parrotfish, but we were
18 given a minimum size limit. And we can do the same thing.

19
20 We can do the same thing that the juvenile fish are protected so
21 they can grow large also and continue to spawn as the adults do.
22 We can look at stuff that. We're willing to work with the team and
23 put something together. I don't think we're asking for a whole
24 lot.

25
26 I know the Science Center has to do their job and evaluate and so
27 forth, but it could be a working document that we get together as
28 a team, and we draft something up and see how it works.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Tony, Nelson and then Vanessa.

31
32 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** It's like they say, we want to give, but
33 we don't want to give. That's my personal take on this. Because
34 anytime you say, "but" everything else before that, that's all
35 gone. What I see here is we putting obstacle in the way instead of
36 saying, "well, let's say we will give this to them. We will deal
37 with what we need to deal with it, the process," instead of trying
38 to, let's say, shoot it down before it actually goes through.

39
40 And my thing is this, I think we're reasonable about this. I think
41 this is actually a reasonable thing. We are supposed to be here,
42 according to the president, trying to open the fishery to make
43 more money. But every time we try to open it, you want to shut it
44 down. And I'm speaking from the point of a fisherman because that's
45 how I am sitting down here looking at this as.

46
47 So, do you really want me to make money? You really want to follow
48 the president's directive? You really want to stop imports, to

1 shut them down to a certain degree to slow that up? Or that's what
2 you're telling us, but you don't really want us to do that? And
3 that's my perspective sitting here.

4
5 We could all make excuses for everything. I could make 100 excuses
6 why something can't work. Give me one. Tell me one vision you have
7 that you think could work. That's what I want to see. Instead of
8 every time we ask for something, "Well, you know this can work
9 because we have to do this."

10
11 I don't want to hear excuses. And I'm coming back to you again.
12 This is the fisherman sitting on here, not the Councilman. Because
13 the Councilman will be saying, which I am saying, we need to stop
14 this and use a different approach.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

17
18 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** In the review of effectiveness, I mean,
19 that's the assessment that we're talking about. Anytime the Council
20 makes any changes to the management, there is an assessment of
21 what that entails. So, María talked yesterday about the biological
22 and ecological effects, the social and economic factors, etc. So,
23 that's all part of what normal business is.

24
25 The second part is that in the letter by the Council and in the
26 table that we referenced in terms of what needs to be done, there
27 is a big increase in pushing for cooperative research with the
28 commercial fishers. So, in the case of Tourmaline, which was our
29 first experience, they're getting paid the same as the scientists.
30 They're being part of that same crew. So, in this case, for
31 example, in terms of removing Grouper Unit 4, in terms of opening
32 up the seasonal closure, etcetera, one situation could be that
33 there is that cooperative research that the fishers are providing
34 the exact data that it's needed to evaluate the impact of opening
35 up that seasonal closure. That's just an example because
36 cooperative research is one of the main points of E.O. 14276.

37
38 So, the Council has that included in the table of priorities. Okay?
39 Nelson.

40
41 **NELSON CRESPO:** I saw Blanchard, you want to follow-up while you're—

42
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** You know we're talking about doing
44 research. Every year, the college has gone in there and done
45 research, in the Grammanik Bank as well as a Hind Bank. I mean,
46 how much research we actually need. I brought it up at several
47 Council meetings where they are only sampling a part of a 14-mile
48 stretch Bank. Now I am not a scientist, but you can't tell me if

1 you're looking at your hand what happened to your foot. You can't
2 tell me that.
3
4 I was saying from before that they are looking-- they are studying
5 these Bank wrong. The smaller Grammanik Bank, yes, that's a very
6 small area. I could see that. Now you're saying we have to do more
7 research. How much more research do we need? How many years have
8 the college been going on this bank and studying this bank? Look
9 at it. How many years have been-- you know who is making money off
10 of this? The researchers, not us.
11
12 You show us nickel and dime to come and show up on board, but to
13 the end of the day, guess who getting the lion's share? It ain't
14 us. It is not us getting the lion's share here. It is a scientist
15 who is doing the research, and everybody else whose got a hand in
16 it. And every time we try to put a hand in it, it gets slapped.
17
18 So, let me just let out how I see it. That's what is going on here.
19 It is like every time I reach for the cookie you slap my hand. I
20 have got to pull back my hand. You want us to have it, or you don't
21 want us to have it? You want this fishery to produce, or you don't
22 want it to produce?
23
24 We overrun it. We get accountability measures, which are penalties
25 because that's what it really is. So, we are here talking and the
26 president is promoting, not buying fake seafood from everybody
27 else. And when we get the real deal, all you want is to shut us
28 down. And I'm speaking from the fisherman's point of view because
29 I think sometimes we have to hear the reality of it.
30
31 Just like I was saying about Puerto Rico, we went from Puerto Rico
32 being overrun on the lobsters us; to now, they're okay. And then
33 guess who suffers that penalty when that mistake is made again? Is
34 us. To the end of the day that's what it is. The only one who's
35 suffering penalties here is us. Nobody else at this table that has
36 got any power outside of this room here is suffering any penalties.
37
38 So, let's be realistic as to who is taking the blows here. We have
39 always taken a blow because we are always on a receiving end. The
40 government come in and tell us what to do, tell us what not to do.
41 And believe me, don't get me wrong. I do believe in regulations,
42 but I do believe sometimes we got the regulations so tight around
43 our neck that we are choking. When the fisherman-- when they don't
44 have no more fisherman to study, who is going study? That's my
45 real question. Who is going to study after we are gone? Because
46 we're dwindling by the day.
47
48 Are you helping us for that to happen? Because I'll be honest with

1 you, if I had insurance, I wouldn't encourage them to do this.
2 Just having to deal with the pressure that is put on by the
3 government and the type of job that we have to do. This is not a
4 young man's job. This is not a forgiving job with aging. And then
5 we have to deal with the government trying to handcuff us every
6 day.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?
9

10 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.
11 Recommendation for Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra coming from the
12 frustration of the old fishing communities, commercial,
13 recreational charters, that they cannot fish at hot areas for
14 pelagics because you are protecting a reef fish. It's so
15 frustrating because when the season comes, the close season comes,
16 ironically, it is this hot season for pelagics in those areas. And
17 even worse, we don't have any evidence through that moment that
18 there's some aggregation of red hinds in Tourmaline. That's why
19 fishers want to open both areas.
20

21 In my opinion, I will be more than happy if you open the water
22 column and keep protecting every fish, because I recognize that
23 it's needed. But, I mean, it's needed to allow the fishers to fish
24 for other species like the management plan of Bajo de Sico that
25 when it's closed, everyone can fish in the water column. Maybe
26 sometimes you can catch a red hind or other species, but because
27 it's closed, those fish have to be released. There's no problem.
28

29 I don't see any problem with opening the water column. And see if
30 maybe that's going to be a fair move. Thank you.
31

32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?
33

34 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank You, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Graciela, for
35 reviewing this with us. I have a couple of process questions and
36 maybe a suggestion. We currently have three actions that we're
37 working on. We've got U.S.V.I. spiny lobster. We have--
38

39 I mean, we also have other things in the rulemaking process, but
40 currently the ones that are still with the Council. We have Puerto
41 Rico spiny lobster that will be coming back to us at the next
42 Council meeting after we get more information from the SSC, and
43 we've got the species matrix action. Species matrix, so I've seen
44 four, I think, different actions here on your list. Species matrix
45 you had identified as one on the previous slide, and then we have
46 these three. One of my questions is could those two priority ones
47 in the bottom two rows be potentially combined into one action?
48

1 To me, I see a lot of overlaps there and then put into the—here,
2 from the Council, where they would fit into the priority list of
3 the actions we have currently open. That number two, priority
4 number two, we heard from Sarah yesterday that, I mean, I think to
5 some extent, some of that's going to get addressed in the species
6 matrix conversation and document there might be actions that come
7 out of that we need to develop a new amendment for. But I think
8 we'll handle a lot of that in species one.

9
10 So, to me, I guess I'm seeing that there might be one additional
11 priority action that comes out of this, right, these comments and
12 the results of this that would be to review the seasonal and area
13 closures effectiveness. I heard you say, I think, Graciela, that
14 we were expecting to get some additional data in September. I'm
15 just wondering, a, where folks think this should fall into the
16 list of actions that we currently have opened. And then, b, could
17 we maybe, while we're waiting for that, the results of that one
18 study that's open do like some scoping with the fishermen to just
19 maybe, as the first step, identify the list of all the seasonal
20 closures and areas that we want to address in this evaluation and
21 just begin gathering that data so we have a good starting point if
22 we pick it up in August or December meeting.

23
24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, we have been working on these
25 seasonal area closures for various reasons. So, the CCC, for
26 example, had a group of area-based management. So, all that
27 information has been presented to the CCC because one of the things
28 that the Council had not prohibited was the use of trolls in the
29 MPA. So, now that's taken care of.

30
31 In addition to what you see here, I mean, that regulatory
32 amendment, in terms of the other areas that are closed, that are
33 other, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Interior, for
34 example, might have a little bit of priority perhaps because it
35 adds up to quite a large amount of fishing ground that has been
36 lost to regulations. So, that's part of the information that we
37 had in the rationale for keeping them separate, because those
38 interjurisdictional issues end up impacting the same group of
39 fishermen. So, that was a concern that the Council had.

40
41 So, that's part of the reason why they were kept separately,
42 because one would have to deal with the other jurisdictions and
43 bring them to the table. The other one had to do with the assessment
44 that we can do for the data that is available.

45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Is the one you're talking about keeping separate
47 priority number two, or are you saying there are those DOI closures
48 or areas in the two bottom rows?

1
2 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I think I made a mistake. So, you see
3 the additional input on the Buck Island Reserve, that should have
4 been part of the bottom one, the last one, of the MPAs, because
5 they are MPAs under DOI. So, my apologies for that.

6
7 But that's, that's also a problem of compatible and non-compatible
8 regulations because they promulgate regulations. The state and the
9 territories promulgate regulations. So, it should be all those
10 players sitting at the table when we talk about this.

11
12 But again, that's not the purview of the Council. We understand
13 that. But it adds up, and the economic impact is on the same
14 stakeholders.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

17
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair Vanessa Ramírez, for the
19 record. Of course, I support Nelson, Julian, and Tony, comments
20 and frustration that they just put on the record. But I have a
21 question about this survey that is being conducted on Tourmaline.
22 Are there commercial fishermen from the area collaborating on this?

23
24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes. There, in fact, are eight members of
25 the fishing community from the west coast; people who knew
26 Tourmaline before it was closed; people who were still fishing;
27 trap fishermen and divers that know the area. So, all that was
28 taken into consideration. There was a call for people to
29 participate and come forth and discuss the project how it was going
30 to be. So, the exit meeting is taking place in the next month or
31 so, and that's for the fishers that participated so that the data
32 analysis will be walked through with them to the end result of
33 what the recommendation coming out of that study is.

34
35 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay.

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, they are part of everything from the
38 beginning to the end.

39
40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I'm just asking because, as we are the biggest
41 association and the highest in divers, especially for these
42 generations. And I don't know anyone that is working on this just
43 to say that for the record.

44
45 And also, I have a second question. Does this sudden interest to
46 open the Tourmaline have anything to do with the energy cable that
47 is going to be passing from Dominican Republic to Mayaguez area?
48

1 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** I don't think that was part of the
2 information that we received regarding the comments that were
3 provided. I didn't see anything about cables. That's another issue
4 that, in terms of the habitat, has to be taken into consideration
5 because that was actually an HAPC, Habitat Area of Particular
6 Concern because of its function as a spawning ground.

7
8 So, I've been asking about the cables, RFPs and to see what's going
9 to do, but I don't have the information with me.

10
11 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Just for the record, the company that has
12 this intention have been, for two years, around the Southwest Coast
13 making their research, talking with fishermen also, about the
14 implications of that maybe this cable could be and how the
15 fishermen feel about that. And, also, from what I saw in the
16 original plans that they have, that cable will pass through the
17 Tourmaline area. Thank you.

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Yeah. In the case of our job, we don't care
20 about the cable. We are supposed to respond to this because of
21 MSA. And whether we open or keep Tourmaline closed depends on any
22 issues related to the fishery of this area.

23
24 The question for Graciela, what are the next steps? We have the
25 comments, the schedule of events. I know that Genio is going to
26 review this in the summer. He told us already. He is going to touch
27 on it at the May meeting, the CCC.

28
29 So, in our terms, according to what you have read and everything,
30 what would be the step of the Caribbean Council regarding any of
31 this?

32
33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, our steps are, number one, whether
34 the ranking that we have and the comments that you received and
35 the comments that we provided to NMFS are all on the same page.

36
37 So, for example, in terms of reviewing the MPAs and the seasonal
38 closures, etcetera, the comments are telling you that that's what
39 the public wants to see. Open up these areas, allow for the pelagic
40 fishing of that area. So, if you want to make it even finer grain
41 as Heather was proposing, please give us the information on how
42 you want it done, so that by April 30 we can say, "Okay, so we
43 reviewed our listing and we need to change. We're changing the
44 last two to make it one and then change the ranking."

45
46 So, that's what I need from you.

47
48 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I do recommend that the action type be more

1 specific and that we rank them sequentially, just so that we don't
2 have three number ones and a number two given capacity to move
3 things forward. Right? , I think it'd be helpful to know what is
4 the highest priority for us to work on next after the three that
5 we have in motion now.

6
7 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, that's what the Council has to let us
8 know. Staff can then rework those, as needed.

9
10 We don't have anything in terms of what capacity is available,
11 what funding is available. I mean, there is a lot of information
12 here on what cooperative work could do. For example, contracting
13 out some of the assessments of these areas, etcetera. So, given
14 that, what would be the Council's priority regarding MPAs and
15 seasonal closures, which have been the hot topics this morning.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I wanted to make a comment to you. I want to
18 make a comment regarding this list from the Saint Croix fisheries
19 perspective. The U.S. Virgin Islands has 33 MPAs, so the fishermen
20 feel like they're being pushed into one corner because Saint Croix
21 has a very limited fishing shelf available to them. Actually, Lang
22 Bank and a Little Elbow on the South Shore of Saint Croix, where
23 a mutton snapper closure is, are the only two areas that fall in
24 the EEZ. Most of the fishers feel like you're pushing them out,
25 and they don't have any other grounds to go fishing in.

26
27 One of the things with those seasonal closures compared to a
28 completely closed area is that you have invasive species that
29 settle into these areas, and there's no way of managing that
30 because nothing's being done about the invasive species. Nobody
31 can go fishing there. Buck island is probably the same thing. The
32 fishermen feel that the column of water, like what Nelson was
33 saying, you need to allow for pelagics if you're in 3,000 feet of
34 water, there's no coral growing there. And that's one of the
35 fisherman's complaints also.

36
37 Ricardo?

38
39 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I Agree with Nelson. If you are protecting
40 a reef fish, ain't no reason why they shouldn't be able to drag
41 line over at it? Number one. Number two, I am having María write
42 a motion for me to have this moving forward, and I would like some
43 support on it. So, that's my statement.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

46
47 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, for the record. Sorry if I
48 missed anything, but talking about all this, I want to go back to

1 the main principal question of Tony. If got it right, I understood
2 that you asked, "For how long?" For how long are we going to have
3 these regulations? Either closing the areas, the periods. For how
4 long, that was his question, the principal question.

5
6 Are we able to answer that question? What do we have to do to
7 answer that question?

8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The question is already answered in the regulation
10 that we follow. There's a protocol for reviewing what we have.
11 Actually, Tony mentioned the rebuilding of a stock for ten years,
12 but that's the minimum. If you take a fish like the nassau grouper.
13 The nassau grouper matures at twenty-two years old. So, if you
14 only take about one and a half generations, we are talking about
15 thirty-three years before the darn thing can be declared as open.

16
17 So, it all depends. So, it's not set in stone. However, with the
18 socioeconomic factor involved, the Council has to look at the whole
19 thing and see if our strategies, like the closures, are fulfilling
20 the needs of the Council, are helping the management of fishery.
21 So, at any time, by the way, once the plan is approved at the
22 Secretary level, it's no longer a Council plan. It's a regulation
23 approved by the secretary. So, the action agency is the one who
24 decides what to do in the future with anything. But any Council
25 can ask if the Secretary would like to review this part because we
26 have new data, or we have better ways of dealing with the issue.

27
28 We had issues, not issues but we have new data that hopefully will
29 happen in Puerto Rico in the next three-- at the end of three
30 years. We have finally recreational fisheries data that indicates
31 that we need to review this. That's what we do.

32
33 So, in other words, we cannot tell the people we are going to open
34 this by this year, but we can tell them this is the process to do
35 it. And, actually, now that I'm talking, in the case of Tourmaline
36 and Abrir la Sierra, let's say that-- and remember, when we started
37 the whole thing, the idea was to open everything, monuments,
38 etcetera, etcetera.

39
40 Actually, Julian was contacted directly, and me and other people.
41 And I talked to some of the key players, some of the fishers, and
42 they said, "Miguel, this can be open, but this one should remain
43 closed because it works." Like, for example, Grammanik Bank, we
44 discussed it with Julian and other fisheries. But there are many
45 other areas that have been closed. And, by the way, some of them
46 are not closed by the federal government. They are closed because
47 of the local government.

1 We need to focus on what they told us to do, focus on those areas
2 that are in the EEZ, followed by the areas that I share. For
3 example, Bajo de Sico is shared between Puerto Rico jurisdiction
4 and the federal government, and the same with Tourmaline. So, if
5 at the end of the process we find that we need to revisit any of
6 these areas, then we have to follow the process, prepare the
7 documents and everything. S

8
9 o, what Graciela is asking is, what is the pleasure of the Council?
10 What priorities are you going to give her regarding this table?

11
12 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, there is something called the
13 management evaluation strategy that looks at the management that
14 is in place, and that's part of what we had in the rationale for
15 some of these. So, perhaps, I don't know if alongside, at the same
16 time that the SEDAR 103 and the lobster 91 are taking place, this
17 would be too much, but that would be a priority in this case from
18 what we're hearing, revise what we have in place, see if it's
19 working or not, but it has to be revised and assessed.

20
21 So, asking the Science Center if the capacity or the directive to,
22 perhaps, among staff work on something that? That would be the
23 question that I have.

24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Actually, the question will be whether we want to
26 review or not the MPAs and then what it will take to do it. And
27 remember, 14276 recognizes that what they are asking is not going
28 to happen immediately. So, the question to the Council, do we think
29 do you think that we need to review and assess? Take a look at the
30 areas that we close and decide whether we should keep it closed,
31 expanded, or do something with it. And then if the answer is yes,
32 we need to ask also what it will take to do that.

33
34 Do we need information from the Center? Do we need information
35 from the local government? Their priorities, María mentioned the
36 priorities of the Council because every time that you meet, you
37 tell staff to do this and that, but there's only two people here
38 and maybe one there. We are not able to do everything. Yeah.

39
40 In our case, the full technical staff are sitting right there. And
41 Kevin told us that the stock assessment person is sitting next to
42 him. So, María, do you think that this is something that can be
43 addressed?

44
45 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I think John wanted to say something, and I
46 think, Tony and Ricardo, maybe they can propose motions that would
47 deal directly with this. I think what you have listed as number
48 one, the two number ones review possible redundancy regulations

1 and seasonal closure areas is pretty much the same as the other
2 ones. Because once you are reviewing the MPAs, which are the
3 seasonal area closures, the redundancy of regulations will come
4 up. So, those two can be combined.

5
6 These are the ones that are under-- Well, we will need to take
7 care of the ones that are under our jurisdiction. The ones that
8 are not under our jurisdiction, we could facilitate a conversation
9 about those, but what would be on our table is what we currently
10 manage, you know.

11
12 Puerto Rico's talking about Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra. U.S.
13 Virgin Islands is talking about, Grammanik, and the MCD with the
14 seasonal species closure for the groupers. So, we could focus on
15 those now that we're going to have some staff time because the
16 SEDARs are not going anywhere for now and then do those specific
17 actions. And through that process, the information that is already
18 available, the information that is needed, and all the questions
19 that they have and possibilities. For example, they mentioned that
20 perhaps the size limit could be for the groupers. So, all of those
21 things could be included within that action.

22
23 So, we'll make it general enough so you can look into all of these
24 things. But the staff would have to have a mandate to start looking
25 into that through this process. So, that's my take on this.

26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, María. Because that's what we were
28 discussing there. Maybe we need to have a motion to include all
29 this. And then once you have the motion, we need to have the
30 discussion and give the staff the mandate, this is what we want,
31 for what date you receive. So, Tony, you said that you were working
32 on a motion with María. Is that what you're asking for?

33
34 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yeah.

35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.

37
38 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. I have a motion that María is going
39 to put on the board here for me.

40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.

42
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So--

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Nicole, we are addressing the issue of marine
46 areas, to review it. And at this time, Tony will have a motion to
47 address this issue and to see what are the next steps, the
48 instruction that the Council would to give to the staff. That's

1 where we are at this time. So, Tony?

2
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. *The motion is to request staff to*
4 *review the effectiveness and necessity of the seasonal closures*
5 *for grouper 4 in Saint Thomas/Saint John considering other*
6 *management measures that restrict harvest of the stocks and protect*
7 *the habitat supporting those aggregations.*

8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We need a second.

10
11 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we have a motion to request staff to
14 review the effectiveness and necessity of the seasonal closure for
15 Grouper Unit 4 in the Saint Thomas/Saint John district, considering
16 other management measures that restrict harvest of the stocks and
17 protect the habitat supporting those aggregations. Moved by
18 Blanchard, second by Vanessa. Discussion?

19
20 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. One suggestion. Just put the word "Unit"
21 after number 4. "Grouper Unit 4."

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel. This addresses seasonal closures, are you
24 also considering the MPAs for the area closures? Or you could-- so
25 if you want to do that, you can just use seasonal area closures.
26 Do you want to do that in one sentence, or do you want to split
27 it? María? Or Graciela?

28
29 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Sí. One thing is what you're directing
30 the staff to do. Another thing is the priority ranking that we
31 have to send to NMFS to be aware. So, these are very specific for
32 what we're trying to do regarding the changes.

33
34 I was going to suggest if I can work with María for the refinement
35 of what Heather had proposed regarding putting together those two
36 and making it, one, locking it in. So, it would take care of the
37 MPAs and the seasonal closures, and actually address this other
38 issue that is so important for stock assessment when you have so
39 many other MPAs that we cannot do anything about it, but we can
40 account for them and let everyone know that this is the sum of all
41 those areas that are closed to all fishing.

42
43 So, if it's okay with-- I mean, you have to vote on this. I think
44 this is a good directive for the staff to work on as an amendment
45 to the FMP for Saint Thomas. So, but that's extremely specific for
46 what we're trying to do regarding the priority listing for NMFS.

