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[PAGE 24](#): Develop a framework action to adjust the ACLs and other management reference points for Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix queen triggerfish based on the SEDAR 80 stock assessments and the ABC recommendations from the SSC. [The motion carried on page 27.](#)

[PAGE 102](#): The Council moves to select Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative under Framework Amendment 3 under the Puerto Rico Fishery