47
48 So, if I can just make a parenthesis and please vote on this so

1 that it would give us direction on where we're heading, and then
2 we'll refine those two priorities that we had, make it into one,
3 and that would reduce again the number of ones that we have on the
4 list. Thank you.

5
6 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Graciela. This is María López. And
7 just to answer your question, Miguel, I think when the motion says
8 "considering other management measures that restrict harvest of
9 the stock and protected areas," we're talking about the marine
10 protected areas that we were talking about. So, if the Council
11 wants to add the names to the motion, that's fine, but this is
12 going to be the assessment.

13
14 In relation also, like Graciela said, there's other marine
15 protected areas that are not under our jurisdiction that we are
16 pretty sure are contributing also to the protection of this
17 population. So, I don't want to necessarily constrain it to what
18 we are doing, but I think it's important to note what she said,
19 that, maybe, that connectivity of all those marine managed areas
20 is giving protection for the species too. So, that's why it's a
21 little bit more general. Although we do have several other
22 measures, like they mentioned, in these areas that would also be
23 acting to protect the populations of groupers in addition to the
24 seasonal closures.

25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, María. That's what we wanted. So, once
27 we have that very clear for the record, and especially the owner
28 of the motion is clear of what is next. And then we are ready to
29 vote because all this will be in the transcript.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

32
33 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, María just
34 said, we don't have to list it out, but I think it's very important
35 that what we can do in parenthesis in there is "For example,
36 Grammanik Bank, Marine Reserve, the MCD, etcetera." We know it's
37 more than those two areas that are protecting these species, but
38 those are the two key areas that are protecting these species. And
39 I think it would put a little weight into the motion.

40
41 We put a little weight when looking into it. So, that's just my
42 suggestion. But you don't have to list them over there. You put,
43 "For example," and then you list those two, "etcetera."

44
45 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Let me add this to it.

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And we should include-- if we're going to mention
48 that we should include one from Puerto Rico, one from the Virgin

1 Islands. Yeah. Yeah.

2
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Etcetera.

4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** People don't like "etcetera" in motion. So, you
6 better put something there that would make sense besides
7 "etcetera."

8
9 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So just take it off?

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Just mention, "For example" yeah. So, yeah.

12
13 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Even among others, requires, exempli
14 gratia, like e.g., like what? Really?

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Among other MCDs, not among other ducks and
17 geese. So, Kate, do you think this is okay? Okay. She does. So,
18 Vance, we're okay.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Let me reread this. Request staff to review
21 the effectiveness and necessity of the seasonal closure for Grouper
22 Unit 4 in Saint Thomas/Saint John, considering other management
23 measures that restrict harvest of the stock and protect the habitat
24 supporting those aggregations such as the Hind Bank, MCD, and
25 Grammanik Bank, among others.

26
27 I'm going to do a roll call vote. I'm going to start with Blanchard.

28
29 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard , yes.

30
31 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, yes.

32
33 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.

34
35 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

36
37 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

38
39 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.

42
43 *All in favor, unanimous vote.* No nays and no abstentions.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, I'm sorry to keep asking you things. Shall
46 we do the same for Puerto Rico? What is the pleasure of the Council?
47 Would you also like to do the same thing for Puerto Rico?
48

1 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, if I may interrupt.

2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Go ahead.

4
5 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Before we go to the nitty gritty, we need
6 guidance on whether you want what Heather had suggested of putting
7 the language together for those two, combining the review of the
8 MPAs, etcetera, and make it just one priority item, and that would
9 be one. Is that the pleasure of the Council?

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I guess that's clear what we have been discussing,
12 and it's in the record. But what we are asking here is do we want
13 to do the same for Puerto Rico, or would "among others" cover all
14 of the U.S. Caribbean?

15
16 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, two things. One, if we combine those
17 two that would cover all of the islands because there are MPAs in
18 the West Coast of Puerto Rico, in Saint Thomas, and in Saint Croix.
19 The staff could begin working on this one, and then the Council
20 can say, "Please review also Puerto Rico and Saint Croix."

21
22 But that's, again, if you want to do it by motion, that's a specific
23 directive to the staff rather than at the higher level that we're
24 trying to complete now.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

27
28 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the difference I
29 see, the question I have. So, combining those two for the purposes
30 of the deregulatory exercise and the response to headquarters about
31 what are our priorities and in what order is one thing.

32
33 But then it's like teasing out specific actions that the Council
34 can take, right, to address some of those. And, when we combine--
35 I do think those two should be combined because there's a lot of
36 overlap. But I also don't think there's enough specificity in them
37 to get to an actual Council action. Right? It seems it'd be a
38 really big amendment that could cover so many different things
39 versus this very specific thing that we can look at and move pretty
40 efficiently.

41
42 And so, I guess I'm wondering, when you say, do we want to do the
43 same for Puerto Rico and Saint Croix? Like, do we have other very
44 specific things that we want to look at that's related to the
45 right, seasonal closure, area closure overlap that we would want
46 to initiate new amendments on.

47
48 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, if that's the specificity that

1 you want in your priority list, then under a heading of reviewing
2 the regulations that deal with MPAs and seasonal closures, the
3 same, motion that you have for Saint Thomas except for taking out
4 the Grouper Unit 4, which is different for the islands, then that
5 should suffice because that would be for Puerto Rico, for Saint
6 Thomas/Saint John, and for Saint Croix. Review "considering other
7 management measures that restrict harvest of the stocks and protect
8 the habitat supporting those aggregations such as" Then you can
9 mention all of them. Is that then what you would like to see?

10
11 So, there would be a heading saying, "we're revising the
12 regulations regarding MPAs and seasonal closures, and the
13 specificity is for Puerto Rico areas on the West Coast, for Saint
14 Thomas areas, the two that are mentioning this motion, and for
15 Saint Croix Lang Bank and Mutton Snapper Area.

16
17 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I mean, I guess I'd to hear from the other Council
18 members. Are there priority areas within those? Right? It just
19 seems this is a lot to bite off. Are there specific areas that
20 will be the highest priority?

21
22 And then how do we prioritize those three relative to each other,
23 Saint Thomas, Saint Croix, Puerto Rico?

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sure, María.

26
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, I just want to clarify, see if we
28 get this right. For what Graciela has, the priority ranking, the
29 presentation that she had, which is what the Council needs to
30 submit to NMFS. They want to see if they need to update what it
31 is. So, we talk about combining. And then, NMFS is wanting specific
32 lists, specific actions, which is this, for example.

33
34 So, the Council needs to tell us if there's any, like Heather said,
35 if Puerto Rico and Saint Croix, they would want to pursue actions
36 that are related to this. Correct? Okay. And then the Council needs
37 to rank how these are going to go because, it's going to be three
38 different actions. Okay. Yep. Just for the record rephrasing. Thank
39 you.

40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's what I was asking before, Mr. Chairman. Do
42 we need a motion for that, or is it clear in the record? You prefer
43 to have the motion, isn't it? So, I propose to allow Graciela and
44 María help us with drafting that motion. And then the next step
45 will be--

46
47 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** You mean to--
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The motion? Do you need a motion for doing what
2 you are talking about? Yes or no?

3
4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** No. We do not need a motion for updating the
5 priority list that will be submitted to NMFS. The motions that
6 we're working on right now for specific projects would be, I think,
7 will be the guidance that is given to the staff. And then that
8 specific information for those motions, we can put it in the
9 updated project.

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's what I'm saying. The priority list is
12 something else. But here, do we need to have something similar for
13 Saint Croix and Puerto Rico? That's what I'm asking the Council to
14 say yes or no. Do we need a motion? Yes or no?

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

17
18 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I believe if we have this, I believe we should
19 have something similar to this for Puerto Rico too.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa and then Nelson.

22
23 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
24 record. Before that motion, I need some assistance and some
25 recommendations from the DAP, please. If I can give my turn to
26 Nelson. Thank you.

27
28 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Gracias, Vanessa. I think
29 it's necessary to move forward. This Council should move forward
30 and make a motion for Puerto Rico.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?

33
34 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Also, for Saint Croix.

35
36 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, would a motion be something request
37 staff to draft--

38
39 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Miguel. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
40 record. I will ask for a motion for Puerto Rico and Saint Croix.
41 I will ask María and Graciela if they can help with the language,
42 please.

43
44 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, for this motion to work, we will need to
45 know specifically what you want to do. Okay? I'll help out a little
46 bit. So, in the priority list of actions that the Council
47 submitted, there's a specific request for Tourmaline and Abrir la
48 Sierra seasonal management areas to evaluate pretty much the same

1 thing, effectiveness and necessity of this seasonal area closure
2 in relation to other management measures in place.

3
4 Now the request from Puerto Rico may be a little different because,
5 while the one for Saint Thomas and Saint John is focusing on the
6 Grouper Unit 4, the objective for the seasonal area closures in
7 Abrir la Sierra and Tourmaline was for the red hind grouper. The
8 red hind grouper has a seasonal species closure during the same
9 time that these areas are close to fishing. So, that would be the
10 duplication of regulations that the Council will want to evaluate
11 as well.

12
13 And then related to that, the modification of management measures
14 because the objective of this seasonal area closures will need to
15 be evaluated to see if it's still being fulfilled or not. So, with
16 that said, and then we'll deal with Saint Croix if that's what the
17 Council wants to do. But we need guidance as to what specifically
18 they want to do.

19
20 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, María. In the case of the Tourmaline
21 and Abrir la Sierra area, we want to check if it could be opened
22 up to the bottom-- sorry, for the water column, but still
23 protecting the bottom.

24
25 Yes. I need clarification before that.

26
27 You're putting there fishing for pelagic species because we asked
28 for the water column. But in the case of Tourmaline, it's specific
29 for the red hind because that is what I check on that.

30
31 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Both areas, all three areas were
32 originally closed for red hind.

33
34 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. So, the *motion is to request a draft options*
35 *paper for modifying the tournament and Abrir la Sierra, seasonal*
36 *management areas to consider fishing for pelagic species in the*
37 *water column.*

38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Allowing fishing for pelagic?

40
41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I think that should be clear. Allowing, yes.

42
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second, Tony Blanchard.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

46
47 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to offer Vanessa
48 maybe a friendly amendment to tie this back to the objectives of

1 the Tourmaline-- to the closure, similar to what we had for the
2 first amendment. So, may I take a shot at that, and then you can
3 help me refine?

4
5 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes.

6
7 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I'm going to pull up, the original one. So, maybe
8 something like request staff draft options paper to review the
9 effectiveness and necessity of the Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra
10 seasonal management areas.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Heather go ahead.

13
14 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** She told me to wait.

15
16 Request staff draft an options paper to review the effectiveness
17 and necessity of the Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra seasonal
18 management areas considering-- so are all of these-- is this all
19 related to red hind?

20
21 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Well, the original, objective of these
22 closures was to protect the spawning aggregations of the red hind
23 during that time, December 1 to February 28.

24
25 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** To allow- I mean, to also protect the
26 functionality of the habitat and for the multispecies that spawned
27 during that period of time in that area.

28
29 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** What about if we said effectiveness and necessity
30 of the water column fishing prohibition in the Tourmaline and Abrir
31 la Sierra seasonal management areas? "Water column fishing
32 prohibition." There's probably a better way to say this, but. Oh,
33 that's a better way. "Necessity of prohibiting all fishing in the
34 Tourmaline." Let's do that.

35
36 That's perfect.

37
38 And then we could just put the period there. Yep. Okay. Do you
39 like that, Vanessa?

40
41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Heather, for the help on this. So, the
42 motion will be to request staff draft an option paper to review
43 the effectiveness and necessity of prohibiting all fishing in the
44 Tourmaline and Abrir la Sierra seasonal management areas.

45
46 Yes, I'm okay with that.

47
48 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yeah, that's good.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion on this motion? Sabater?

3
4 **ROBERTO SABATER:** So, the way it's written now is going to not only
5 talk about the water column, but it's also going to talk about the
6 red hind too. So, they're going to both be checked.

7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, and María. Are we okay with that one?
9 Okay.

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

12
13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just a suggestion or a-- go ahead Heather.

14
15 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Sorry. Just wondered if we should add after "areas"
16 "relative to the management objectives" because that will get at
17 to protect red hind. "Relative to the management objectives to
18 protect red hind," that will get at what I think Roberto is
19 bringing up.

20
21 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. I agree.

22
23 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yes. Tony Blanchard, for the record.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

26
27 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. So, we're revisiting the rules and regulations
28 that are in place presently. This is what this is saying. And
29 Nelson is saying, should we add in-- And the reason for doing this
30 is in order to see if the water column can be open.

31
32 No. I'm just asking, he asked me to ask to ask because we're trying
33 to understand

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. No. No. I got it. But, yeah.

36
37 Yeah. I believe that it's clear for the record. María, is the
38 intent here, or do you need to add something else? So, it's okay.

39
40 Mr. Chairman, maybe we have to call the question and vote. It's
41 you. I cannot do that.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we're going to take you to a vote. I'm
44 going to do a roll call. Sabater?

45
46 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Yes. Roberto Sabater.

47
48 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

1
2 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

3
4 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, agree. Yes.

5
6 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, yes.

7
8 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard , yes.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.

11
12 *So, the vote is unanimous.*

13
14 María?

15
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. So, now that
17 we have Saint Thomas and Saint John and Puerto Rico submitted their
18 own motions, we would like to hear if the Council members want to
19 propose something for Saint Croix, and what would that be?

20
21 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. Using
22 Executive Order 14276, I want to ask the Council to consider a
23 special closure for the snapper ground to continue. But for us to
24 have the ability to catch snapper outside of that targeted closure
25 area that is in the Southwest corner of Saint Croix. Snapper is
26 the only species in Saint Croix that is close from shoreline to
27 200 miles out, and we would like for you guys to consider reopening
28 the outer areas from shoreline.

29
30 It's a need for not just the fishermen, but it's a cultural thing
31 for a person to go in the shoreline with their family and throw a
32 line and catch a snapper to carry it home and have it for dinner.
33 In the first half of the close season, they permit us to catch the
34 snappers outside the special closure area. But when the last three
35 months come into play, we cannot catch a snapper nowhere in the
36 island.

37
38 So, we'd like to ask the Council to do a special closure only for
39 the mutton snapper for the four months and permit us to catch the
40 snapper outside of the closed area. And that's the closed area in
41 the Southwest corner of Saint Croix.

42
43 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I would to request a clarification. So, are we
44 talking about the mutton snapper aggregation area? So isn't that-
45 - are you referring to the little part of that is in federal
46 waters. Right?

47
48 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** The state and federal waters can remain close.

1
2 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay.

3
4 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** What we want is the ability to catch them from
5 the shoreline and in other areas. Because of the law that NOAA
6 passed years ago by Robert Mathis that he made a law that you
7 cannot possess or sell snapper during the close season, and they
8 were closed from shoreline to 200 miles. So, that affected our
9 market and affected our ability to catch fish in other areas. And
10 they are all over right now. We are seen them in numbers in Lang
11 Bank.

12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Gerson. We're going with what María is saying.
14 Remember, we only can address the EEZ. The rest is the local
15 government's jurisdiction. So, what is it exactly that you would
16 like to ask the Council to do within the EEZ with that species?

17
18 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Mr. Magras would like to help me here,
19 please.

20
21 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, I think what he's asking is similar to what we
22 asked for the Grammanik Bank and for the MCD, to leave that closed,
23 but only during the seasonal closure, keep the Mutton Snapper Bank.
24 Keep that permanently closed, but allow the fishing on the outside
25 of there. So, he wants a seasonal closure lifted. That's what he's
26 trying to say.

27
28 So, right now, they're in the mutton snapper season. It's closed
29 right now, but it's closed from the shoreline to 200 fathoms. So,
30 what he's asking-- 200 miles. What he's asking is during the
31 seasonal closure, just have it for the Bank of the spawning
32 aggregation itself, but leave outside of the bank opened up. So,
33 lift the seasonal closure, but keep the snapper bank closure in
34 place.

35
36 Am I right?

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole.

39
40 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. So, I think I would like to make a motion
41 that we request staff draft an options paper to review the
42 effectiveness of snapper and let's just go with both spatial and
43 seasonal management in areas related to-- do you want all snapper
44 species? Just mutton? --related to mutton snapper. You don't want
45 to add lane?

46
47 It's okay.

1 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson, for the record. We don't have a fishery
2 for lane snapper. They're here, but they're really tiny.
3
4 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Tiny. Okay.
5
6 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** I've never seen them be of--
7
8 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, just for mutton. Okay.
9
10 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** --marketable size.
11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, let's give the staff a few minutes so they
13 can draft.
14
15 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you. Okay.
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, what we're going to do is we're going to
18 break for lunch and finish this up after.
19
20 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** *We would request staff to review the*
21 *effectiveness and necessity of the spatial and seasonal closures*
22 *for mutton snapper in Saint Croix relative to the management*
23 *objectives to protect mutton snapper.*
24
25 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.
26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more discussion?
28
29 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Any discussion or amendments that I would--
30
31 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you. I guess I just have a question. The
32 management objective to protect mutton snapper, should we tie that
33 to manage it for optimum yield or relative to annual catch limits?
34 You know what I mean? Do we want to tie it to--
35
36 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Maybe sustainable yield?
37
38 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah.
39
40 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. So, then that would--
41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** John?
43
44 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Question because I heard, this is general and
45 across all of the management, but the mutton snapper seasonal or
46 the mutton snapper spawning aggregation closure seems to be
47 something that's specific that-- is that something that people
48 want evaluated out of this? Whether to lift that?

1
2 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** No.

3
4 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Okay.

5
6 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I don't think so.

7
8 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Then that's good clarity because that limits the
9 scope. So, that people are feeling is a useful managing tool. Okay.

10
11 No. I think just getting on the record, so that we are clear too
12 that that's not in scope for changing.

13
14 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** In that case, I wonder if we should remove
15 "spatial" from the "review the effectiveness and necessity of
16 seasonal closure relative to the management," but not if you, Dr.
17 Angeli, want to include that.

18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Go ahead, Sennai.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

22
23 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think it's necessary to review the effectiveness
24 of both. The issue is that the reason they're both there is these
25 are organisms that are all going to a directed place during a
26 directed time for the purpose of spawning. So, understanding the
27 effectiveness of the regulations, which these are for limiting
28 harvest during a biologically sensitive period for these
29 organisms, you need to understand by looking at both of them to
30 see which would be the most effective to limit the impact on
31 fishers.

32
33 So, I think it's important to have both of them in there to look
34 at that effectiveness and understanding whatever direction we go
35 in for the next iteration of management, how it would have impact
36 on both of those things.

37
38 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I agree.

39
40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I agree.

41
42 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Can I make one more suggestion to my edit?
43 Maybe instead of adding that sustainable yield, then-- I'm just
44 thinking because of the spatial closure, I'm sure it has different
45 objectives. So, maybe we could just say relative to their
46 management objectives. "Review the effectiveness and necessity of
47 spatial and seasonal closures for mutton snapper in Saint Croix
48 relative to their management objectives," period.

1
2 And that would cover whatever objectives.

3
4 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** That's fine. I think that was the original
5 intent.

6
7 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.

8
9 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So yeah. And I thought that maybe your suggestion
10 had to been to limit the scope of all the management objectives.

11
12 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** No. That wasn't the intention. It was just the
13 protect mutton snapper part. I wasn't sure what that meant. Okay.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I shouldn't say this before lunch. But, anyway,
18 when we have this kind of discussion, these motions, people think,
19 okay, they're going to eliminate that. They're going to eliminate
20 this. On the contrary, probably at the time that you have the
21 review, you need to have more restrictions rather than less
22 restrictions. So, let's get that clear because we need this motion,
23 what it says, we need to look at it, review it, and then come back
24 to the Council and say, "Okay. This is what we found, and this is
25 what we should do."

26
27 So, we have to that to make that very clear, because in the past,
28 some people think, and they call me after the meetings saying,
29 "Oh, they're going to do this." No. What we are saying is that
30 we're going to review it and see it.

31
32 So, I believe that if the owner of the motion, and the secondary
33 are in agreement, you can vote.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

36
37 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Following what you're saying, can we say here
38 what the objective is of what-- Well, we haven't voted on it.

39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I know. So, we are at a stage of discussion. So,
41 what is your question?

42
43 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Nope. That the objective here is to open it up,
44 not to close it all up. You cannot say that?

45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. The law says that you have to review and
47 convince the Secretary that this is the best option for this
48 particular fishery. So, while we're standing here, we're telling

1 the scientists, the staff, look and review this, and come back to
2 us and tell us whether any a, b, or c can be done. That's what
3 we're doing.
4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I'm going to-- yeah, take it to a vote.
6 Let's do a roll call vote. I'm going to start with Blanchard.
7
8 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard , yes.
9
10 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Angeli, yes.
11
12 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.
13
14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.
15
16 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.
17
18 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.
19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes.
21
22 *The unanimous vote, all in favor.*
23
24 Okay. So, before we break-- Heather?
25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Before we break, I'm hoping we can actually
27 prioritize these because now we have three new actions in addition
28 to the three that we have open.
29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And that's what I was saying before, and I asked
31 María, if you were deciding priorities, what would you do? No.
32 Just tell us, in your best opinion, what could we do.
33
34 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I cannot do that because they're all equally
35 important. Right? So, I think that's-- maybe what we could do is
36 look into the rest of the actions that we need to discuss today
37 and see at the end of the day, like we normally do, come back to
38 the list. And then by that time, the Council has had some time to
39 think about how this may go and then prioritize. How about that?
40
41 Okay. Let's go to lunch.
42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Before we break, I want to recognize our
44 past Chairman of the Council, Mr. Vernon Browne. He's also a past
45 senator for the U.S. Virgin Islands and a past Commissioner for
46 DPNR. Well--
47
48 (WHEREUPON, THE MEETING RECESSED FOR LUNCH ON APRIL 22, 2026.)

1
2 - - -
3
4 APRIL 22, 2026
5

6 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION
7 - - -
8
9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to start again. We have some changes
11 again to the agenda, and we're running out of time.
12

13 So, we're going to try and knock these agenda items off real fast.
14 So, next on the agenda is Caribbean Marine Aquaculture Workshop by
15 José Rivera.
16

17 **CARIBBEAN MARINE AQUACULTURE WORKSHOP 2026 REPORT—JOSÉ A.**
18 **RIVERA, NOAA FISHERIES**
19

20 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Hi. Good afternoon. It's not José Rivera.
21 He cannot make it this afternoon, but I'm presenting on behalf of
22 the organizing team. This is a short presentation that will
23 summarize the results of the workshop that was held in Puerto Rico
24 approximately a month ago.
25

26 The initiative of this workshop actually started several months
27 ago with the dream and expectation of exploring possibilities to
28 increase production in the U.S. Caribbean. Some mariculture is
29 being lately seen as a viable alternative, and the workshop was
30 specifically aimed to identify those potential collaborations and
31 topics, important topics.
32

33 It was held in a hybrid format, very participative, highly
34 interactive. Approximately, 60 persons attended the one in San
35 Juan, and there were another thirty, more or less online that were
36 all the time continuously interacting through zoom.
37 Representations from five countries, as you can see from this
38 table, were hosted there.
39

40 It included mariculture initiatives that focus on restoration,
41 initiatives in Puerto Rico, most of them with several species, as
42 well as commercial mariculture taking place throughout the region.
43 Those were from Panama, Dominican Republic, Guadalupe. And online,
44 we had Jamaica, even though they didn't present at this time. There
45 were representatives from the state governments and the federal
46 authorities as well as one donor that are actually working on
47 providing funding for sustainable aquaculture.
48

1 As I mentioned before, the main objective was to extract and learn
2 from experiences existing or in the past that can support the
3 development of new collaborations for planning and evaluating
4 possibilities for developing mariculture in the U.S. Caribbean.
5 The workshop report is expected to be completed in August this
6 year, and a potential follow-up meeting is also being considered.

7
8 The multicultural workshop learned from the experiences of those
9 actors that I described before, but the most important, perhaps,
10 outcome of the encounter was the development of planning sessions
11 through two different techniques, PESTEL and SWOT. That was divided
12 into two subgroups. One, that was the commercial/industrial
13 mariculture, and then was the restorative mariculture.

14
15 So, the following slides will briefly present the main topics that
16 those two subgroups discussed on different perspectives. So, I
17 will start with the PESTEL.

18
19 PESTEL is a planning tool that includes and evaluates in a macro
20 scale several of the factors. This is the first, the political
21 factors. Strong policy interests; permitting complexity; limited
22 resources; and regulatory fragmentation were discussed in these
23 groups. On the economic factors, this list was discussed, and pros
24 and cons of this initiative were under different perspective
25 recommended or evaluated.

26
27 On social factors, mariculture was recognized as a good potential
28 for security in food and communities but also discusses how it
29 might create some conflicts with different users and different
30 uses of the maritime space. And so, those different complexities
31 were analyzed and view on how they complement and not be
32 conflictive.

33
34 Technological factors. That was a company that, and other
35 experiences that were received at this workshop. They recommended
36 developing specific tools and methodologies to accommodate threats
37 and challenges that activities, when you are working at sea, are
38 experienced nowadays. Particularly, through the U.S. Caribbean.
39 Environmental factors. These four were also highlighted. Favorable
40 ocean conditions; hurricane exposure; water quality risk; and
41 climate impacts, in particularly those from sargassum.

42
43 On the legal and regulatory aspects, these other four were also
44 discussed in deeper context. Improving permitting process; the
45 Jones Act constraints, that maybe make transportation a little big
46 and supply chains a little bit expensive; some restrictions on
47 labor laws; and the lack of multi-agency coordination among
48 agencies were highlighted on many different perspectives.

1
2 Now going through the SWOT, which is the strength, these four were
3 considered. Pristine waters, specifically where you work, outside
4 in the more oceanic environments; the access to U.S. markets; the
5 potential for receiving federal support, I mean, not only
6 technical, but also economical or funding support; and the
7 availability of having research institution to collaborate with
8 the research that is needed to overcome some challenges.

9
10 Weaknesses were identified as infrastructure gaps, high cost,
11 limited workforce, and investment challenges. While the
12 opportunities were highlighted, again, the aquaculture that can be
13 successful most involves the community, the local communities. So,
14 they need to be involved from the beginning, and they can
15 participate through different stages of the business. But it's
16 also to learn and include their local ecological knowledge in the
17 development of these initiatives. Species diversification was
18 highlighted frequently, so they are not competing with local
19 markets from the fishing industry. And then the value chain
20 development. It is important for mariculture to go through the
21 entire process of the value chain. Threats, in that context, were
22 highlighted as these four: important competition, political
23 uncertainty, climate risk, and poaching.

24
25 So, the last slides that I'm going to present to you refer to the
26 overall recommendations from both analyses. So, secure long-term
27 policy is relatively. It's definitely a key issue if you like
28 establishing activities industry that is for stay for a long time
29 and longer term. So, there is a need to invest in hatcheries, and
30 those hatcheries can support the development of community
31 participation and other local enterprises in the industry and the
32 mariculture activity in general.

33
34 So, there is a need to adopt resilient technology given the fact
35 that natural events are becoming extreme. And so, there's a need
36 for adaptation to those changes in the environment. And then, as
37 I mentioned before, what was highlighted, the most needed
38 participation of local involvement.

39
40 These other recommendations were by consensus from everyone. So,
41 create a technical agriculture team within SIRO, the regional
42 office at NOAA. Investment in hatchery is very important for
43 initiating the industry, but that will need to take into
44 consideration not to compete with the fishing markets.

45
46 Recommendation for the utilizing of some species that are
47 predominantly filter feeders could be relatively easy to pursue
48 and was recommended. And, again, the participation of local

1 community was enhanced.

2
3 So, with that, I conclude this presentation. If you have any
4 questions, I will try to answer. I was there. Many of you were
5 there too, but we have online a couple of the team organizers. And
6 if we can't come up with a response, we have Miguel here too. Thank
7 you. And if you have any questions, we will happy to address those
8 at this time.

9
10 Vance?

11
12 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
13

14 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes, Martha. Thank you. You pretty much
15 covered all the topics that were discussed in that meeting. I want
16 to thank Miguel and the Council for inviting me to participate
17 also. But there were two things that caught my attention that I
18 think were given the most amount of time in the discussion period,
19 and one was the permitting process.

20
21 That's one thing that really scared the potential aquaculture
22 investors. That was one. And the other thing that they made public
23 was the situation of hurricanes, because we're within the hurricane
24 belt, and that's why many of these companies moved elsewhere, like
25 Belize or further south to Panama, away from the hurricane belt.

26
27 It was a lot of time discussing that, but you covered all the
28 important topics. Thank you, Martha. And thanks, Joe Rivera.

29
30 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** I appreciate it, Vance.

31
32 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Nelson Crespo for the
33 record. I'm going to read some concerns that came from the fishing
34 community that participated, especially in the Sea Grant meeting
35 that we celebrate on the West Coast of Puerto Rico after the
36 mariculture meeting.

37
38 Mariculture could be an alternative to contribute to the supply of
39 fresh fish on the island, but we must be very careful. Attempting
40 to farm fish similar to those that we catch in the Caribbean would
41 create a direct competition with local fishing, potentially
42 leading to the displacement of the local fishermen.

43
44 Following the manicure workshop held a few weeks ago, I had the
45 opportunity to participate in a meeting at the Sea Grant Office
46 where leaders in the fishing industry were present. Their main
47 concern was about the species to be cultivated that could bring
48 direct competition affecting the local fishermen and species

1 eventually leading to their displacement from the market. There is
2 also a concern that access to fishing will be prohibited in areas
3 where these activities take place.

4
5 There is great concern about the pollution of surrounding habitats
6 and ecosystems due to the large amount of sediment and waste that
7 would be generated. They expressed concern about the possibility
8 of an increase in predators in those areas. Should an accident
9 occur, whether due to atmospheric events or other causes, these
10 species could escape and become invasive, impacting local species.

11
12 They also inquired about who would be responsible for removing the
13 infrastructure as it would pose a significant danger to navigation
14 and surrounding habitats and ecosystem, that is if an accident
15 occurred. On the other hand, it was also mentioned that
16 mariculture, if it doesn't compete with local fishing, could help
17 supply fresh fish to the island. It would be a great opportunity
18 to train fishing communities so they could integrate into the
19 process and generate additional income.

20
21 There's a significant concern, and it is necessary to develop an
22 educational campaign in Spanish that is simple and easy to
23 understand. Consideration should be given to taking leaders in the
24 fishing industry to sites where the mariculture is being developed
25 so they can see the process firsthand.

26
27 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

28
29 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Thank you, Nelson. I would like to ask
30 Kieley or José if they can respond to anything regarding the
31 letter. Is it open if you are there?

32
33 In the meantime, I find out if they are present and are able to
34 talk. I just wanted to remind everyone that, actually, those two
35 topics were continuously discussed in the session, and they are
36 aware.

37
38 However, the educational part in Spanish maybe is something new
39 that the organizers need to be considering. Kieley, would you say
40 anything more?

41
42 **KIELEY HURFF:** Hi, Martha. Thank you and thank you for your
43 feedback. So, yes, definitely those concerns, the majority of those
44 concerns were also discussed during the workshop as well, concerns
45 regarding potential displacement, but also potential opportunities
46 to provide fresh seafood as long as it's not duplicative or
47 competitive with the species that are locally wild harvested. And
48 there was mention and a need to enhance the education opportunities

1 and programs, to provide those opportunities and be collaborative
2 with the local communities as well. So, those are certainly points
3 that were resonating in the workshop as well.

4
5 So, thank you for bringing those to our attention today. To do
6 this, or did you

7
8 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Is there anything else that you would like
9 to comment? Yes, Julian?

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian.

12
13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. I thought the
14 meeting overall was a very educational meeting, and a lot came
15 across the board. And I think it was very important that the
16 stakeholders were involved in the process of the discussion because
17 it opened up a lot of dialogue and what would really affect the
18 fishing communities, both U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico.

19
20 I know at one point there was a discussion with Miguel on the
21 meeting that we were considering forming a committee where we can
22 continue the process of discussing the mariculture here in the
23 Caribbean, I don't know if that's still on the table, where we
24 could, I think-- I think if a plan is created the correct way, I
25 know the Virgin Islands, Nicole and her team is working on a lot
26 of stuff.

27
28 I think if we bring the managers to the table and all the user
29 groups to the table, which can create a plan that would work,
30 investor, somebody's coming in. Alright. We hand them this plan.
31 It could be a working document that over the next three to five
32 years, you work this document until it's tweaked to the right where
33 you want it.

34
35 Then, when someone comes in, "Alright, you want to do mariculture,
36 aquaculture, or agriculture." We hand them that folder. This is
37 what is expected, and this is how we need to move forward. All of
38 this is laid out for them. And they'll know right off the bat,
39 "well, am I going to invest \$5,000,000 to get involved in this?"
40 This is all what I need to do. Exactly what Vance said, the
41 permanent permitting process seems to be the lengthiest part of
42 the whole process, which can take you anywhere from three to five
43 years. And I think with creating a plan, that timeline can be
44 decreased.

45
46 But when you start, "oh, yeah. I'll get this." And then all of a
47 sudden, you're in the middle of an application process and your
48 administration changes and your administration decides, "well, we

1 want to change the requirements around." Then you have got to start
2 all over, and we have already invested all of this money.

3
4 So, I just wanted to throw that out there. But overall, I'm very
5 happy that we were engaged in that meeting. I thought it was a
6 good meeting.

7
8 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** I just wanted to conclude my presentation
9 saying that as we learn in the meeting, working on mariculture is
10 not an easy task. It requires a lot of dedication, not just
11 funding, but it needs to overcome several different challenges at
12 the same time and perseverance. As fishing industry has persevered
13 through history, mariculture is expected to be the same way. So,
14 production together, mariculture and fishing, are called an
15 invitation to go on the same path collaboratively. Thank you.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Martha. Any more questions for Martha?
18 Okay. So, next, update on NMFS' Risk/Value Prioritization
19 Framework for Managed Stock.

20
21 **UPDATE ON NMFS' RISK/VALUE PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGED**
22 **STOCKS—NOAA FISHERIES, SEFSC**
23

24 **JOHN WALTER, III:** I'll take this, very quickly. NMFS has sent a
25 letter through the CCC announcing that there's going to be a pause
26 on the June 30th deadline for responding to the risk value matrix
27 and that NMFS is looking forward to working closely with the
28 Councils on further developing out some of the ideas and
29 quantitative information that was used in that. And just to refresh
30 people's memory, that was presented in 2025 to the Councils at the
31 CCC as a way of helping to prioritize which species may need to
32 get full federal management and which might be able to be taken
33 out of the management units. It then expanded a bit to include
34 economic analyses and then risk analysis based on environmental
35 risk to some of the stocks.

36
37 And then one of the concerns that was raised among many by the CCC
38 as well as some of the individual Councils, one, was that they
39 needed more time. Now there's a lot more time to work on that
40 together. Two, that it that there were questions about how the
41 economics were calculated. Those, we've worked with each of the
42 Councils, to better flesh out how those economics are worked out.
43 And then three, that it didn't include a very good understanding
44 of the social and cultural importance of species. This was raised
45 particularly by the Pacific Islands' Fishery Management Council,
46 and we think it also is quite applicable to this Council in terms
47 of many of the species may not have as high of economic value as
48 they have a social and cultural value.

1
2 So, to address that, our staff have put together a pilot survey to
3 determine what and to try to pull opinion on the social and
4 cultural value of different species. This right now is working its
5 way through an initial expert group to at least evaluate the
6 efficacy of that survey and whether we're asking the right
7 questions. And what I guess we want to get from the Council here
8 is that that can be done in really three steps of increasing time
9 and complexity. Noting that if the goal is to be able to inform
10 the matrix of stocks that you might choose to take out of the
11 fishery management unit, do you want that information, number one,
12 on the on the social and cultural value of species, or is that
13 already inherent in your minds. And so if that's the case that you
14 want that information from us, if you don't and it's good, then
15 we'll stop here. If you do want that information, we can either
16 use an expert group of which the Council members could be included
17 in that, because I think that number falls underneath the Paperwork
18 Reduction Act in terms of the number of people that would that we
19 would could pull, and that could be just Council members.

20
21 Then if the goal is for full stakeholder inclusivity, then that's
22 going to have to go through the Paperwork Reduction Act in terms
23 of and that would take longer to get that kind of survey, fully
24 approved through that process. That could take six to eight months,
25 in which case it may not be available in time for the-- to inform
26 the matrix. So, really, the decision is, do we do you want that
27 information from us? So how much investment in time and energy?
28 Thanks.

29 30 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

33
34 **SENNAI HABTES:** This wouldn't be in a comment to John's question,
35 but just another thing that I wanted to point out or ask about the
36 aquaculture workshop. And was there any discussion towards
37 changing the structures that exist in the U.S. Caribbean for
38 research and extension? Because beyond just permitting, I find
39 that that structure right now is prohibitive towards the
40 development of more research and extension towards aquaculture,
41 which in my opinion is one of the more limiting factors to
42 developing it as a true economic industry in the U.S. Caribbean.

43
44 And so, I didn't see that listed on the outcomes from the workshop,
45 and I was wondering if that was discussed specifically, how we've
46 structured funding for aquaculture in the Caribbean and the
47 necessity for partnerships between things Sea Grant, which doesn't
48 exist in all areas, or for things NRCS, for funding extension work

1 towards that kind of things that actually other jurisdictions use
2 to fund aquaculture for restoration. So, I didn't know if any of
3 those had come up at the workshop.

4
5 And I think those would be important things to include beyond
6 simply just identifying which species because developing those
7 kind of programs, which, Puerto Rico has done for a lot of the
8 freshwater aquaculture that they've done already, would be
9 important for moving towards the mariculture space, which we can
10 do that process through extension and research if it's adequately
11 developed and funded.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. We discussed it, actually, and there are
16 internal conversations with NOAA Fisheries. One idea came out to
17 have a unit in the southeast region, and they have some of the
18 components of that unit from the Center and the Regional Office.
19 We looked at the possibility of mariculture from the standpoint or
20 the point of view of science. They are not going to be involved in
21 much money given programs, but they can look at the science related
22 to mariculture, species composition, and socioeconomics of the
23 mariculture.

24
25 Also, the local government is going to be, in the case of Puerto
26 Rico, it was in the newspaper the other day, the governor is trying
27 to streamline the process of permitting. And Dr. Angeli also
28 presented to us what you already did in the Virgin Islands with
29 the initiative that started in 2026. The other thing is that Sea
30 Grant, they already have a program or a project with money for the
31 development of mariculture in the U.S. Caribbean. They are looking
32 at the, well, outreach and education component of that.

33
34 And, also, they need to focus on what type of mariculture we're
35 talking about. Mariculture to produce marketable sized fish.
36 Agriculture to replenish some of the areas, like the queen conch
37 in Naguabo, others that are just at the earlier stage. Like, some
38 in Culebra, for example. They have TNC money to work with the local
39 fishers and develop the oyster farm that they have. So, all that
40 was discussed. It's just that, in the summer, it's very difficult
41 to put that together.

42
43 The other thing that they mentioned is that the mariculture is
44 mostly a local government venture, and the federal government can
45 supply information, etcetera, that they might need. But the
46 conclusion of the mariculture soci-- workshop-- I keep calling it
47 society --is that the local governments are the ones who are to
48 initiate with the collaboration of the federal government as much

1 as possible. That's what we did.
2
3 I don't know if that answered your question, but those were the
4 points that were considered by the workshop participants.
5
6 Genio, Mr. Piñeiro, who was the one who started the whole thing,
7 he believes that these components that I just mentioned are
8 important for him then to, let's say, plan ahead for the thing
9 that NOAA Fisheries likely has. We already have, as you all know,
10 aquaculture opportunity areas. But the problem with the million
11 dollars, the first part started in the Gulf of America, and the
12 other half is in the south of California. So, we expect it to be
13 included sometime in the future, but at this time, those are the
14 two main areas.
15
16 So, the Regional Office, Andrews and Kieley, they were involved in
17 this. So, NOAA Fisheries want to do just to go ahead and see, side
18 by side with the aquaculture opportunities, look at what we can do
19 here. Of course, we are not fooling ourselves. There's a lot, a
20 lot to do for some of these projects.
21
22 The fishers made a point, I remember, I guess it was Julian, "Do
23 all the aquaculture you want here, but sell the fish in some other
24 place," because they don't want the competition. And the other
25 thing that they mentioned is that if you have a hurricane event
26 and the [campechanos?] gets lost the water, what will happen to
27 the local population? So those are the kind of things that Sea
28 Grant is working on now. And they will have a pilot project where
29 they have-- it seems that they are ready to deploy some large cages
30 on the West Coast of Puerto Rico, and they will produce information
31 for that. They also have seed money, something that you mentioned.
32
33 They have seed money, not specific to aquaculture, but they have
34 seed money, that can be used for starters, for projects that can
35 start working on my mariculture here. Somebody asked you about the
36 investment. Well, investment is time and money. Right now, José
37 Rivera is in Panama looking at some companies. Bets go anywhere
38 from 1,000,000 to \$7,000,000 for the agriculture venture on cages.
39 So, all that was included.
40
41 In the case of the Caribbean, the group mentioned that we should
42 look at using cages that sink whenever you can venture. But those
43 are very expensive. The technology is there, but it's expensive.
44 All that you mentioned was discussed at that time.
45
46 We will have the transcription. So, for anybody who wants to have
47 the transcription, Cristina put it together on the web page so
48 anybody can look at it.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more comments? No.

3
4 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** It's not a comment. It's a question for John because
5 I'm not a 100% sure that I understand what he was just talking
6 about. The species what you were talking about, what does that
7 pertain to? The presentation what you just gave.

8
9 **JOHN WALTER, III:** So we're in the process of identifying the
10 species that might be taken out of the fishery management. That's
11 the matrix conversation that's going on. The risk value matrix was
12 something that NMFS was putting together for each of the Councils,
13 which quantified the economic value and the risk of species that
14 could have helped inform that, but it's not going to really be
15 ready, and we have to put a pause in that.

16
17 So, the question is and one of the concerns that what came up was
18 that if that matrix did not adequately take into account the social
19 and cultural value of species, which is, I think, a fair criticism.
20 So, we and our Science Center put together an initial survey to
21 try to gather that information about which species are valuable
22 beyond just economics.

23
24 It's right now internal. We would like, in a perfect world, to
25 make that external so everyone can participate in that, but the
26 timing of that may not inform the majors. So, the question is two
27 stages. Do we just go to Council members? Because that's less than
28 the 10 that we would have to get high level approval. Or do we
29 take our time and make it so that it can go to everyone? Thank
30 you.

31
32 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Thank you. So, I did understand it right. So, I
33 would like, because of the timeline, if the Council can take a
34 look at it, at least you guys communicate with all of the fishers
35 already, and we could answer some of your questions if you have.
36 I think that it should be overlooked with you guys at the Council
37 level.

38
39 It's a recommendation from us DAP members. I just wanted to make
40 sure I understood it wasn't tied to the mariculture because when
41 he asked the question, it threw us off, the question on the table
42 if anybody had any questions for you. So, thank you for the
43 clarification.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel. Yeah. Just following on what he just
46 mentioned, this is a rapid way of looking at the questions that we
47 have. So, let's say that we have the Council participation. The
48 people who can participate are right here in this meeting.

1
2 So, we can have a committee of Council members, the three DAPs,
3 and then we will have to have the questions there.

4
5 So, anyway, that's the idea that we were thinking about during the
6 lunch break. That's what John wants to hear from the Council. What
7 is the pleasure of the Council? How do you want to proceed?

8
9 Vanessa.

10
11 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I'm Vanessa Ramírez for the for the record. Thank
12 you, John, for the clarification and Julian for asking the
13 question. Yes, I think that we are going to make that
14 recommendation. And as Miguel says, be part, as Council, including
15 the DAP members is the best way to proceed, if possible, with this.
16 Thank you.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more con I think we already did our listing.
19 Right? The DAP submitted their listing. Okay.

20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's what John is saying. You have several
22 different rationales for keeping the species or putting them in
23 another category that he mentioned. What he's asking now is to
24 look at the sociocultural component, because maybe the species
25 doesn't have, let's say, the abundance, etcetera, etcetera, that
26 you think is important for keeping them in the management unit.
27 But there are some other species. For example, you have the
28 parrotfish.

29
30 Parrotfish, socially and culturally speaking, are very important
31 for Saint Croix, and we are in Saint Croix today. So, if we tell
32 the people, "Well, we're going to drop all the management, for
33 parrotfish because of 14276." The question will be, "What will
34 happen to the fishery? What will happen to the fishers that depend
35 on that particular fishery?"

36
37 So, there we have a couple of species, not all of them, but we may
38 identify species of parrotfish that sociocultural speaking, are
39 important for Saint Croix. And therefore, we should keep it in the
40 management unit. That's just an example. We did this on July 25
41 with all the members of the groups, and we came up with a listing.
42 But at that time, we were not talking about sociocultural.

43
44 And, also, when we have the sociocultural, we have to identify the
45 right information. We need to, in some cases, like Brent said,
46 anecdotal information is as good as a paper that was written some
47 time ago. So, I believe that the next step, John, my question is,
48 what will be the next step? Practically speaking, when do you

1 expect the Council to meet or to comply with your question?

2
3 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Sure. Well, right now, in this case, given if we
4 stay under the 10, then it can go right to Council members
5 immediately, and we can submit it to Council members. And it's a
6 very, very easy survey to take. I took it to test it. And I think
7 it might need-- it could maybe get polished in a bit, but it's
8 useful because it makes you think about species that might have a
9 high cultural value and social value, and then you have to write
10 down what that is, so that we know that information.

11
12 I think it could happen right away because we wouldn't have to
13 worry about PRA.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, in that case, we have 10 members. One of them
16 is a RA representative, and that means that we have six. And we
17 can include the three Chairs that we have here plus six members of
18 the Council for that survey. And with that, you can send the survey
19 to these people if they don't want to help. Do you need anything
20 else at this time, John?

21
22 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Nope.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, next, we have the Evaluation of Managed
25 Stocks' Needs for Conservation and Management with Sarah.

26
27 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good afternoon. Can you hear me? Good
28 afternoon. Can you hear me?

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

31
32 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.

33
34 **EVALUATION OF MANAGED STOCKS' NEEDS FOR CONSERVATION AND**
35 **MANAGEMENT—SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA FISHERIES, SERO**
36

37 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. Okay. Okay. Thank you.

38
39 I'm going to, yes, be running through the evaluation of managed
40 stocks, and these are the stocks that we manage under the three
41 fishery management plans. I know we've been calling it matrix, and
42 I apologize if there's any confusion in terminology. So, I'll try
43 to be as clear as I can as we walk through this. Next slide.

44
45 So, again, this process will eventually result, if we go forward
46 with it, in either one amendment that modifies each of the three
47 plans or maybe three separate amendments. It's just going to depend
48 on the road, but it's going to require an amendment. It's not just

1 something that we can just do. And so, as I showed yesterday with
2 that purpose and need statements, we always want to kind of talk
3 about upfront what we are doing and why we are doing it. So, for
4 this review of our managed stocks, what are we proposing to do?

5
6 We're proposing to maybe change, refine, and update the list of
7 stocks that we manage under those fishery management plans to only
8 include those that are in need of federal conservation and
9 management at this time. We did that. We did that process when we
10 developed the fishery management plans. And so, now it's been a
11 few years. We're just kind of taking a pulse point and going
12 through that process again.

13
14 We also want from the species that maybe no longer require federal
15 conservation management to reclassify any of those that maybe
16 should be retained as an ecosystem component species because of
17 their importance to the ecosystem, the Caribbean ecosystem. And
18 then if there's any left over, maybe remove those completely from
19 the fishery management plan. During development of the fishery
20 management plans, they talked about ecosystem component species,
21 but none were ever classified as such. So, now, again, we're coming
22 back, and we're just kind of looking at how we manage and seeing
23 does anything needs a facelift. And so, why are we doing that?

24
25 As was described in the fishery management plan, some of these
26 stocks that we're managing are not actually targeted by either the
27 commercial or the recreational fishers, but they were included in
28 the plans due to their importance to the ecosystem. So, those
29 stocks may be better suited as ecosystem component species. So,
30 they would still be listed under the management plans, but as
31 ecosystem component species, they wouldn't require some of the
32 management measures that the managed stocks do, annual catch limits
33 and accountability measures. We talked about that a little bit
34 yesterday. And then finally, another secondary reason why we are
35 doing this now is we do want to improve efficiency and
36 effectiveness of federal fisheries management for the stocks that
37 we manage. Next.

38
39 So, how are we proposing to revise this list? We definitely want
40 to make sure we comply with all the mandates under the Magnuson-
41 Stevens Act and the National Standard Guidelines, which I showed
42 in the previous presentations at the December meeting and the
43 August meeting. I'm not going to show them here, but I have them
44 listed in front of me. So, for instance, is the stock a target of
45 the fishery? Can the fishery management plan actually improve, or
46 maintain the condition of the stock? That one might come into play
47 with, for instance, dolphins.

1 So, we have these factors to consider. We definitely want to kind
2 of make sure we have those. And in today's presentation, we talked
3 a lot about the matrix previously, but in reviewing and preparing
4 for this meeting, we kind of realized we also need the process.
5 So, we don't want to just know how we are going to use the matrix
6 to maybe select or not select species. We want to know what steps
7 we are going to take? How are we going to do that? Because we want
8 to do it in an effective manner that is stepwise.

10 So, today, I'm introducing a new term, the Decision Tree. It's
11 basically just a flow chart that helps visualize the process. I
12 took an example here from one that the Science Center has shown
13 you previously. And, again, it's just step one, and you do the
14 step, and the next step is yes or no. And then you move to the
15 next step and yes or no.

17 So, it's a similar kind of process. That's just showing what a
18 Decision Tree helps you do. And so, we're going to kind of walk
19 through our yes or no questions, our steps, and then, kind of some
20 thoughts for each of those steps, things that we want to think
21 about that might help us make those yes or no questions. Obviously,
22 all of the information that we've gathered for the matrix,
23 landings, history of management, what criteria was originally
24 included under, what's the productivity and susceptibility score
25 assigned by the SSC.

27 All of that information is already in the matrix. And so, we want
28 to think about how we can use the matrix as a tool, but, also, are
29 there other things that currently aren't in the matrix that are
30 maybe more qualitative than we want to consider? And so those are,
31 in this slide, going to be called maybe criteria under each step.
32 Next slide, please.

34 So, here's the high-level overview. Right now, we have four steps
35 of our Decision Tree. And then, we're going to only start with a
36 list of species under each FMP. So, at this time, we're not
37 proposing to add new species. So, step one is going to be to retain
38 species that are determined to be high value or high risk. And
39 then in the following slides, I'll go through how we might do that.

41 Step two would then be to retain species that are targeted by these
42 fisheries. And then step three, the next thing is we might want to
43 retain species that are benefiting or could benefit from the
44 current management structure. And then lastly, you know, you're
45 going step by step, kind of take a look at what's left and maybe
46 reclassify any that we've retained or not retained as ecosystem
47 component species. And then we really want to kind of tie that to
48 the role that they play in the ecosystem.

1
2 So, you could have different roles in the ecosystem, but we really
3 just want to be very descriptive on, for instance, corals are the
4 base. They are the habitat that forms the ecosystem. Parrotfish
5 are ecosystem engineers, if you will. I think that's what the
6 original FMP called them. So, they all have different roles, and
7 maybe they don't. And if they don't, then we just know that, and
8 that'll help us just kind of describe everything again at this
9 point in time, our understanding of our socks, and that'll help us
10 revise the list. Next slide, please.

11
12 So, taking a closer look at step one, which was to retain species
13 that are determined to be high value or high risk. Again, we're
14 only starting with what we currently have. One thing that we could
15 think about is which species are currently determined to be
16 overfished. Maybe they need to be retained.

17
18 Also, which species are currently listed under the Endangered
19 Species Act? Maybe those need to be retained. And then species or
20 species groups that are high value or considered to be high risk.
21 From that, we could use the productivity and susceptibility scores
22 or the information from the July 2025th ad hoc committee. All of
23 that data, as I mentioned, is already included in the matrix.

24
25 So, if we have a metric to use, we can go say, "Okay. We want the
26 group, the committee, whichever other committees you're looking
27 at, SSC or the ad hoc, determined which were high value/high risk,"
28 and those get put in a pile. So, that that's kind of how we're
29 doing it.

30
31 These are just things to consider. It doesn't mean it's an absolute
32 at this point. It's just things we want to consider. So, as we
33 step walk through each of these steps, I'm going to just ask the
34 Council if there's anything that you think should automatically be
35 something we should consider, like a criterion, that kind of
36 information, and it's not here, please let us know. Next slide.

37
38 Step two was to retain species that are targeted by the fisheries.
39 And so, for this, this one makes the most logical sense. We have
40 data. Let's use the data.

41
42 So, you set some sort of threshold based on your commercial
43 landings, based on the recreational landings. Granted, that was
44 only for a certain period, and it was mostly for Puerto Rico. But
45 we're not limited to those things. We can go outside based on other
46 information that we have. For instance, the catch validation
47 project. So, that's what David was reporting on yesterday. The MER
48 Consultants. As I mentioned, the recreational landings, we could

1 get together with, both the Puerto Rico DNER and the U.S.V.I. DPNR
2 and say, "Even if you don't have anything that's finalized, do you
3 have preliminary information that might help us answer these
4 questions or whether or not the species is targeted by the either
5 the commercial fishery, the recreational fishery, some combination
6 of that. We really want to get everything that we can and not just
7 be limited to commercial landings."

8
9 And then, also, as we're thinking about what's targeted by the
10 fishery, we do want, if it makes sense, kind of come up with a
11 level of landings that kind of correlates to the fact that they
12 really don't target the species. This is either bycatch or it's
13 just nontargeted. And so, that's what the minimis threshold is.

14
15 Again, it was something that the Council kind of deliberated upon
16 when putting together the FMPs, but it just never got put in stone.
17 There was so much to lift in getting those FMPs in place. But we
18 can do it now.

19
20 So, for instance, it does not make sense to maybe have an ACL of
21 77 pounds. That's just-- especially if it's a larger sized fish,
22 you catch five and now you're over. So, we want to kind of take a
23 look at not just what they might be targeting, but at what levels
24 and kind of really kind of include those in whatever future options
25 or alternatives you guys might see and review and vote on.

26
27 And, again, with this, as I mentioned, we want to use all
28 information we have. So, any information that was provided by
29 either that July ad hoc committee or previous District Advisory
30 Panels. We want to include all of that information. We definitely
31 want to build upon everything that's been discussed since these
32 FMPs have been in place. Next.

33
34 Step three retained species that are benefiting or could benefit
35 from the current management structure. Our first question that we
36 thought of was, is the management structure that's in place now
37 either just federal or the combination of federal and territorial,
38 is that supporting the sustainability of the species? And we
39 thought that maybe we could look at, for instance, are there
40 fishing prohibitions for the vulnerable species?

41
42 Of course, we would have to define what we mean by vulnerability.
43 Are there size limits in plates to protect juvenile individuals?
44 Are there seasonal closures to protect fish during their critical
45 periods when they're getting together to spawn? Are there
46 management measures in place that limit how many you can remove?
47 So that's either going to be a recreational bag limit or
48 potentially a commercial trip limit.

1
2 Are there gear restrictions for a specific species to try to
3 protect it? And the best example we could think of there was that
4 we don't allow spear gear to harvest spiny lobster. So, these are
5 ones that we thought of in yesterday's discussion with the dolphin
6 and wahoo. Maybe we want to add a criteria about, whether it's
7 managed at an even higher level, at that state level is what I
8 believe what we were calling it yesterday, WECAFC, ICCAT, some of
9 those broader things to maybe try to help with the question of
10 those few pelagic species that we have that are here for a short
11 period of time and then in someone else's jurisdiction.

12
13 So, that's something we could think of maybe that we would want to
14 look at under this step. It could also go into a new step if we
15 thought there was a better step to add. But for right now, this is
16 kind of where we flagged that we might want to add something to
17 try to address that, based on yesterday's discussion of dolphin
18 and wahoo. Next slide, please.

19
20 Last step that we put together, step four, is to reclassify any of
21 the kinds of remaining species, the ones that we didn't say, "Yeah,
22 this one probably needs to be kept retained in the FMP." So, the
23 ones that we either don't know about or maybe we do know about,
24 that aren't targeted, but are important, we want to go ahead and
25 reclassify them.

26
27 So, again, we need to identify what their role is in the ecosystem
28 because we really want to protect that. So, is it habitat? Is it
29 a grazer who might provide settlement substrate for more coral?
30 The habitat engineers, that's what I was trying to think of earlier
31 too, who regenerate nutrients that are stored in sediments. Is it
32 bait for other species that we do want to manage? Like, I think--
33 I forget. You use maybe little tunny for bait to catch some of the
34 other fish.

35
36 So, again, we really want to know which of these species that maybe
37 you don't target in your top catch, but they're important to you
38 to the ecosystem. We want to do that. And we do have some of that
39 already identified if it was captured in the FMP. So, the FMP kind
40 of went through and described each species that we're managing and
41 where those discussions came out in either SSC meetings, Council
42 meetings, DAP meetings. We tried to include that information.

43
44 So, we do have some of it, but, again, that's the type of
45 information we want to collect during this process. And then, of
46 course, is there any other, essential value that maybe is not
47 listed here that you know of a fish does that maybe that's why we
48 don't want to remove it completely. We want to classify it as an

1 ecosystem component species. And so, we just kind of keep an eye
2 on it over time. And so, I did have a note that the selection
3 criteria that was used, so there was a b was removed, so I'm not
4 going to count b.

5
6 A, c, d, and e. You had four criteria that were used to assign and
7 include species. That's all in the matrix. And so, we can look at
8 that too right off the top if that makes the most sense. Next
9 slide.

10
11 Next steps are just, again, input on anything that was said here
12 today, that was said yesterday that you don't see here, that you
13 want us to consider as we're taking all of this information back
14 home and getting a group together to look at options to bring back
15 to you. And then, the criteria are just those things that we need
16 to think about. So, this is the order of operations and then what
17 questions do we need to be asked? We did get a lot of that
18 information yesterday for the pelagic, so we will update, and bring
19 that back.

20
21 And then, yeah. So, NMFS staff and Council staff will work together
22 and develop that options paper for the August meeting. And so, of
23 course, during that time, we do want to get input from DNER and
24 DPNR. Again, to either ask for things we're missing, to get their
25 input, to make sure that if they think a species is mandatory, for
26 instance, they just did compatible yellowtail snapper size limits
27 in the U.S.V.I. So, they would probably want us to keep that to
28 just be compatible. So, those types of conversations we'd like to
29 have.

30
31 And then, if any results are available, in the meantime, from that
32 the science center's risk value matrix, the one that John was just
33 talking about, we will include those. So, yeah, that's what the
34 apologies are for. There are two matrixes.

35
36 But I think that's the last slide. I think the next one is just
37 the questions. Yep. So, you can leave it, go back to the previous
38 slide, leave it on here and see what people think and what they
39 would say and make sure that we incorporate.

40 41 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you for the presentation, Sarah. Just to
46 ask you, where do we plan to include the sociocultural criteria
47 for decision making regarding the species?
48

1 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Do you mean what John was just saying that
2 the Council is theoretically going to be providing-- Like that, or
3 do you mean something else?

4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. That one.

6
7 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. So, if they put together a summary that
8 says, for instance, the Caribbean constituents acknowledge that
9 queen conch is vital too and there's lots of different, I don't
10 know what they call them, but the social cultural I know that's
11 too high of a term. I've taken it, so I should theoretically be
12 able to respond better. But if they can provide all of that
13 information to us, then as we're going through step by step and
14 maybe using the matrix tool.

15
16 Let's say queen conch falls out because it's prohibited, so there
17 is no harvest that we would consider. But wait. The social and
18 cultural says it's very important. That would just mean that those
19 two pieces of information get put side by side and brought to you
20 as a Council, and you get to decide, "Oh, well, the data says this,
21 but the people say this. What do we want to do with this stock? Do
22 we want to include it and," I don't know, have the potential to do
23 protective measures, "or do we want to just kick it out completely
24 because it's caught mostly in territorial waters? And that's that"

25
26 So, that's how I envision this would happen. It's just all data.
27 It's just a different type of data. And it would be brought back
28 to you kind of the same way we talk about the biological and
29 ecological effects, and then you we stack on top of that the social
30 econ effects.

31
32 It's just more data for you guys to make the best-informed decision
33 that you can, if that helps.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any qu-- Vance?

38
39 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Thank you, Sarah. Very good presentation.
40 You cover a lot of aspects here. But one in particular that I am
41 concerned about are the species, the ecosystem species, which will
42 be any remaining species that have an important ecosystem role
43 such as-- or whatever. You know?

44
45 What concerns me a bit, I mean, we have tried to list priority of
46 species based on both their vulnerability to environmental change,
47 their vulnerability to climate change. And, normally, this
48 consists of a group of scientists, many of which are part of the

1 SSC. But what really has overwhelmed me, I've been trying to keep
2 partially up with the scientific literature on this species, on
3 this ecosystem species, and how to determine their major functional
4 role in the ecosystem and it's just amazing the amount of
5 information, the amount and the rate of new information is being
6 produced on this aspect.

7
8 I am concerned because this will take, really, a lot of effort and
9 time on reviewing literature more than meetings. And, anyhow,
10 that's just a concern that I have regarding the ecosystem species
11 that will be listed as such. Thank you, Sarah.

12
13 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Mhmm. Thank you.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Sarah, Heather?

16
17 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sarah, I'm just wondering,
18 would it be helpful to just pause on each of your steps, step one,
19 step two, step three, and see if-- just to make sure folks don't
20 have other criteria that they would us to use when we apply this?
21 And I think for step two, maybe. Do you want input on potential
22 thresholds at this point?

23
24 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Can you, driver of this presentation,
25 Cristina, go to that step two?

26
27 I think if the Council had a really good idea of what they wanted,
28 then yes. But if it's, we're not quite sure, I would probably let
29 the IPT or workgroup, whichever we're going to have for this, kind
30 of look at the information and then provide a couple different
31 options. But I can tell you when I presented this in December, I
32 think I picked a proposed threshold of 90%. So, if it's in the top
33 90%, then maybe it would be caught.

34
35 But, again, that was just preliminary messing around. So, if the
36 Council has a strong feeling, then sure. But, otherwise, I would
37 let the planning team, their drafting team, come up with those
38 options.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai.

41
42 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Sarah, for
43 this Decision Tree is the, I guess, term we are using the for this?
44 Ah, okay. It's not a framework, just a Decision Tree. Okay.

45
46 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** You can call it a framework if you'd like.

47
48 **SENNAI HABTES:** Oh, thank you. Anyhoo--

1
2 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** I had to say it.
3

4 **SENNAI HABTES:** My question is and this is more a comment to the
5 Council. That is, I'm going to make the same point that I made
6 when we first went through going through this list of species,
7 which is we are continually developing methodologies for
8 determining management at the Council level despite already having
9 existing advisory panels and groups that are going through these
10 processes and existing management frameworks for doing some of
11 these things.
12

13 I think what we're doing is spreading ourself too thin, doing
14 double work on things that will eventually have those if we give
15 those groups and that management, advisory panels the time and
16 ability to come up with things that can answer a lot of these
17 questions. But continually going through it, developing another
18 panel to answer just one question and then expanding it to every
19 species that we have under management is monopolizing our resources
20 and time.
21

22 And not that I am thankful for all the work that Sarah and María
23 puts into this. I think we really have to address what is it that
24 we want to do as a Council, the management that we are trying to
25 make happen, and really put together a pathway to doing that, as
26 opposed to making a split-second decision to create management
27 frameworks that aren't fully thought out or fleshed out through
28 the processes that we've already established for management.
29

30 I really think one of the good examples for this is that we're
31 talking about putting species into ecosystem management. We have
32 an Ecosystems Based Technical Advisory Panel that is trying to
33 develop a fisheries ecosystem plan that also gives you management
34 tools and frameworks to make those decisions, while at the same
35 time, we're coming up with another framework and decision to do
36 that exact same thing through another process that we are
37 developing yet another group to write and develop that.
38

39 I don't think that makes sense. I think we really have to identify
40 the necessary things that we need to do, focus on the main
41 priorities, and identify those management needs that we really do
42 have. Are there species that we can move off of management? Yes.
43 Let's identify those prioritized ones and do just that and then
44 work on these other things through the existing structures that we
45 have.
46

47 I'm a broken record, but I feel it is necessary to say it over and
48 over again. Thank you.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

3
4 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I guess I just want to make sure I better
5 understand, Sennai, what you say. So, I do feel the goal of this
6 is to do just that, focus our efforts on those species that we can
7 actually affect, right, with the limited resources that we have.

8
9 I did understand what you said about having the Ecosystem Advisory
10 Panel, and I guess I think it could be an option when we get to
11 the, what is it, step four or whatever. Once we've decided that
12 things don't meet the first three criteria and we're trying to
13 decide whether to move them into the EC species that we could
14 consult the Ecosystem Advisory Panel on that. But I might be
15 missing more of what you're saying. I'm just not following
16 completely what other process you would want us to use.

17
18 **SENNAI HABTES:** To clarify, I think my larger question is who is
19 going to be on this panel that is developing this and drafting it?
20 You know? Like, is it going to be the same people that are already
21 setting up our SSC and our FEPs trying to make these other
22 decisions and taking time away from doing that to do yet this other
23 thing? Go ahead.

24
25 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, this is María. And, Sarah, you can-- so
26 when Sarah's referring to the team, she's talking about their
27 Interdisciplinary Planning Team, which is the framework that we
28 already have established under our regulations, that are the team
29 that is composed from people from the different, like, for example,
30 you have people from SERO, Science Center, the Council,
31 Enforcement.

32
33 So, this is your regular team of people, experts, that only varies
34 depending on the action that are the ones that will develop an
35 amendment. Because this will be-- the product of this is an
36 amendment to each one of the FMPs, and that amendment will have
37 the actions that say, "Remove this species, or move this species
38 to ECs." Like, very simple.

39
40 What she's explaining to you here is just the process that will
41 give us those alternatives at the end that will be included in an
42 amendment, and all of those analyses are going to be done by the
43 people that are included in the IPT. So, this is not an external
44 group of people.

45
46 So, what she, Heather is recommending, about the EBFM TAB, it could
47 be added as a step because, again, you guys are the experts on the
48 ecosystem component species, and you are developing the tools to

1 make that decision, to help the Council make that decision through
2 your recommendations. So, the framework is already there.

3
4 We're using exactly the same framework for all of that we're doing
5 on all of these actions. This is like the scoping part. Right? And
6 the product from this is going to be what is going to end up in
7 those amendments. And I believe that at this time, the guidance
8 that we are trying to get from the Council is, are you okay with
9 these criteria that we have over here, which are very similar to
10 what we had before in the FMP?

11
12 And if you can see, I don't know if you go to the slide before? It
13 says in here "the productivity and susceptibility scores assigned
14 to each species by the Scientific and Statistical Committee during
15 development of the FMPs and the results from the July 2025 Ad Hoc
16 Committee are included in the matrix." So, that means the
17 information that the Council has already evaluated to make the
18 decision as to what species were going to be included in the FMPs,
19 that's there, and that's valid. And we will continue to use that
20 because that was your expert's advice.

21
22 I hope that clarifies a little bit of what the plan is to do with
23 this. I don't know, Sarah, if you have anything else that you would
24 like to add.

25
26 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** No. Thank you.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Anymore?

29
30 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yes. I would like to make a motion *to apply the*
31 *Decision Tree that Sarah has presented to us for the development*
32 *of an options paper to bring back to the Council at the August*
33 *meeting.*

34
35 Yeah. Maybe just "for" should be "to." Apply the Decision Tree
36 present to the Council to the development of an options paper.

37
38 María, Sarah, do you have any suggested edits there?

39
40 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Maybe August 2026 Council meeting, maybe.
41 Just add the date or the year.

42
43 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Oh, yes. I made some edits in our working
44 document that I believe Liajay's going to show you right now. So,
45 it starts off with that same request to staff to develop the
46 options paper to apply the Decision Tree as presented at this
47 meeting, the April 2026 meeting, and bring back to the Council at
48 the August 2026 meeting.

1
2 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Can I get a second from someone?

3
4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

5
6 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Okay.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion is to request staff to develop an
9 option paper to apply the decision-making tree. We seem to want to
10 have that word in there. I'm not sure. As presented at the April
11 '26 meeting and bringing it back to the Council at the August '26
12 meeting. Sabater?

13
14 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Shouldn't it say by whom it was presented, and
15 that is for the evaluation of managed stocks to clarify a little
16 bit better because many things have been presented here.

17
18 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** That's a good suggestion, Roberto. The Decision
19 Tree presented by staff-- let's not put Sarah's name. Presented by
20 staff at the April '26 meeting. And maybe we could say the Decision
21 Tree for evaluating-- What's the title?

22
23 For evaluating managed stocks.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, now it's request staff to develop an
26 option paper to apply the Decision Tree for evaluating managed
27 stocks presented by the staff at the April 2026 meeting and bring
28 it back to the Council at the August 2026 meeting. Moved by
29 Heather, seconded by Vanessa. Any more discussion? Hearing none,
30 I'm going to start a roll call vote with Blanchard.

31
32 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Blanchard , yes.

33
34 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Angeli, yes.

35
36 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

37
38 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, yes.

39
40 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

41
42 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchete, yes.

45
46 *Motion carries unanimously.*

47
48 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Thank you, everyone. I would just add, if you

1 think of anything in the meantime or you weren't comfortable
2 speaking up today, just reach out to either María or I, and we'll
3 make sure your concerns get added in. And, otherwise, thank you
4 very much.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sarah. María?

7
8 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Sarah. I think that concludes that
9 presentation for the matrix. I do want to bring to your attention
10 the fact that when we were discussing the priority ranking of the
11 Caribbean actions and that we got a little bit sidetracked with
12 very important motions for specific activities, there were still
13 two slides that were priorities that were listed as number one.
14 So, that's one of the things that we will have to go back to
15 because the Council needs to submit this back to NMFS.

16
17 And one of the requests from a Council member was to decide. There
18 cannot be that many number ones because, because obviously staff
19 limitations, etcetera, and workload. So, that will need to be
20 brought back to this table. I understand that we already have
21 several presentations going. So, I don't know when you would like
22 to do that or, if you want to move on and then at the end we can
23 come back to this.

24
25 So, just wanted to bring that to your attention.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So in that agenda, when it says competitiveness
28 summary, that's what you're talking about?

29
30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, this was scheduled for today at
31 11:30, which I think that's when it happened. It was when Graciela
32 was talking. And then we started talking about-- we stop at the
33 that priority about the seasonal closures and marine managed areas,
34 and we're going to combine that, etcetera. And then we went to
35 specifics, which is great.

36
37 But we still have a couple of things that we have to go through.
38 I think it may be easy to get through them. We can do it right now
39 if you want. Okay. Let's do that. And I will take over from Graciela
40 then, if you want to show it.

41
42 So, it will be, I believe we need to do slide number two and three.
43 No, slide number three and four.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Oh, yeah.

46
47 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, this is where we stop. Right? And we
48 make decisions over here, the specific motions for each one of the

1 islands. And then let's go to the next slide.

2
3 Okay. So, the listing here says, "Priority rank number three,
4 collect recreational data in the U.S. Caribbean." There are several
5 projects that are ongoing, with the Science Center with the
6 territories to collect this information. That information is not
7 in there. It doesn't say-- well, it says "ongoing." Right?

8
9 So, there were additional comments received. What is on the left-
10 - on the right corner. "Implement recreational license" was a
11 comment that somebody, from the public, submitted to NMFS, and
12 that's why it's listed in there. But it's falling under the
13 collection of recreational data in the Caribbean.

14
15 Not sure if the comment was related to a federal recreational
16 license or if it was referring to Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin
17 Islands, which already has it. So, we need we may need a little
18 bit more clarification on that one. And then the other one says
19 that "Regulatory (amendment). revised the AMS for the Caribbean
20 spiny lobster in Puerto Rico. Science/data collection survey that
21 samples individuals larger than those being caught in the fisheries
22 to confirm there are large individuals in the population. Those
23 are SSC and fisher recommendations." That's one of the priorities
24 of the Council. There were not really any comments received on
25 that, but that is set as number one.

26
27 So, with that, the revision of the accountability measures, this
28 is something that was included in the priorities for the year, and
29 I think I talked a little bit about that on the first day. It is
30 listed as priority number one. Based on the discussions that you
31 had yesterday regarding the SEDAR 91 and all of that, then the
32 decision will need to be made if this is still a priority number
33 one given all of the other things that you have in here or if you
34 want to move it to a different number. Let's go to the next slide,
35 please.

36
37 So, that one, priority number one, "Revise AM for pelagic stocks."
38 These are the comments received. "Allowing fishing for pelagics
39 during the seasonal closure for red hind and the EEZ of Lang Bank
40 of Saint Croix." That was one of the comments that were received.
41 The other one was "Fast track the National Permit process for the
42 U.S. Virgin Islands to install six fish aggregating devices in the
43 EEZ of Saint Croix and six in the EEZ of Saint Thomas." Again,
44 comments received from the public.

45
46 So, the revision of the accountability measures is something that
47 we discussed yesterday, and the Council decided to table that for
48 now. So, I'm assuming that will change the priority number for

1 this one. "Consider alternative approaches for ACLs." This is SEDAR
2 103. It's listed as priority number one. This is something that is
3 ongoing. And that comment that is in there says, well, there's two
4 comments. This says, "Carryover unused annual catch limits except
5 conch." And another comment said "Include and pay elite fishermen
6 for their knowledge and include these in stock assessments and
7 avoid use of single species model meant for temperate ecosystems.
8 Instead, use models for multispecies tropical fisheries and
9 include an estimate of effort." Based on my understanding, I think,
10 part of this-- this comment should be addressed through the SEDAR
11 103 process because they're looking at alternative methods for
12 assessing species. Is there another slide? Okay. One more.

13
14 Oh god. Okay. Okay. Another so you see what I'm saying? There's,
15 one, two, three, four more priorities that are number one. I
16 thought this was going to be fast, but it's not. So, let's see.

17
18 "Conduct queen conch population assessment in the U.S. Caribbean
19 (Regulatory Amendment)." a comment received that could be related
20 to that. "Remove queen conch from ESA listing."

21
22 Another one, "Assess commercial and recreational fishing data to
23 determine fishing effort in the U.S. Caribbean. Develop
24 methodology to determine fishing effort by gear type as needed."
25 Another priority one, "Enforce import regulations for spiny
26 lobster and queen conch." A comment received that could be related
27 to that "Address lack of enforcement of fisheries regulations."

28
29 "Prioritize socio-economic data needs for decision making in the
30 U.S. Caribbean fisheries." "Re-evaluate SEDAR, especially social
31 and economic elements)" was the comment. "Policy and Funding.
32 Implement policies that would help domestic spiny lobster and queen
33 conch products compete against imports." Additional comment "For
34 seafood imported to U.S. Implementing a tariff could fund upgrades
35 for U.S. fishermen, for example, gear, boats, facilities and create
36 a more competitive industry." Is that the last one of the-- Okay.

37
38 Let's go back then to the other ones. So, the question is, what do
39 you want to do? My understanding is that at least this one could
40 be easy. Revision of accountability measures is not going to be a
41 priority number one anymore because if the Council decided to table
42 that, that could be either removed from the list or ranked lower.
43 So, I think that's an easy one.

44
45 Consider alternative approaches. I mean, it depends on how we
46 prioritize this. If it's something that is already done and it's
47 very important to us and there is an activity that is associated
48 with this, I am assuming that it could stay for priority number

1 one. This is SEDAR 103.

2
3 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah, sorry. As a point of clarity, I'm just--
4 So, you're asking us if we want to keep-- You're asking us right
5 now, we're going to go through each of these actions, and we're
6 going to give you an updated priority number.

7
8 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I believe that was the intent this morning to
9 update the priority numbers. Right? And I guess the question is,
10 with so many number one, is it okay to have more than one number
11 one or no? Kevin? Kevin, I think-- Mr. Chair, Kevin has a comment.

12
13 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. Kevin McCarthy. I mean, for some things
14 that are actually already happening, does it-- could you not just
15 take them off this list? 103 is happening. Is further comment
16 needed? I'm just trying to simplify for [crosstalk]

17
18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I do not think we need further comment. I think
19 this is more about, there's too many number ones. Right? But then
20 again, maybe some guidance. Heather, maybe a little bit more on
21 how this could be phrased or redone so that we comply with what
22 they're asking for.

23
24 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, unfortunately, Graciela's gone. I'm not sure
25 exactly what the objective was. I don't think we should remove
26 things we're working on. I think we should show them that we have
27 prioritized certain things, and maybe we bin them by things that
28 are underway. So, the matrix document that we just talked about,
29 that's underway. That was on the list. The ACL alternative
30 approaches, SEDAR 103, that's underway. Ongoing. That's on the
31 list.

32
33 I saw the queen conch population assessment. We did-- I was going
34 to report under the RA report later on that we have initiated
35 another review of--another status review of queen conch. So,
36 presumably, that would address the conduct queen conch population
37 assessment one. We could say that is ongoing underway. Maybe we
38 want to bin these by what's ongoing/underway and then rank the
39 rest of them in priority order.

40
41 I see several things on here that the Council-- it does not appear
42 that the Council has any jurisdiction or the ability to do on its
43 own. And so, I don't know if we would want to bin them by things
44 that are under the Council's control and then other things that we
45 might be able to facilitate, right, or help with, but that we can
46 actually impact on our own and only focus on prioritizing those
47 things where we can work. Go ahead, Nicole.

1 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. No. Thank you. I guess two things. I have
2 the same comments as you, and I'm not going to repeat those on. If
3 you're already working on them, they're likely a priority. And so,
4 after Kevin's comment, I was going to ask, are we removing those
5 as a priority, or do those actually become priority one, because
6 we're already working on them?

7
8 Second, we do have a strategic plan. It would be nice to see where
9 within the CFMC strategic plan these align. I think many of them
10 do align with objectives and strategies in the 2022 to 2026
11 strategic plan. And if they don't align with the strategic plan,
12 they should immediately go to the end of the list. And so, I don't
13 know if someone has already cross walked the strategic-- it was
14 done, but it's just not presented.

15
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, yeah. So, the first time that this was
17 presented, I believe it was not in the past meeting. I think it
18 was at the August meeting. There should have been a table that
19 says "priority," and we can look it up and maybe we can bring it
20 back. It would say-- next to each one of those priorities, it has
21 to say the number of the-- and under the strategic plan and where
22 it falls.

23
24 So, that should have-- that should be in the Council's briefing
25 book for two meetings before.

26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Two things. We need to supply headquarters
28 with a list of the species that, as you all know, will be retained
29 in the management unit, those that will be put in the ecosystem,
30 and those species that we are not going to manage at the federal
31 government jurisdiction. And then, the list that we put together
32 here, we want for example, in the case of the queen conch, there's
33 a possibility that the queen conch will be delisted. So, will that
34 affect the priorities that we have here and the spiny lobster?

35
36 So, when we discuss this at this meeting, that number one should
37 be number one, the spiny lobster and the queen conch. And what
38 María is saying, okay, because we have all these number ones here,
39 do we have number one a, c, d? So, that the staff can continue
40 working on each one with the priorities that you set here.

41
42 We are supposed to bring that to the attention of the group at the
43 CCC meeting in May. All the Executive Directors were asked to bring
44 to the attention of the group, although I've received an email now
45 that we're going to pass on that one too.

46
47 So, what we need to say at this time is, okay, given all the things
48 that we that we've discuss, what priorities are we going to give

1 the staff to work on? That's where we are at this time.

2
3 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, I feel we've already talked about we have six
4 at this time. We have the three we started with, two spiny lobster
5 amendments, the species matrix-- Sorry. I keep calling it that. -
6 that Sarah just went over, and then we came up with three
7 additional amendments right before lunch. Right?

8
9 So, we have those six, which I can't imagine taking-- we're not
10 even going to be able to do all those six at the same time. So,
11 what about if we-- and enforce import regulations for spiny
12 lobster. We can't do that. We could somehow maybe facilitate, write
13 a letter about it or-- right. But that's not the Council's job.

14
15 So, what what's the thinking, I guess, maybe somebody going through
16 what's here, bidding them under what the Council can do and not
17 do. Right? Like, what's under our control? And then Kate had a
18 good suggestion, maybe for the things that we're working on, we
19 could sequentially number and order 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. What's the
20 order we're going to work on them?

21
22 For these other things that are under the Council's control, maybe
23 we could, as a Council, notate them, high, medium, low priority.
24 Just not try to-- like, which group would we get to next? Maybe
25 there are some things on here that we don't intend to ever get to.
26 I don't know. I don't know if we want to--

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's the point. If we say something like that,
29 we have to have the rationale of why not.

30
31 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** That's why I think I'd like to see where they
32 align with strategies. Like, if one of these actions aligns with
33 six strategies, then that would be higher than [crosstalk]

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But we already did that. We already did that last
36 year.

37
38 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Maria can you look in the briefing books. I would
39 like to have that information before I have to give feedback right
40 now. So, if you can tell me which presentation I'm looking through
41 everything in August.

42
43 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Yes. Thank you for that. And I think
44 that's a good idea. So, that means that at this point right now,
45 I don't think we're ready to move forward with this particular
46 ask, which is what Graciela was working on.

47
48 Everything that's in here has already been deemed by the Council

1 as a priority. That's why it was included here. I believe there
2 was a discussion a couple of meetings ago. I don't know if it ended
3 up in a presentation, but I know that there's something done
4 because I saw it. So, it will be nice if we can get that available.
5 I'll work with Liajay and Cristina to see if we can make that
6 available to the Council members.

7
8 And then because this was already submitted to NMFS, right, they
9 already have that. The difference is that the comment period was
10 opened again, and there were other comments, right? But nothing
11 that was included there, from my understanding, was so different
12 as to add something that the Council could do into this list. So,
13 it looks like the list will stay that, and that will be submitted
14 to NMFS because that's something that you have already decided.
15 Right?

16
17 Now the question that we were doing, I think we can work with the
18 things that we are doing, okay, one, two, three, etcetera. And
19 then, you suggested the rest of the stuff, then ranking those
20 priorities. But if we don't have specific actions at this time to
21 accomplish them, then that means, to me, that means that they will
22 be lower. Right?

23
24 So, I think the things that we already have motions on and projects
25 that are already ongoing, they're already ranked number one, and
26 then we just have to 1a, 1b, 1c or something that. So, maybe just
27 pause it for now and maybe see if Council members can look at the
28 list and see if there's anything else to ensure that this is part
29 of it.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. And one point, María brought. Anything that
32 we send to Washington is already there, and we are not supposed to
33 change it unless we have a significant rationale for changing it.
34 Because they collected that day from every Council, and they are
35 going to discuss it. Actually, we were supposed to submit this by
36 April 30th. They move it to June.

37
38 The matrix is paused at this time. So, we have to be careful that
39 what we submitted already is there. We cannot change it unless we
40 have a very significant rationale for it. At this time also, we
41 wanted to know what the priority for this list is, at least for
42 the staff to work.

43
44 For example, we were talking about close season, spatial-- the
45 sites of the fish that-- the site that we prohibit fishing, like
46 Tourmaline, for example, do we want to address that as a top
47 priority? Do we need to review the priorities that we have sent
48 already to Washington for the review, or do we want to wait until

1 we get feedback from them?
2
3 If anyone sent an email to all the executive directors, we were
4 supposed to, number one, wait until they have a reaction, and we,
5 all the Councils, have to react to whatever they send to us. They
6 moved it a little bit further into the summer so that we would
7 have time to discuss it as much as possible at the CCC in May.
8 That would be the week of May 20, 21, 22.
9
10 At this time, María, do you need anything else for the Decision
11 Tree besides what we already have? I mean, not the Decision Tree,
12 for the priority list besides what we already have.
13
14 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, let's see how-- okay. So, this is the
15 priority ranking Council actions that were submitted to NMFS.
16 Within these are the motions that we passed today and what we have
17 been working on. So, my recommendation now to the Council, if they
18 want, is just let's put this aside. This list here, let's put it
19 aside. We already know what we're working on.
20
21 We can submit the documents that Nicole is requesting, and then
22 maybe that will be a conversation that can be had maybe by email
23 or something when this list is refined through the Council members.
24 I don't know.
25
26 But now, setting this aside, we can go back to the updates and
27 actions and updates that I was talking about yesterday where we
28 had the list of all the things that we were discussing, and then
29 we need to look at that, see what fell off from our priorities,
30 like for working this year for staff. And we have motions that
31 were passed today so that the Council needs to decide what staff
32 are going to start working on. So, we can put the slide again.
33
34 Can you put the presentation for the actions and updates, the ones
35 for yesterday morning?
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?
38
39 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I got a suggestion. I think we should go
40 with the motions that were made earlier because this is tied in
41 today. The executive order I believe we have a timeline for that.
42 Then what should come second into play is what we are already
43 working on. And then third into play the rest of them that we
44 decide are on which to file into play.
45
46 That's my suggestion.
47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's exactly what María said.

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Oh, okay.
3

4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, what you're going to see now is based on what
5 we already have discussed, and then María needs for you as a
6 Council to tell her, "Okay, this is what I want the staff to
7 prioritize for the August meeting and the rest."
8

9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. This is María. So, this is what you guys
10 saw today. I haven't had a chance to update it yet. But
11 modification on AMs, we reviewed the option papers. We're tabling
12 that for now. So, that's not going to be-- for the rest of the
13 year, that's not going to be something that the Council staff is
14 going to be working on directly.
15

16 SEDAR 91, spiny lobster, Saint Croix, Saint Thomas. I believe and
17 correct me if I'm wrong with so much stuff, that we're moving
18 forward with an amendment with that. Okay. So, that's something--
19 Rulemaking. Okay. So, that is outside of the Council's, of the
20 Council's plate right now it is on NMFS plate. But that's staff
21 time.
22

23 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. It will still need to be finalized and yeah.
24 Correct.
25

26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Alright. So, SEDAR 91 spiny lobster,
27 Saint-Croix, Saint Thomas, that is something that we're going to
28 be working on during the rest of this year. SEDAR 91, spiny
29 lobster, Puerto Rico. Also, that's not something that is going to
30 be moving forward right now. Neither is SEDAR 84, for the
31 yellowtail or for the stoplight.
32

33 Okay? So, from this slide, only one thing. We can update it and
34 show it to you. It's just that it's a pdf. Yes.
35

36 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** SEDAR 91, we would pick up in August after we get
37 the SSC response.
38

39 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Correct. Okay. So, that action is alive. Yes.
40 Sorry about that. Go to the next slide, please.
41

42 We continue to work on the matrix. So, that's project number three
43 for staff. This is the revision of AMs which the Council's not
44 working on right now. Can you go to the next slide?
45

46 Okay. And in here, which also falls on the prioritized list of
47 actions on the incompatible regulation and duplicative
48 regulations, etcetera, we have the three motions that you did

1 today. Okay? So there has to be a decision as to what would be any
2 of the projects that staff can be working on. Based on that there
3 are three other projects that staff has to be working on, I would
4 say that, to be fair, only one of those motions perhaps would be
5 reasonable to start working on at this time until at least the
6 rulemaking for the spiny lobster has moved forward.

7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María?

9
10 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do you want to do that? Just put the slides so
13 they can--

14
15 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** The what?

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do you want the Council to pick one of the three
18 at this time?

19
20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. Yes. And then, the other thing that's
21 happening in SEDAR 103, that's a different process. So, yes, so I
22 would think that, as Heather was mentioning before, from those
23 three motions that were made today for each one of the islands, if
24 that's something that the Council can be tasked to work with. So,
25 you need to decide what do you want to do.

26
27 Thank you.

28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Cristina, ¿podemos ponerle esas tres? Un
30 momentito. Okay. So, we have, from the presentation, what Heather
31 is recommending. That's one.

32
33 And then from the three motions, we have to pick which one you
34 want to address immediately or now.

35
36 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. I would suggest that we keep all three on
37 the list, but maybe just order them in order of priority because
38 there might be downtime on one that we could start working on the
39 others, but we would know which one is the highest, most time
40 sensitive. Right?

41
42 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I agree.

43
44 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.

45
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, the suggestion was just to start working
47 during this period, because right now we're just looking at 2026.
48 So, trying to figure out what will be most doable, that will be

1 good. Thank you.
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, we leave that at the discretion of the staff,
4 to start working on the ones that they-- yeah. Out of the three,
5 then they will start working on one of them with the understanding
6 that they will keep working.
7
8 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. But we need Council input to help prioritize
9 between Saint Thomas, Saint Croix, and Puerto Rico. Which ones, in
10 order of importance, time wise, should we begin first?
11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's why I asked them to put on the screen.
13 Espérate, Tony. Pues nada, las tres emociones que hicimos hoy de
14 la vaina de-- ponlas ahí.
15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.
17
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
19 record. *I will suggest to start with motion eight for Saint Thomas*
20 *first, and then do the same, next Puerto Rico and next Saint Croix*
21 *in the same way that we presented the motions.*
22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Deja que lo ponga en el screen primero, entonces,
24 lo que tú acabas de decir se hace oficial.
25
26 So, motion eight, Vanessa, motion eight is number one? Motion nine
27 will be number two, and motion 10 will be number three.
28
29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Correct.
30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, María, is that enough for you to work? We
32 need a motion for that or--
33
34 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** We need to make a motion to accept this
35 order, the order which you will follow.
36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Actually, it will be better if you do that.
38
39 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay.
40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Have a motion to accept the order using the
42 language that Vanessa just mentioned. It will be clearer for
43 everybody.
44
45 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. I'm making a motion to accept the-
46 -
47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Tony, it's not to accept, but a motion to

1 prioritize.
2
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Motion to prioritize Saint
4 Thomas/Saint John. The motion that was made this morning, which is
5 not up on the board that I can't really see. Okay.
6
7 Motion to make number eight, number one, number nine, number two,
8 and number 10, number three.
9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿y le puede quitar San Tomás/San John?
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We need a second.
13
14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.
15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But we need to say, "prioritize motions made
17 today" or "motion made at the CFMC meeting today."
18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion is to prioritize motion eight as
20 one, motion nine as number two, and motion 10 as number three.
21
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** From the meeting of the CFMC that were discussed
23 today.
24
25 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Have a clarifying question. My understanding of
26 this is these are behind the actions that we have opened. These
27 would be behind Puerto Rico spiny lobster that will pick up in
28 August. It doesn't mean they can't be happening at the same time,
29 but that's also first priority and completing the species matrix.
30 So, would there be those and then these three in this order?
31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes.
33
34 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.
35
36 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for the discussion. Just want to
37 clarify too that staff probably won't be bringing anything to the
38 August meeting on this one because we have the other one. So, just
39 wanted to make that clear.
40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, yeah. Any further discussion?
42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** All in favor, say aye. All in favor, say aye.
44
45 **GROUP:** Aye
46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? *Hearing none, motion*
48 *carries unimosly.*

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Sí. ¿Vamos a hacer un break ahora?

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sí.

5
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Sí, porque van al baño.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we're going to take a quick minute
9 break.

10
11 Every time we take a break, it's so hard to get them back.

12
13 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next on the agenda is the Outreach And
16 Education Advisory Panel, Jannette Ramos. And then we have Michael
17 Funk who's going to do a presentation with Jannette, right after
18 Jannette.

19
20 **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL (OEAP) REPORT – JANNETTE**
21 **RAMOS GARCÍA, CHAIR**
22

23 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon,
24 everyone. It's a pleasure to be here today presenting the Outreach
25 and Education Advisory Panel report to the Council. Next, Cristina.
26 Oh, sorry. Next. Thank you.

27
28 We carry out a range of activities, including community events,
29 school presentations, development of educational materials, and
30 collaboration with partner agencies. Next one, Cristina.

31
32 The first one was one of the outreach highlights. An educational
33 talk at an elementary school in Puerto Real, in Cabo Rojo, my
34 hometown. The presentation focused on invasive species, their
35 impact on marine ecosystems, and the importance of fisheries
36 awareness. Working with students was, at this level, especially
37 valuable because it helps build understanding early and encourages
38 long-term stewardship. I'm sorry for the word. And I have to say
39 students always bring a level of curiosity that makes these
40 conversations very engaging. Next one.

41
42 Also, at another meeting, the liaison asked for some educational
43 material. So, during this period the educational materials were
44 reproduced to support the work of the CFMC liaisons. These
45 materials are being used in workshops and community outreach
46 activities across the regions and also at schools. Next one.

47
48 Well, remember the 2026 calendar? Well, this content is recognizing

1 multigenerational fishing families. It's going to be used in the
2 2027 calendar. It was announced, but it couldn't be done for 2026.
3 Now all the material is done for the 2027 calendar. Next one.

4
5 In February 2026, Diana, Gerson and me, were participating in the
6 Agrifest in Saint Croix. He says that he is the most handsome
7 fisherman in Saint Croix. This event provided an opportunity to
8 engage with a broad audience, including farmers, fishers, and
9 families. We distributed educational materials and promoted the
10 CFMC initiatives, reaching people who may not typically attend
11 fisheries focused activities. Events allow us to expand our reach
12 and connect with communities in a more accessible way. Next one.

13
14 And then, we participate in Fisher's Day organized by the Puerto
15 Rico Department of Agriculture. In Puerto Rico, the Department of
16 Agriculture is in charge of fishing villages. So, we were there,
17 and this event gave us the opportunity to connect directly with
18 other fishers, share information with the public, and even with
19 the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture who doesn't have a
20 notion of what the CFMC does. These interactions are important
21 because they create a space for conversation, questions, and
22 feedback that help strengthen our outreach efforts. Next one.

23
24 And finally, the fish species catalog, requested by fishers and
25 District Advisory Panel members, has been completed and submitted
26 for revision. This catalog is designed to improve species
27 identification, support understanding of regulations, and assist
28 both fishers and consumers. It's a practical tool that responds
29 directly to the needs expressed by stakeholders, which makes it
30 especially valuable. Next one.

31
32 And now, we have a new outreach tool, and it's a sticker. This
33 outreach was also developed in the form of a sticker featuring 10
34 species managed under the CFMC. I'm going to send this one-- I'm
35 going to send one of the stickers for you to see in person. It's
36 still under review. Go ahead, please. Pass it down.

37
38 Even though it's simple, this tool can be very effective because
39 it's very visual, easy to distribute, and helps reinforce key
40 messages in every setting. So, what you are seeing, the sticker,
41 is an interactive tool. You put-- Cristina, please touch the orange
42 one, the orange one. No the orange, the orange one. Yeah. Yeah.

43
44 So, you see? I put the bubbles just to make the presentation fun,
45 but when you touch the fish, there is information. The name in
46 Spanish, the scientific name, the name in English, and some
47 information about the fish.

1 I'm going to do that with all the fish in the sticker. So, if
2 you're at the school and you don't have the information, you just
3 go in your phone or your tablet or your pc or your mac and touch
4 the fish and learn the information. That will also be included in
5 the catalog. And touch ahora, Cristina, the triggerfish. another
6 form of showing it. So, that is going to be part of this new tool.

7
8 And, also, we are going to create a QR code. If I don't have
9 stickers or posters, the interactive posters, you go to the QR
10 code with your phone, and then you are allowed to see all those
11 things. It's very simple but-- No, no. This one is not working
12 still.

13
14 Well, today, I received-- I am so happy. Today, I received approval
15 to offer the course again for the chefs. And, once again, it would
16 be delivered with the support of Chef Cedric Taquín, reaffirming
17 our commitment to education, responsible use of marine species,
18 and threatening the opportunities for the gastronomic and fishing
19 sectors. Thank you. That will be all. Thank you for your attention
20 and support.

21 22 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

23
24 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Just a quick anecdote. One of the loves of working
25 with lesser-known species was working with Jannette many years ago
26 on promoting lionfish consumption. And her and Chelsea contacted
27 me, and they were like, we're going to make a lionfish cooking
28 contest in La Parguera. We really want you there, this and that.
29 I was a little nervous about going out there and competing with
30 other chefs. But I got ready.

31
32 I got my knife sharp, and I went down there, and I was the only
33 chef. So, I'm up on stage, and I'm the only chef that prepared
34 several dishes of lionfish. I filleted them and-- It was a great
35 show. But that's probably funny, and it's really something that
36 affected me and made me want to just keep going and working these
37 lesser species and educate consumers about the importance of eating
38 all these other species.

39
40 So, good job, Jannette. You can always use MenTa as a platform for
41 education for all these things.

42
43 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you.

44
45 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** That's it. Thank you very much.

46
47 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Well, I will be happy to take any questions.
48 Vanessa?

1
2 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa, for the record.
3 Thank you, Jannette and Cristina and Wilson, that I'm always around
4 asking for materials, especially for our young fishermen and the
5 schools around the Puerto Real Fisherman Village. I was very happy
6 to participate in a couple of the activities that you mentioned
7 here. Also, I just want to let you know that we're going to have
8 some activities during the month of May, so you're going to be
9 receiving some invitations. Always, your table is welcome in our
10 association, and it's going to be a community. On May 9, it's going
11 to be a community activity, and we hope that you can participate
12 also.

13
14 I have a question about the sticker. Is the sticker also going to
15 be labeled with the Caribbean Fishery Management or the logo of
16 the Caribbean--

17
18 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** If you saw it in the slide, it had the
19 logos.

20
21 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Oh, okay. It was the one that I saw first. Yeah.
22 Thank you.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I also want to thank the Outreach and
25 Education Panel for participating in the Agrifest on Saint Croix.
26 That three-day weekend, about 10,000 people passed through that
27 Agrifest property. So, that was a lot of outreach.

28
29 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I have Michael Funk he will talk about
32 lionfish. Michael funk is going to do a presentation next.

33
34 **LIONFISH DERBY - MICHAEL FUNK**

35
36 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Well, good afternoon. Can you hear me? Is this mic
37 working? Okay. Great.

38
39 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a presentation. It's about forty-
40 five minutes. But in the interest of brevity, I'll make it thirty
41 seconds.

42
43 My name is Michael Funk. I'm with the Core Foundation, and I'm
44 working on a lionfish project in Saint Croix. There's a lot of
45 discussion in meetings like this about the harvest of-- sustainable
46 harvest for managed species. Lionfish is one of the few species in
47 which the more we take, the better.

1 So, one of the things that we're trying to do is, I've been speaking
2 with my colleagues here from Puerto Rico. One of the ideas that
3 keeps coming up with harvesting lionfish is fishers are afraid of
4 getting stuck by a lionfish. They're a little more difficult to
5 deal with. So, one of the things we do on Saint Croix is we train
6 fishers in the safe removal of lionfish.

7
8 Let's see. We've been training recreational fishers for over a
9 decade. Last year, in 2025, we removed 2,500 lionfish from one
10 area on the west end of Saint Croix. So, on May 16, we have a
11 lionfish derby, and that's going to be a real-world opportunity
12 for us to bring fishers, restaurants, and the public together to
13 try and make or bridge this gap between the fishers bringing them
14 in and people wanting to consume them. And I'm very interested in
15 any advice or help anybody has to offer. Thank you very much.

16 17 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS** 18

19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, thank you, Funk. I wanted you to let them
20 know how much you all gave as a prize to the smallest lionfish in
21 the last derby.

22
23 **MICHAEL FUNK:** That's always a funny story. So, this was the first-
24 - the one coming up is our Fourth Annual Lionfish Derby. The first
25 derby that we had in 2023, we offer prizes for the most lionfish,
26 the biggest lionfish, and the smallest lionfish. So, in that derby,
27 we had one guy. He was a snorkeler. He's not a scuba diver. He
28 told me he went out at 08:00 in the morning. He was snorkeling all
29 over Saint Croix.

30
31 He came into the waste station at 03:00 with this cooler. He had
32 a big old cooler, and he set it down full of ice. I opened it up,
33 and there was one lionfish. Like this. And he won the prize. That
34 one lionfish, he got the prize for the smallest lionfish with
35 \$1,500. [laughter]

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** If you all don't know Michael Funk, he's also a
38 member of our DAP. He's also a member of the Saint Croix
39 Fisherman's Advisory Panel. Julian?

40
41 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. I just wanted
42 to make a comment as it pertains to the lionfish. I just was
43 watching a documentary here the other day, and now they have found
44 that the lionfish has started to eat lionfish. So, they gutted
45 some lionfish in a study that they were doing, and they found
46 lionfish inside of their guts.

47
48 So, that's positive that they're eating their own right now also.

1 So, not only the other small fish, but they're actually lionfish
2 eating lionfish.

3
4 **MICHAEL FUNK:** If I could comment about that. So, that was a study
5 done out of University of Florida, and a lady did DNA gut content
6 analysis, DNA analysis of lionfish gut content. Because
7 oftentimes, if you open up their gut, you can see fish, but they're
8 partially digested and you can't identify it. What she found was
9 26% of the lionfish gut content is lionfish.

10
11 I could show you a couple of pictures. We landed a lionfish the
12 other day, a pretty big lionfish, and sticking out of its mouth
13 was part of a baby lionfish.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Cannibals.

16
17 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Yeah. So, they are eating them. So, they do have
18 more than one predator. We're the only other predator. But--

19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Michael, when is the derby? What dates are the
21 dates of the derby?

22
23 **MICHAEL FUNK:** The Saint Croix derby is May 16, and there's a Saint
24 Thomas derby on June 11.

25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do you need anything from us to help you with
27 that? Advertising it or anything, or bringing information?

28
29 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Aw. Anything you can do to help would be great.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. I have the queen of lionfish, Jannette. She
32 has been working with lionfish forever, and she can help you. She
33 is the Chair. So, if you need anything that we could put in our
34 pages.

35
36 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Okay.

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** To announce it, and then Cristina can load that
39 up, and we can help you with that. And, also, if you need any
40 materials, we have some videos that Diana told me about the--
41 anything that you need that we can help you, please call us.

42
43 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Alright. Fantastic. I'll get with Carlos so we can--

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. And Jeannette.

46
47 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Thank you so much. Great to be here.

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Michael. Appreciate your patience.
2 Alrighty. So, next we have Cristina on the Social Network.

3
4 **CFMC SOCIAL NETWORKS REPORT—CRISTINA D. OLÁN MARTÍNEZ**
5

6 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Good afternoon and thank you as
7 always for letting me present what we have been doing on social
8 media. As Carlos mentioned, my name is Cristina Olán. I work for
9 the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council. So, I have a couple of
10 updates to share with you today.

11
12 I will be as quick as possible because I know that we have been
13 here for two days, and there are people that also have other
14 responsibilities. As always, I mentioned where we are on social
15 media. We are on Facebook, Instagram, Threats, LinkedIn, X, and
16 BlueSky. But the one that has the most engagement right now is
17 Instagram. We have almost now, 2,500 followers.

18
19 It's the ones that have the highest engagement in terms of views,
20 reposts, and shares. Excuse me. All the content that we publish is
21 in English and Spanish. So, people in the U.S. Caribbean are able
22 to understand what we are communicating. Other platforms where we
23 have a presence are YouTube and ISSUU.

24
25 ISSUU, you use that for documents, especially for meetings. And in
26 the case of YouTube, we are live right now. So, hi to the people
27 that are following us on YouTube for the meetings and also to watch
28 the videos that we include on YouTube channel.

29
30 You can visit our Link Tree. There is a QR code, and there you can
31 find all the links to our social media platforms, and also some
32 updates. Like, for example, we have an area that is dedicated to
33 Salvapeje, the descending device. Also, every time that we have a
34 meeting, like right now, there is an area dedicated to the meeting
35 as well. And, also, new products, for example, Bajo La Luna, the
36 book. If you go there, you can just click, and you can go to the
37 new book.

38
39 We also produce content to share through WhatsApp. And I have to
40 say thank you, as always. Thank you to Gerson in Saint Croix and
41 Wilson in Puerto Rico. They are the sexiest fisherman in Saint
42 Croix and Wilson there. This was a picture that I took of him in
43 La Parguera. And I'm very thankful for them because with their
44 help, we can reach almost 2,000 fishers that are subscribed to the
45 broadcast list and the chats.

46
47 The content that we share is mostly focused on seasonal closures,
48 regulations, meetings and workshops, outreach and education

1 activities, marine species, shared content, and also content that
2 we share from other agencies and other partners, collaborative
3 content that we do with agencies, influencers, among others,
4 followers' requests, funding opportunities, bulletins, Big Fish
5 Initiatives, Salvapeje, or Assist the Fish in the V.I. And we also
6 have the inbox and the direct messaging, so people write to us,
7 and we answer their questions through the inbox and direct message.
8 And, again, all is in English and Spanish.

9
10 We have an email contact list to which we add contacts every time
11 someone writes to us through social media, but also in the
12 workshops. For example, when Wilson goes to a fishing village or
13 association or a nautical club and he gives a workshop, there is
14 a registration form. So, from the registration form, we add that
15 information to the contact list, and people are able to receive
16 information through the Council and through their emails.

17
18 We have been updating the general archive. Right now, we have all
19 the documents from past regular meetings from 2020 to 2025, also
20 the Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Outreach and
21 Educational Advisory Panel also. And we are working on Ecosystem-
22 Based Fishery Management Technical Advisory Panel meeting
23 documents as well. So, I think that next month, we will have the
24 EBFM TAP documents there also included.

25
26 We have been producing, as Martha mentioned in her presentation,
27 the CFMC Takes Action or el Consejo Toma Acción. This bulletin is
28 dedicated or focused mostly on the projects that are funded by
29 IRA. We have also been producing the CFMC Updates or Noticias del
30 CFMC. It's a monthly bulletin in which we share some updates
31 regarding species, closures, scientific information, and
32 management among other topics.

33
34 The example that I am presenting there is one that we published
35 with support and help-- I'm very thankful for what María and Sarah
36 have done and for their support to produce this bulletin. In this
37 one specifically, we produced an overview or a summary of fishing
38 regulations. That one is from April 2025. The other one is May
39 2025. Also, that summary is accompanied by a one pager that could
40 be reproduced and you can take that with you in the boat. Or if we
41 need to distribute that information, it is already done. The only
42 thing that we had to do is to print it.

43
44 So, again, thank you to the staff, but also María and Sarah that
45 did a lot of work there and are always giving me support on
46 producing the bulletins.

47
48 Salvapeje, descending device. We have been producing a lot of

1 material, pictures, announcements of the workshops, bulletins, the
2 video that is there already. So, it's kind of a messy slide because
3 I put a lot of pictures. But what I wanted to convey there was how
4 the collaboration and people get together to have the work done.

5
6 So, there is, for example, the promo of the workshop. But if you
7 go to this picture of David, David is a fisher from Mayagüez. He
8 is a fisher that after taking the workshop, he went for a second
9 time to the workshop. I mean, he showed us his own Salvapeje, and
10 we recorded a video. The video had a lot of views on social media.
11 So, this is an example of the impact that we have been having on
12 the community.

13
14 There is Nelson in some of the pictures, and also Wilson, and some
15 of the posts that we have been publishing in social media, and
16 also the faces of the fishers that have been involved in the
17 workshop. The salvapeje video, that was a project coordinated by
18 Dr. Michelle, Marcos Hanke, Elizo, Pichón, Raul Ortiz and me. And
19 also, we have an updated version of the bulletin that was published
20 this year in February 2026, we already have copies to distribute
21 on the workshops.

22
23 And, again, I have a lot of examples, but I took the one related
24 to dolphinfish, the mahi, the dorado, of what happens when people
25 collaborate. As always, what we do with the bulletin is that we
26 take the pages, and we put it in an image format. We do posts on
27 Instagram and other social media platforms. So, there you have,
28 100 people that share that in their stories. Among these people
29 are agencies, influencers, fishers, etcetera. There were 14,
30 reshares, in the case of the Spanish version. We also had
31 involvement in the English version.

32
33 Also, what I was showing, I wanted to show there in ISSUU is the
34 impact that we had sharing this publication through WhatsApp and
35 through social media because the one that is related to the dorado
36 is the one that is the most viewed by people in ISSUU. Also, as
37 you see in the picture, Wilson is using the bulletin in the
38 workshop. So, again, it's a combined effort of many people there
39 that are moving the information so people can get informed about
40 what is happening, and especially because people are very
41 interested in this topic.

42
43 We continue with the Big Fish initiative. They have been creating
44 beautiful content in English and Spanish videos, mostly focused on
45 fish aggregations in the wider Caribbean.

46
47 We have been producing the fiftieth anniversary video, celebrating
48 the fiftieth anniversary of the Regional Management Councils. I

1 included their pictures of what we have been doing. Some of the
2 interviews were recorded in Saint Thomas, others in Saint Croix
3 and others in Puerto Rico. And I'm very thankful to all the people
4 that have been participating in the interviews. We are in the
5 process of editing and producing the video.

6
7 I have some pictures of the thank you cards that we sent to the
8 people that were involved in the interviews. I'm very sorry about
9 Saint Thomas because I was in and out of the meeting. I couldn't
10 take a lot of pictures of the process. But in the case of Saint
11 Croix, I was able to do that. So, thank you for [inaudible].
12 Included, of course, was Gerson, Marcos Hanke, Vanessa is there.
13 Viste, Vanessa, está ahí. Robando cámara.

14
15 And, again, muchas gracias. Thank you. Thanks to all the staff
16 members, panel members, committee members, fishers, liaison
17 officers, followers, scientists, managers, local and federal
18 agencies, collaborators, friends, among many other persons for all
19 the support, information and idea.

20
21 Thanks.

22 23 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions for Cristina?

26
27 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Tony.

28
29 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I just got a quick question. Do you think
30 the social media is that popular because of Mr. Gerson Martínez?

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next, we have Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico
33 liaison.

34 35 **CFMC LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS** 36 **PUERTO RICO-WILSON SANTIAGO**

37
38 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you,
39 Mr. Chair. So, this is my report. My name is Wilson Santiago,
40 Puerto Rico Fisheries Liaison for around the Island, Vieques and
41 Culebra too. So, this is my report after the last meeting in
42 December.

43
44 So, we have been working around the outreach and education
45 participation. We have been working around seven workshops for the
46 descending device, continuing to deliver materials of the Council
47 and DNER materials too for the fishers around the island, including
48 Culebra and Vieques too. We are participating in the MREP Steering

1 Committee. The MREP workshop is coming next June. So, we have been
2 working hand in hand with them. Yesterday and today, I think I
3 recruited two U.S.V.I. fishers. So, we needed them, so we continue
4 working with them.

5
6 The weekly posts for the WhatsApp broadcast list, and this, like
7 always, I want to thank Cristina Olán. Whatever I ask her for, she
8 first starts scratching her head. And then, okay, she sends it to
9 me. So, with the WhatsApp broadcast list, I have an update of all
10 the descending devices and the visits to the fishing villages.

11
12 It has gone up. There are almost 1,400 contacts that I have in my
13 in the WhatsApp broadcast list. Those come from all sectors,
14 recreational, commercial, for hire and other restaurant owners. I
15 have fishing shop owners too. So, it's been growing.

16
17 The educational table for the Council, me and Nelson, were invited
18 to the DNER. That was last December; after the December meeting.
19 We have continued attending calls and questions from fishers
20 regarding Puerto Rico State and Federal Waters. That's my day.

21
22 If you see me in the back getting the phone is because fishers are
23 calling me with questions or something that I send in the WhatsApp
24 broadcast list. If they don't understand, they prefer to call me
25 so I can explain it to them, in arroz y habichuelas, as we say,
26 rice and beans. So, that's all my days.

27
28 So, federal state water regulation workshops like the mini-PEPCO.
29 We are not giving the educational program for commercial fisher--
30 the whole workshop that was three hours. They have been soliciting
31 mini workshops. Okay? So, when we go give the descending device
32 workshop, they just ask me, "Oh, can you explain something about
33 the statistic reports, or something about Puerto Rico
34 regulations?" So, I just start with the PEPCO presentation and
35 give that part of the state regulations. Okay? Next, Cristina.

36
37 So, for the descending device workshop, like I said, since December
38 last meeting, we've been in seven workshops engaging fishers in
39 the community. 64 recreational fishers attended, and 101
40 commercial fishers. And since April 1st, since the regulation has
41 been implemented, more recreational fishers have been more
42 interested in the workshop. So, those are the workshops given,
43 Culebra, Cabo Rojo, Humacao, Fajardo, Luquillo, Arecibo, and
44 Mayagüez again, because they got more than 20 fishers. We gave it
45 again in the same place.

46
47 So, future locations will be La Villa Pesquera La Hoare, the Club
48 Náutico San Juan. I just contacted them, and I am waiting for them

1 to give me updates for the workshop. Vieques Island has been
2 coordinated already. Villa Pesquera Canovanas, I'm waiting for
3 Diana's friend so we can contact each other. I haven't been able
4 to contact him yet, so we can coordinate that workshop over there.

5
6 Everybody from Puerto Rico must be thinking, "There's a Fishing
7 Village in Canovanas." Well, yes, there it is recreational, but
8 they call it a Fishing Village. It's near the river. Right? It is
9 a very beautiful place near the river. So, we're going to be
10 attending soon, and Villa Pesquera La Parguera, in Lajas. That is
11 next week, I think.

12
13 I didn't put there Ceiba Fishing Village of Ceiba and Cebuco. Next
14 week, I think, it will be Wednesday and Thursday, those two. Okay.
15 Yeah. So, next week, we're going to attend those two workshops.
16 Next, Cristina.

17
18 So, here are some photos of the impact that we have. I've been
19 giving descending device workshops. That's from-- the bottom left
20 is for Culebra. The one with the marline is in Club Náutico
21 Arecibo. Nelson and I are the ones that go to give this workshop.
22 I give the presentations. I explain the regulations. I explain to
23 them everything about the regulation or anything.

24
25 Then Nelson shows them because he has a table because the
26 regulation permits the fisher to make the devices at home. So,
27 Nelson has a lot of them, even with a hanger he made a descending
28 device. So, he shows-- he makes the presentation about all the
29 descending devices that he has done in his house, from scratch.
30 Okay? And, also, for the fishers from fish traps. So, he has this
31 soldante, leftover wire from the nasa. Well, the wire left over
32 from his traps. So, he made this cage. It was very interesting,
33 and the fishers are very interested.

34
35 Like the picture in the center. Right now, Nelson has one in his
36 hand and all of them just gather around him, ask him to ask him
37 questions, like, "How do you do this? How can I do this? How can
38 I use this?" And, we have been getting fishers that come to the
39 workshop with their own homemade descending device that they have
40 been using for months and years already. So, this workshop has been
41 very, very productive. And I said before, when we are in this
42 workshop, they always ask us about regulation from the states.

43
44 The last one in Club Náutico of Arecibo they asked us about the
45 regulations of wahoo and mahi. So, I just put in the bulletin that
46 Cristina made or the presentation from the educational program,
47 and we just explained to them everything that is happening. Okay?
48 Next one.

1
2 So, the fisheries interests and concerns. This is like-- all my
3 reports are almost the same, but it has continued to be their
4 interest and concerns. I am interested in the DAP or OEAP, SSC,
5 and CFMC process.

6
7 When we start my workshops, I always explain what the Council is,
8 what the process is, what the DAP is, what the SSC is, what the
9 Outreach and Education Panel part is in all this. So, they have
10 been very interested. After that, if they are more interested in
11 all of this then I just invite them to an MREP workshop so they
12 can educate themselves and learn the whole process. So, there has
13 been huge interest.

14
15 Interest in the Puerto Rico State Regulations, that has been
16 attended by the mini-PEPCO that I have given. Chartered license
17 process. There have been a couple of charters fishers that have
18 been calling me regarding the permits of tourism and the DNER
19 permit. So, I always assist them.

20
21 State fishing license process. Every day, I help them with the
22 little that I can do, I just work with them in the license process.
23 The Federal Water Regulations implemented. As I mentioned, the
24 wahoo and mahi and the descending device. We are explaining those
25 regulations in the orientations for the fishing communities. Next,
26 Cristina.

27
28 So, my next steps. I will continue with the descending device
29 workshops, like I said, in Vieques. We have to do more in the north
30 side of the island, which has not been very, very-- we have not
31 had that many workshops. We just had, this past month, one in
32 Arecibo, and in the coming weeks in Vega Baja. So, it's going to
33 be held on the north side of the Island. And soon, we're going to
34 be bringing it to Saint Thomas/Saint John, U.S.V.I. Okay? So, we're
35 coordinating it.

36
37 So, the return with the educational commercial program, the PEPCO,
38 as we call it. We're close with DAP Chair Nelson, to create a set
39 of workshops for all sectors. This is something that Nelson and I
40 are planning, and I hope that at the next meeting, I have a full
41 report of these ideas that we have. So, in the next report at the
42 next Council meeting, we're going to have a complete report on
43 these workshops that we are planning.

44
45 Participating in educational tables by invitation. They always
46 invite me to tournaments in fishing communities. So, we just take
47 the CFMC table. We are going to participate in Cabo Rojo in Puerto
48 Real, both days, the tournament for the kids and the other day.

1 So, we're going to be over there and participate in the 2026 MREP
2 Caribbean workshop at Saint Thomas.

3
4 So, that will be all my report. If you have any questions?
5

6 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
9

10 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. Excellent
11 presentation as usual. I just want to mention, he mentioned there
12 that we're organizing for Wilson and Nelson to come to Saint
13 Thomas/Saint John. I think they're looking at Saint Croix also to
14 do some of the descending device's workshops.
15

16 Some of the guys got the devices, but they don't know how to use
17 them. We have a lot of our commercial fishers that are interested,
18 and we have direct contact with the Chairman of the Game and Fish
19 Club. Also, we have contact with one of our MREP guys, Corey Pugh
20 from Neptune Fishing, and he's going to work with getting some of
21 the recreational boats for-hire and not-for-hire to attend.
22

23 So, we're looking at doing a couple workshops over there. Yesterday
24 I also contacted the Northside Sports Fishing Club who has a big
25 tournament coming up on July 12, and I have asked for a space for
26 Wilson and Nelson to set up-- and Cristina. Let me not forget
27 Cristina. --to set up an educational table. Also, they'll be doing
28 the descending device training right there at the tournament when
29 the fishers come in and they drop off the fish and they come into
30 the big area.
31

32 We'll have a couple tables there and have the CFMC tablecloths and
33 everything laid out. So, we're looking forward to that. I think
34 it's going to be a nice little boost to see the presence of the
35 Council at the tournament and to be involved with what's going on.
36 And for the training, of course. Thank you.
37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson.
39

40 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.
41 Wilson, something that maybe you didn't mention is that at every
42 meeting, meeting by meeting, we see the fishermen bring the ones
43 that want to get more involved in all the Council issues. They
44 keep asking us how to participate, how to get more engaged. And
45 that's really good. Maybe we are doing something right, maybe the
46 dynamic or something because they are asking, "We want to
47 participate, what is the right way to do it? And then, after the
48 meeting, we spend more time showing them the different ways they

1 can participate. We love that. I really love that. I mean, it's
2 really good for me.

3
4 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** I want to add something. We tell them
5 that if they don't-- you know, because some of them don't dare to
6 talk. If it's in English, then it is no good for them. So, we
7 always tell them you can come with us, send a letter to Nelson, or
8 send it to me, that we can make that reach the Council, we can
9 bring it to the Council. Right? So that would be all.

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

12
13 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa, for the record.
14 Wilson, I just want to say that I don't think that there's anyone
15 in the Caribbean that has the excellent communication skills that
16 you have with our commercial fishermen. The recreational as well.
17 And as I know, there's a lot of things going on, especially with
18 the way that the commercial fishermen perceive the things that we
19 do in the management process. But since I have been here and I see
20 the way that you make things happen, with Nelson and Cristina, all
21 of you do a great job, specially making the easiest ways and in a
22 nice language for the fishermen, and to get that compromise from
23 them to continue collaborating and attending, especially for the
24 issues that we have in management.

25
26 Thank you for that. And Some day you know that I want to see you
27 at this table.

28
29 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Thank you, Vanessa. Before I finish, I
30 just want to welcome my counterpart from Saint Croix, Ms. Walton.
31 So, if you need anything, from my part or if you don't understand
32 something, you can call me or send me an email. We're here to help.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Wilson. Okay. We have the DAP reports.
35 I have Julian.

36
37 **DISTRICT ADVISORY PANEL REPORTS (15 MINS EACH)**
38 **ST. THOMAS, U.S.V.I.—JULIAN MAGRAS, CHAIR**
39

40 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras. I've said enough for the last two
41 days, so it covered everything I would say in my report.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That's good. Gerson?

44
45 **ST. CROIX, U.S.V.I.—GERSON MARTINEZ, CHAIR**
46

47 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Good afternoon. I don't have a report at the
48 moment.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Nelson Crespo.

3
4 **PUERTO RICO—NELSON CRESPO, CHAIR**
5

6 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Crespo. I don't have any report, but
7 I want to read the letter that was sent by the Culebra Fishermen
8 Association. So, may i? Okay. So, dice:
9

10 Asociación Pesquera de Culebra Inc. PO Box 637 Villa Pesquera,
11 Barrio Playa Sardinas Culebra, Puerto Rico.
12

13 It says it is for Miguel Rolón, Nelson Crespo, Carlos Farchette
14 It says, "Request for Interagency Support on Enforcement and
15 Nautical Charting of the Canal Luis Peña Natural Reserve.
16

17 To the Members of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council,
18

19 Greetings from the Culebra Fishermen Association, a nonprofit
20 organization composed of local fishers working to advance
21 sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystem stewardship in Culebra,
22 Puerto Rico.
23

24 We respectfully submit this letter so that Mr. Nelson Crespo, Chair
25 of the Puerto Rico District Advisory Panel, may read it aloud for
26 the record during this Council Meeting.
27

28 Over the past several years, we have actively participated in the
29 review process of the Action Plan for the Collaborative Management
30 of the Canal Luis Peña Natural Reserve 2025 to 2030, which includes
31 priority actions related to enforcement, biodiversity
32 conservation, sustainable use, applied science, and outreach. The
33 ecosystems protected within the Canal Luis Peña Natural Reserve
34 include coral reefs, seagrass beds, and associated habitats that
35 function as nursery areas and refuges for many species managed by
36 the Council. These habitats contribute directly to the
37 productivity of regional fisheries, and its protection aligns with
38 the Essential Fish Habitat conservation objectives under the
39 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.
40

41 Within the CLPNR Action Plan review process, two management actions
42 have consistently been identified as local priorities, essential
43 to protecting the ecological integrity of the reserve and
44 supporting the sustainability of our fisheries:
45

46 Number one. Need for increased enforcement. Members of our fishing
47 community have repeatedly witnessed illegal fishing and poaching
48 occurring within the no-take boundaries of the reserve. These

1 incidents often occur at night, as well as during dawn and dusk,
2 and are frequently associated with vessels arriving from the main
3 island of Puerto Rico. These activities include the illegal capture
4 of species managed by the Council, including queen conch, as well
5 as other reef species. In addition, vessels have been observed
6 anchoring illegally over protected seagrass beds and coral reef
7 habitats, causing damage to sensitive marine ecosystems.

8
9 For this reason, we respectfully request the Council's support to
10 communicate this concern to federal enforcement authorities,
11 including the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and the United States
12 Coast Guard Sector San Juan and to encourage coordinated
13 enforcement joint efforts with the Puerto Rico Department of
14 Natural and Environmental Resources Rangers.

15
16 Number two. Need to include the Canal Luis Peña Natural Reserve
17 boundaries in NOAA Nautical Charts. Another identified priority is
18 the need to improve public awareness and navigational visibility
19 of the reserve's boundaries.

20
21 Visitors and boaters frequently claim they were unaware of the
22 existence or limits of the reserve and its regulations. Many have
23 pointed to the absence of the reserve boundaries on official
24 nautical charts as a reason for entering the area or engaging in
25 prohibited activities. For example, fishing and anchoring directly
26 on sensitive protected ecosystems.

27
28 We therefore respectfully request the Council's support in
29 communicating to the NOAA Office of Coast Survey concerning the
30 importance of incorporating the official polygon and regulations
31 of the CLPNR into NOAA Nautical Charts.

32
33 We understand clear cartographic representation would
34 significantly improve compliance, reduce accidental violations,
35 and assist enforcement personnel in protecting the reserve.
36 Improving chart and regulation visibility would benefit both
37 conservation and navigation safety in the waters surrounding
38 Culebra.

39
40 The CLPNR is a vital ecological refuge that contributes to the
41 recovery of reef ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of
42 fisheries throughout the Puerto Rico archipelago. Strengthening
43 environmental enforcement and charting the reserve boundaries are
44 critical steps to ensure the long-term effectiveness of this
45 important marine conservation area.

46
47 If no action is taken, illegal fishing and anchoring will continue
48 to damage our natural fish nurseries, threatening the future of

1 our fisheries, and undermining the livelihoods and well-being of
2 the people of Culebra, particularly us artisanal fishers who depend
3 directly on healthy marine ecosystems.

4
5 We appreciate the Council's attention to this matter and
6 respectfully request your support in advancing these actions.
7 Thank you for your time and consideration.

8
9 Signed by Nicolás X. Gómez Andújar. Secretary of Asociación
10 Pesquera de Culebra Inc.

11
12 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance.

15
16 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes. Thank you, Nelson. I am already in
17 communication with him by email. I have been providing the
18 information that I have collected over the years on Cayo Martin--
19 on the Reserve of Martin Peña Canal. So, we're in contact, and I'm
20 continuing to help him. Thank you.

21
22 Great guy, by the way.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

25
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to ask for some
27 guidance to make this letter-- I don't know if the staff could
28 help with this. To give a copy of that letter to the enforcement
29 of NOAA and also request Ricardo to bring a copy of this to the
30 rangers that maybe can address better the situation or take action
31 regarding the enforcement that is needed in that area.

32
33 I just want to say also that the Association of Culebra was
34 reestablished in 2025, and they have done a great job with the
35 community. Also, Cabo Rojo helps them a lot, and we share a lot of
36 similar things. So, it's very important because it's not only this
37 situation occurring in the Culebra area, it's practically passing
38 throughout Puerto Rico in the natural resource area. Thank you.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo.

41
42 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Vanessa, gracias for the opportunity.
43 Ricardo, for the record. Nelson, thanks for the information. Please
44 let me know how I can help? Bring me the letter, and I will be
45 sure to take that letter to the Commissioner of DNR in Puerto Rico.

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole?

1 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah, thank you so much. I really appreciated
2 that. I know that we have similar enforcement challenges, and I
3 think it would be really nice if we thought about having, maybe,
4 a larger session rather than just reports on enforcement at a
5 future Council meeting. And we could kind of discuss some pathways
6 forward for these areas that are plagued by enforcement challenges.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more comments for nelson?
9

10 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I also liked that idea of having a session
11 dedicated to the topic. And we can, of course, also share the
12 letter with our enforcement agents.
13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.
15

16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. The letter will be part of the record of
17 this meeting, so it will be available in ISSUU. But, Dr. Angeli's
18 suggestion, we have done it before, and we can do it again. We can
19 have a session addressing enforcement issues, and we can have it
20 as part of a Council meeting. Before or after the Council meeting
21 in, for example, August, we can preplan and have that. And invite
22 Miguel, for example. He's in charge of the Enforcement in NOAA
23 Fisheries. And, of course, somebody from Virgin Islands and someone
24 from Puerto Rico so they can come.
25

26 Also, we to have, given that it will be close to the Council
27 meeting or next to a Council meeting before it, the three Chairs
28 of the DAPs because there are many issues with enforcement. We
29 have done that before, and, actually, we did it with an interagency
30 cooperation in Mayagüez. It was a long time ago.
31

32 We had the Coast Guard, the National Marine Fisheries Services
33 and the local government people there and also the fishers. It was
34 an excellent exercise. We also have the Coast Guard Auxiliary Corp.
35 The majority of people think that everybody knows about the laws
36 and regulations. No.
37

38 Sometimes even the people that enforce the regulation don't know
39 about it. There was an enforcement agent that stopped a fisherman
40 for carrying a fish that was allowed in Puerto Rico because he
41 confused the strawberry grouper with a red hind. So, they called
42 me. And that triggered that meeting that we held in Mayagüez.
43

44 So, the staff will work on this one. And if you still decide, then
45 it will be basically, like maybe half a day or something to address
46 enforcement issues at the next meeting in August.
47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next on the agenda, we have the enforcement

1 reports of Puerto Rico, DNER.

2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, where are we? DNER Enforcement?

4
5 **ENFORCEMENT REPORTS (10 MINUTES EACH)**

6 **PUERTO RICO DNER**

7
8 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to
9 all of you. This is my report. I can shorten the report a lot.

10
11 The DNER rangers cover all the federal areas, waters, but they
12 didn't have any intervention during this period. What they told me
13 was that the activity was very low and no intervention were done
14 in the federal waters during this period. But I will bring you a
15 lot of other interventions that they did have in territorial waters
16 and inland.

17
18 For example, in this period, which is from December 1st, 2025, to
19 March 31st, 2026, 958 interventions were conducted, almost 1,000.
20 Even with the surveillance in place, as I said, none occurred in
21 federal waters.

22
23 Regarding our area, our responsibility, two cases involve
24 violations of the Puerto Rico fishery laws, and 35 were for
25 breaches of fisheries regulations. In the next slide, you can see
26 a comparison among periods. You compare the period that I am
27 presented with the same period last year and with the previous
28 period of this period. And you can see there the two blocks in
29 green are the most important ones in terms of fisheries.

30
31 We had five more interventions than in the last period for the
32 fishery regulation law. I mean, for the fishery regulation. It was
33 a record. Down in the graph, you can see a record of 656
34 interventions in Puerto Rico water navigations and safety laws.
35 So, they are there. The DNER rangers are doing the job, as much as
36 they can.

37
38 In the next slide, you can see pictures from an intervention in
39 Barrio Obrero. That is in Santurce, downtown. And over there, they
40 cracked down on an unauthorized street vending. That was a person
41 that didn't have the permit, licenses, or anything, and he was
42 selling fish. He was doing commercial fishery without any paper.

43
44 On the next one. This one was presented by the news. It's available
45 you can stop that if you want. And you can see there that they
46 intervened with a diver. It wasn't a scuba diver. It was a free
47 diver. It was an old person, as you can see. This person has been
48 doing this for a long time and he was caught with, not only small

1 lobsters, also small queen conch, but he was also using Clorox to
2 catch octopus. Over there, you can see, on the right to the top,
3 there's another intervention with another diver doing the same
4 thing. So, these were two cases out of three cases. The last case,
5 you will see it later. Please, next.

6
7 Okay. Here you can see in Ojo del Buey one fisherman was trapped
8 and result in an illegal migrant. A person that was undocumented
9 in Puerto Rico, he was doing illegal fishery. On the middle, you
10 can see an intervention with snooks. Small snooks, about six months
11 snooks were gathering in that fish market. On the one to the right,
12 you can see an intervention with a person that was selling crabs,
13 land crabs without permits. Next.

14
15 Here to the left, another group of migrants. In this case, they
16 arrested two of them. In that pickup, you can see that they had
17 enough fuel to travel a lot. They said that they were planning to
18 go to Florida. I doubt that. I think they were going back to the
19 Dominican Republic to sell something. I don't know yet what it
20 was.

21
22 In the middle, another person diving, also with the Morey Boogie,
23 as the last two, with small lobsters. That was in Los Machos, in
24 Ceiba, very close to Roosevelt Road. And to the right, in La
25 Pescadería la Robalera, that is in San Juan, yellowtail snapper
26 that were too small to be sold, they ceased that fisherman. Next.

27
28 On this last one, there's a video over there. You don't have to
29 see it now. We don't that much time, but you can see over there an
30 endangered species, right? A nassau grouper entangled in a trammel
31 net that was abandoned. Okay? That one also went into the news.
32 It's available on YouTube. That was caught by the Special Operation
33 Division Unit, and that was in Rincón, with a ranger from Aguadilla
34 also.

35
36 Over there you have many emails if you want to report anything,
37 and the name of the contacts and the telephone numbers. Do you
38 have any questions?

39 40 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson.

43
44 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the record.
45 So, Ricardo, I have to recognize that since you have been involved
46 in all this that the DNER rangers are improving and doing a great
47 job. I know that is because of you.

1 But, sadly, regarding the trammel nets, it's so sad, and
2 frustrating to hear this news. I'm sure it's not an isolated
3 incident. I have been raising this concern for a long time without
4 any results. Although, I maintain that the trammel net is a
5 technique that if fished correctly would be successful,
6 unfortunately, I have never seen it used responsibly.

7
8 The local government requires that when any type of net is used,
9 it must be under constant supervision. That doesn't happen because
10 the fishing gear is thrown out and, if we are lucky, are retrieved
11 the next day. But really, it is left for two, three days, or even
12 more, killing a large number of fish and other species that then
13 have to be thrown away because they are rotten, causing great
14 damage. And on many occasion, I have shown the photos and videos
15 that a fisherman sent to me.

16
17 However, I recognize that this is also a great source of income
18 from many fishermen. This fishing method have been prohibited for
19 many years in federal waters, and now we have an excellent
20 opportunity to make compatibility regulation and offer an
21 honorable way out for fishermen who use this fishing method just
22 like fishing with traps, diving, maybe a buyback or something that.
23 Maybe we can coordinate that with Mr. Piñeiro. I spoke to him, and
24 he said that maybe he can evaluate something, to do something and
25 get rid of this dangerous gear.

26
27 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Nelson, thanks for your concern and for your
28 letter. Thanks for letting me know. Yes, the work of the Puerto
29 Rico DNER rangers is not because of me. I am only the messenger.
30 I do some pushing, but they are doing a lot, because they have new
31 personnel, they have more equipment, more materials.

32
33 I asked that question. Why the difference? Why are you doing more
34 now than a lot of years ago? And they told me that they were also
35 doing a lot of new plannings. So, it is because of them. But
36 anyway, thanks for your concern and for your suggestion.

37
38 In the case of the trammel nets or any nets, I will do my best if
39 the Council or if the fisherman sends me an email or a letter
40 asking for compatibility or to control more the nets. I will do my
41 best to take that to the Secretary and do something about it. I
42 agree with you.

43
44 Thanks again.

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sure. Saint Croix was successful in doing a ban
47 on gill and trammel nets, because of the buyback program that was
48 developed, and it worked out successfully. Ricardo?

1
2 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. I have one question. I don't see any of
3 the law enforcers from NOAA or-- Today, I don't see the person
4 from NOAA or the Coast Guard. I have been trying to get in touch
5 with them.

6
7 Ah, Coast Guard is here.

8
9 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Cristina Olán, for the record. Coast
10 Guard is here. Her name is Kayla Ishida. She is in zoom. Also, Mat
11 Walia from NOAA OLE, he was connected, but he had to leave some
12 minutes ago.

13
14 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** So, my question is, are we okay with the law
15 enforcement by NOAA in the Caribbean? Are we okay with-- Do we
16 have the people, or has anything changed? Are we okay with the
17 personnel of law enforcement from NOAA working in Puerto Rico and
18 the Caribbean, or do we not have the people yet? Is there any
19 changes?

20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. That's something that we have been discussing
22 for the last forty years. We only-- I'm serious about it. The
23 Southeast Region have, let's say, a minimum amount of money they
24 receive every year, and they cover from Texas all the way to the
25 Carolinas. We were able to secure, an enforcement agent in the
26 U.S. Virgin Island some time ago, and then another one in Puerto
27 Rico. Now we only have one, and that's Miguel Borges. That's why
28 we've been trying to reach him.

29
30 That's been a constant issue that we have. The latest that I
31 participated in that meeting some years ago was to reauthorize the
32 memorandum of understanding between Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin
33 Islands and the federal government. Through that memorandum of
34 understanding, for example, in the case of Puerto Rico, they
35 received \$140, or something like that, \$140,000. And they were
36 supposed to deputize the rangers.

37
38 But at that time, there was something that happened. I don't want
39 to-- it was an unfortunate incident that happened. But to give you
40 an idea, there were a lot of people passing as enforcement agents
41 from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and they were not. That
42 created a problem, and the Secretary decided to do away with the
43 memorandum of understanding at that time.

44
45 So, probably now Puerto Rico can revisit that part and see if the
46 memorandum of understanding can be activated again with the NOAA
47 enforcement agency. The same goes for the Virgin Islands.

1 In the case of enforcement, actually, I have a letter from Paúco,
2 Mr. Edwin Font, a fisherman from Puerto Rico. He wrote a letter in
3 2019. And he is wondering what happened. Have they done anything?
4

5 He was talking about many other things about the lack of
6 enforcement and compatibility regulation, especially in Bajo de
7 Sico. Because in the case of Bajo de Sico, we have Puerto Rico and
8 the federal government, jurisdiction both at the same time.
9 Sometimes when you are in Puerto Rico, you have zero regulations.
10 When you are in the federal zone you have another. And he was
11 asking for compatible regulations and everything, to make sure
12 that the fisher understand which regulation applies to Bajo de
13 Sico.
14

15 So, he's asking whether the Council has done anything with it, and
16 what is the status of that request that he made some years ago. He
17 said that most fishers currently use GPS and sonar to find the
18 place and locate the area. But, at that time he told us that
19 sometimes they are intervened by the Coast Guard. That becomes
20 very difficult because, "Yeah. I didn't know where I was." "Well,
21 tough luck. You are in violation."
22

23 So, he wanted the Council to revisit that part whenever possible.
24 So, probably this is one issue that we can get to the attention of
25 the group at the August meeting that will be addressed in only the
26 enforcement session. We have a special enforcement session at the
27 next meeting in August.
28

29 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
30

31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Cristina, por favor, ponla un ISSUU como que fue
32 sometida en esta reunión, please. I mean, sorry. Cristina can put
33 it in ISSUU as resubmitted at this meeting.
34

35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we have U.S.V.I. DPNR. I don't believe
36 that they're present.
37

38 U.S. Coast Guard.
39

40 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We have Kayla. I'm going to give
41 her permission to speak, and also, I'm going to share her
42 presentation. Kayla, can you hear us?
43

44 Kayla, can you hear us? Cristina Olán, for the record. I sent her
45 a chat, but I didn't get any answer. So, I have information that
46 Mat Walia shared with us before he left the zoom meeting, can we
47 share that. Mr.
48

1 Mr. Chair. Is it okay to do that? Before Mr. Walia left the zoom,
2 he sent us an email with this information. Report a violation.
3 Please, contact NOAA's Office Of Law Enforcement if you see a
4 possible violation of federal marine resource law. There is a phone
5 number 800-853-1964, and the email address.

6
7 Kayla-- I'm going to admit Kayla again. She was having trouble
8 with the connection.

9
10 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Hi. Good afternoon, everyone. Can you hear me now?

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

13
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Thank you.

15
16 **U.S. COAST GUARD**

17
18 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Thank you. Sorry about that. I had to switch
19 computers. I guess it wasn't working on the first one. But this is
20 Lieutenant Kayla Ishida with sector San Juan, U.S. Coast Guard. We
21 cover both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

22
23 So, I just want to highlight some of our enforcement operations
24 over the last couple of months. First of all is the Operation Clean
25 Catch, which took an effect in December 4th through 5th, so kind of
26 concurrently with the last meeting. This was a joint operation
27 with both NOAA, Coast Guard, and then Puerto Rico's DNER as well,
28 both with surface assets and then also one of our helicopters
29 providing boarding targets predominantly on the West Coast of
30 Puerto Rico focused on the three closure areas. With that, we
31 conducted 18 boardings. No, federal fisheries violations, one
32 safety violation. But this just highlights some of the compliance
33 that was going on the West Coast of Puerto Rico, and it was a great
34 opportunity to work with our DNER partners. So, really appreciate
35 the collaboration on that side.

36
37 In addition, to that operation, while our cutters are out doing
38 other law enforcement operations, they're also doing boardings of
39 opportunities. So, one that was highlighted was the Coast Guard
40 cutter, Joséph Tezanos, was doing a routine patrol on the West
41 Coast of Puerto Rico, and they identified a vessel that was
42 actively fishing in one of the closed areas. With that, they issued
43 that boat a violation and also educated them on some of the federal
44 fishery fishing regulations from that.

45
46 We also conducted a Caribbean LMR boarding officer training course.
47 So, that's a Coast Guard course that our boarding officers go
48 through to learn about species ID, the federal regulations, and

1 then different boarding procedures for that.

2
3 Moving forward, what we want to do is continue doing Operation
4 Clean Catch as an annual operation to enforce those West Coast
5 closed areas and then also increase our boat forces unit in the
6 Virgin Islands to increase their presence in the closure areas
7 around there as well. But that's all I have from the Coast Guard.
8 Open to any questions you may have.
9

10 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions for U.S. Coast Guard? Vanessa.
13

14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you. Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. I
15 just want to put one comment and thank you for the way that you
16 approach our fishermen. It's good to hear from them when they come
17 back to pier about the good way that the Coast Guard always makes
18 their boarding and how respectful all your people are. I just want
19 to ask, and this is addressed also to the people from NOAA, is
20 there any way that once the fishermen gets the first letter or the
21 communication when they get stopped and have any situation, that
22 these letters that are addressed to the Puerto Rican fishermen
23 come translated in both languages.
24

25 Because usually, those letters come in English. Our fishermen don't
26 understand or read English. So, practically, they just put it on
27 the table or leave it in the car. When they receive the second one
28 with the bill, that's when they are running, asking for help to
29 translate and all that.
30

31 I have to say that all the legal people have are very friendly
32 with us when we ask for translation and all that. Also, Miguel
33 Borges has helped a lot with that, by bringing the document if
34 they find the way to do it by mail. But it's something that is
35 taking more time than it is supposed to, and it's because of the
36 barrier of the language.
37

38 So, is there any way that you can bring this message, that in the
39 case of Puerto Rico, when they send the letter, the first letter
40 notification should be already in both languages so that, for
41 example, in the fisherman association we can help them give their
42 answer in the least time possible, and don't wait until the case
43 is already on review, and just receive the bill for big amounts of
44 money. Thank you.
45

46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Yes. I asked Diana to read for the record,
47 the report that they sent from the OLE Office. This is the first
48 quarter of 2026 regarding CFMC. Enforcement intervention is very

1 quick.

2
3 Diana, can you just go ahead and read it?

4
5 NOAA FISHERIES OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
6

7 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Sure. Number of incidents by primary
8 law, regulation, program, and location Quarter 1, 2026. There were
9 endangers for the endangered species act, in Puerto Rico there was
10 one, and in U.S.V.I. there was one. For highly migratory species,
11 one for Puerto Rico. And then-- I'm sorry. Zero for international
12 trade. That's about it. Thank you.
13

14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The full report will be sent to Cristina as part
15 of this meeting.
16

17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Moving on. Advisory Body Membership.
18

19 **ADVISORY BODIES MEMBERSHIPS**
20

21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yesterday, when we were discussing this at the
22 closed session, Dr. Angeli asked for the staff to put them on the
23 screen so we can read, for the record, the names of the people who
24 are going to be reappointed for each one of the advisory bodies.
25 Then Diana will address each one of them.
26

27 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. For Puerto Rico, I was requested
28 to contact-- No. Hold on. ¿tú lo puedes subir, Cristina, ¿para que
29 se vea completa? Thank you. --Roberto Silva.
30

31 Roberto Silva, said that he would like to continue, and that he
32 would participate in the next meetings. He is not for reappointment
33 until April 2027. So, we are just, I mean, keeping him in the DAP.
34 The other one was Genius Fernández. Genius is going to be replaced
35 by Roberto Sabater, who will be joining the DAP after he exits the
36 Council.
37

38 So, we would need a motion to appoint Roberto Sabater to the Puerto
39 Rico DAP.
40

41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So, I want to put the motion to-- Miguel?
42

43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The motion will be to appoint Roberto Sabater
44 once he finishes his term as a Council member in August 2026. So,
45 we need a second.
46

47 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Miguel, for the language.
48

1 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second.
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** All in favor, say "aye," Mr. Chairman.
4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All In favor, say aye.
6
7 **GROUP:** Aye.
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? *Motion carries.*
10
11 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Cristina, can you put the Saint Thomas
12 DAP panel chart?
13
14 For Saint Thomas DAP there's only one vacant seat. That would be
15 it.
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Do we need to reappoint anybody at this time.
18
19 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** No. We don't need to reappoint anybody
20 at this time. Hey, Carlos.
21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
23
24 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras for the record. So, I'm trying to
25 figure out where the vacancy came from.
26
27 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** It was a vacancy that was still there.
28 I mean, it was not addressed. Somebody was going to look for a
29 person to submit, but nobody did.
30
31 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Oh, I think it was someone from Saint John at the
32 last Council meeting that was chosen in the after meeting, and
33 that person never came onboard. Is that-- am I correct?
34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.
36
37 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Right? So, do I go and look for someone for the
38 next for the August meeting to fill that seat? Okay. Thank you.
39
40 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Cristina, can you please put in Saint
41 Croix? Thank you.
42
43 Okay. For Saint Croix, there's an open seat from a person that was
44 appointed and died. Daniel Santiago. And, also, there's two open
45 seats in Saint Croix. No reappointments needed at this time.
46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Also, yesterday, we said, usually what we
48 do is that whenever we have a vacancy, the Council members and/or

1 the DAP Chairs, they look for a substitution. If by August we don't
2 have that, then we should publish and advertise that there's a
3 vacancy in x panel so we can fill that vacancy.
4

5 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Next is the is the Outreach and
6 Education Advisory Panel, Cristina. Uh-huh. Okay.
7

8 For the Outreach and Education Advisory Panel, we are going to
9 have Olivia Walton, who is going to be replacing Leandry. And then
10 Nick Smilley will be for Kim Iverson from the Southeast Atlantic
11 Council. And then we also need to reappoint del Delmis Alicea,
12 Jannette Ramos, Ruth Gómez, Vilmarie Román, and Emily Muehlstein.
13 So, we would need a motion to reappoint those people.
14

15 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So, I want to submit the motion for the
16 reappointment and the appointment of the list that was just read.
17 Cristina, if you can put the motion on there.
18

19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, motion to reappoint the members that Diana
20 submitted.
21

22 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Do you need me to repeat them? Delmis
23 Alicea, Jannette Ramos, Ruth Gómez, Vilmarie Román, and Emily
24 Muehlstein.
25

26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We already-- there are people who are ex-
27 officio, so you don't have to reappoint those people.
28

29 Olivia Walton will be substituting the lady who was in Saint Croix
30 as liaison, Leandry. Nick Smilley is substituting the lady who
31 retired from South Atlantic. The motion that we need now is to
32 reappoint Delmis Alicea, Jannette Ramos, Ruth Gómez, Vilmarie
33 Román, and Emily Muehlstein for another term to the Advisory Panel
34 of Outreach and Education.
35

36 Y dale con poner la vaina ahí, no lo tiene que poner ahí, pero ya.
37 ¿ah? Okay. So, somebody says, "so move." And then, "Second."
38

39 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So moved.
40

41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Falta el SSC. ¿Qué más? Carlos, ¿ya votaron por
42 la moción?
43

44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No.
45

46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Pues di, "all in favor, say, 'Aye'"
47

48 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Wait. I'm sorry.

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Esperate. Diantre.

3
4 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Gerson needs to be reappointed too.

5
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Ese es en Santa Cruz.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. Right. That's what I'm-- I need a second for
9 the motion.

10
11 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Seconds.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Have a motion by Blanchard , seconded by Daniel
14 Matos for the reappointments of the OEAP. All in favor, say aye.

15
16 **GROUP:** Aye.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstention? Hearing none the motion
19 carries.

20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And then we have Gerson Martínez. He's a Council
22 member, but he's also-- I mean, he's a DAP member, but he's also
23 a member of the Outreach and Education, and we need to reappoint
24 him for another term. Do you agree to be reappointed?

25
26 **GERSON N. MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez. Yes, sir.

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. So, we need a motion to reappoint Gerson
29 Martínez-- Thank you, Diana. --for another term as a member of the
30 Outreach and Education Advisory Panel.

31
32 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Puerto Rico motions Gerson for this
33 position.

34
35 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Motion by Daniel, seconded by Vanessa, for
38 reappointing Gerson Martínez to OEAP. All in favor, say aye.

39
40 **GROUP:** Aye.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstention? Hearing none. Motion
43 carries.

44
45 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Okay. For the SSC, it's to reappoint
46 all members of the SSC. But Skyler. I forgot the name.

47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Except one.

1
2 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Except one. Yeah. Gracias. Skyler
3 Sagarese.

4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Dr. Skyler Rose Sagarese is already appointed.
6 Her time expires in 2027. So, at this time-- Sorry. So, at this
7 time we to reappoint all the SSC members.

8
9 Elizabeth Kadison, Jorge García Sais, Richard Appeldoorn, J.J.
10 Cruz-Motta, Todd Gedamke, Michelle Schärer. We better appoint by
11 Vance Vicente, otherwise, we won't know who's Chair. Walter Keithly
12 and Tarsila Seara and Jason Cope. All of them expressed that they
13 are willing to continue for another term in the SSC Caribbean.

14
15 So, moved and then second?

16
17 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So move.

18
19 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say aye.

22
23 **GROUP:** Aye.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstention? Hearing none, motion
26 carries.

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** TAP.

29
30 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Cristina, can you put the TAP table,
31 please?

32
33 For the TAP table, we have a vacant seat, which would be Álida
34 Ortiz. And then to reappoint all other members, Juan Cruz-Motta,
35 Kevin McCarthy, Edwin Cruz Rivera, Sennai Habtes, Stacey Williams,
36 Tarsila Seara, and Orian Tzadik. So, we would need a motion for
37 that.

38
39 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second, Vanessa Ramírez.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say aye.

42
43 **GROUP:** Aye.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
46 carries.

47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And then we encourage anybody who has a substitute

1 for Dr. Álida Ortiz to bring it to the next meeting in August so
2 we can consider that person for a term at the TAP meeting at the
3 TAP panel.

4
5 Dr. Álida Ortiz, because of health issues, she retired from Council
6 activities, TAP, the EBFM. Yeah. Okay. Nicknamed TAP. So, if
7 anybody has somebody, please, send us a note where you can contact
8 the Chair Sennai Habtes so that we can consider them at the next
9 meeting in August. That's it. Are we finished, Diana?

10
11 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** We're finished.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So now we have an Update on the Queen Conch
14 Status Review.

15
16 **OTHER BUSINESS**

17 **RED SNAPPER AQUACULTURE EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT APPLICATION**
18 **SUBMITTED TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL BY**
19 **CULTIMAR TECHNOLOGIES-NOAA**
20

21 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I actually had two topics I
22 wanted to cover under other business. Can I start with Cultivar?
23 Just because I have it up first. Okay.

24
25 Yesterday, we published a fishery bulletin requesting comments on
26 an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) that we
27 received from Cultivar Technologies Inc, and that's for activities
28 related to establishing a dedicated broodstock population of
29 american red snapper at a hatchery research facility in Arecibo,
30 Puerto Rico. This was one of the projects that was on the
31 presentation that Martha shared with us earlier today. Cultivar
32 was at that aquaculture workshop that we had here just recently.

33
34 So, the exempted fishing permit that they're requesting us to issue
35 would authorize them to collect 200 sexually mature fish from
36 federal waters off the Atlantic Coast of Florida and transport
37 them to the research facility in Arecibo in recirculating holding
38 tanks on a chartered research vessel. The primary objective of
39 their project is to establish a genetically diverse breeding
40 population of red snapper for use in studying their biology,
41 physiology, and aquaculture potential.

42
43 The fish would be maintained at the hatchery in Arecibo and would
44 not be sold or transferred. They're asking for the EFP to be
45 effective from May 1 through March 2027. The comment period on the
46 EFP is open through May 21, so it would not be issued as early as
47 May 1, but could be issued, maybe by June, July, sometime this
48 summer if we approve it. The EFP would not include any exemptions

1 for Caribbean fisheries regulations because the collection will
2 actually occur in South Atlantic water. So, they're requesting
3 exemptions from south Atlantic Council regulations, not from
4 Caribbean regulations.

5
6 But because the fish will be transported to and maintained in
7 Arecibo, we wanted to advise you of the opportunity to review the
8 project proposal and comment on the request for the EFP. And like
9 I said that the comment period on that is open through May 21. We
10 did put out a fishery bulletin yesterday with information on how
11 you can comment. If you guys did not receive that and someone would
12 comment, we could share that with you.

13 14 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a question real quick. Is this a land-
17 based hatchery or a cage?

18
19 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** It's a land-based hatchery. What's the best way,
20 María, we can share the fishery bulletin with them?

21
22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I will share the fishery bulletin with
23 Cristina, and she can distribute it to Council members and DAP
24 members and post it in their social media.

25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Thank you.

27
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mhmm.

29
30 **CEDRIC TAQUÍN:** Are american red snappers over here.

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep.

33 34 **Update on Queen Conch Status Review—NOAA Fisheries**

35
36 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Any other questions on that?

37
38 Okay. The other update I wanted to provide, so in March we asked
39 the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to conduct a comprehensive
40 scientific review of the queen conch population to ensure the
41 listing decision that we made in February 2024 is informed by the
42 best available science consistent with the administration's
43 Executive Order to restore gold standard science. The review that
44 they're doing will reexamine existing data that we used in the
45 original status review in light of information and questions that
46 we received by stakeholders and academics since the species was
47 originally listed.

1 It will also integrate any new data from peer reviewed literature
2 and NOAA funded studies that we have obtained since the listing.

3
4 We'll look at both biological factors like life history,
5 reproductive abundance and density, and population connectivity,
6 and also look at fishery management factors impacting the status
7 of the population. And the results of this study are intended to
8 inform the upcoming five-year status review that we'll do on the
9 population.

10
11 That concludes both my updates.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any questions for Heather? Okay. Hearing
14 none. Thank you, Heather.

15
16 A public comment period. Is it María?

17
18 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**
19

20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mr. Chair, before, before the public comment
21 period, there was a presentation that was requested About Fishery
22 Aggregating Devices, that was requested to be given at this Council
23 meeting. The Council staff prepared the presentation, but I don't
24 know if you want to leave that for the upcoming meeting for August.
25 Just for the record, if that can be clarified.

26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. That's what we agreed yesterday. So, for
28 the record, the FAD presentation will be done in August.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, that concludes the 189th Caribbean
31 Fishery Management Council Meeting. Nobody. Nobody online? Okay.
32 Yeah.

33
34 ¡Oh, sí! We have Vanessa.

35
36 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez now as a
37 member of the Fishermen association I just want to put in the
38 record that I asked Daniel Matos from DNER.

39
40 We have been talking a lot about spiny lobster in Puerto Rico. So,
41 I requested yesterday, and thank you, Daniel, for bringing the
42 information today before this meeting ended, about the landings
43 for 2024. And the numbers show that 94% of the landings were in
44 state waters. So, only 6% of the number that we have, because it
45 is the only data that we have. Only 6% of that was in federal
46 waters.

47
48 So, from the perspective of the fishermen's, commercial

1 fishermen's, and as we stand as the number one fish market in
2 Puerto Rico, we ask for the Councils to be part of this process
3 for the next August meeting, and please show us and let the spiny
4 lobster be free. Thank you.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alrighty. And I want to thank Alberto Fort, our
7 IT guy, for all the work that he does here, and Cristina and Liajay
8 for all the hard work they do managing our internet stuff. And for
9 María and Sarah for all the hard work they do with NOAA.

10
11 Also, I want to thank Vanessa for keeping me in line with my
12 tracking the names of the people that had the questions. Thank
13 you. And, Roberto Sabater, it was a pleasure meeting you. Don't
14 become a stranger. Come by and visit.

15
16 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I would like to thank all of you for being part
17 of this. I did not know what this was when I was asked to be in it
18 by Elena and Wigi and those people that I helped during the
19 problems that we have with some laws in Puerto Rico, especially
20 the 1014. But I decided that since I always try to find new ways
21 and new things, I investigated it. I am very happy that I joined
22 this group.

23
24 I would have never thought about the decisions that control the
25 fisheries, and I imagine many other things, were taken with such
26 a team of people here behind me and the people in front. It's a
27 real combination of the ones in the water and the ones in the lab.
28 I have learned a lot.

29
30 It's too bad that I'm not as young as I used to be, and I don't
31 function as good as before. I'm having trouble capturing everything
32 that is being spoken, and I'm sad to say that I have to leave. But
33 to me, it was fantastic. It was a real pleasure to be part of this
34 team.

35
36 Thank you very much.

37
38 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Roberto, for your service, and I really
39 appreciate all the things that you've helped me, especially from
40 the recreational sector, every time that I have any requests or
41 question about that. So, I also hope that someday we can have a
42 lady in there, and you will be a nice coach. So, keep in touch,
43 and I'm happy that you're going to be in the DAP. Thank you.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Roberto, from our part, it's been a pleasure
46 working with you, knowing with you. Now I know that you are the
47 father of Dr. Sabater, the one that we knew. So, you have been a
48 pleasure, and you have friends here. Whenever you swing by or need

1 to say hello, we are of your pleasure.

2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

4
5 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Roberto, I really appreciate
6 that from day one you treated us as friends, and we value that a
7 lot. So, we share your trust and some confidence. And it's really
8 good.

9
10 I appreciate the concerns you bring to us, your help and your
11 support for the fishing community. We're not going to get rid of
12 you. You know you're going to be part of the DAP. So, we are going
13 to see you around. Thank you for your service, Roberto.

14
15 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Roberto. From Julian. You know? When I first met
16 you, I didn't know what to expect. And at the first meeting you
17 sat in, you couldn't vote with us yet, but you still had a lot of
18 questions.

19
20 And over the three years working with you, it's been a great
21 pleasure. You gave the fishers of Saint Thomas/Saint John, and
22 Saint Croix a lot of help. You were there when we needed you. But
23 one thing I respect you a lot for is you didn't vote on what we
24 asked you to vote unless you understood what was going on, and you
25 always had an interest in learning what the fisherman had to say.
26 Sitting at the table or outside when we're gathering together after
27 the meeting or in breaks, you would come and say, "well, explain
28 this to me." And I really want to thank you.

29
30 It was a great pleasure working with you, and I look forward to
31 seeing you at some of these meetings as a member of the DAP and
32 continuing to work close with you. Again, thank you for your
33 service.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, that concludes our 189th Caribbean
36 Fisheries Management Council Meeting. Meeting adjourned. It's
37 05:28pm.

38
39 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 22, 2026.)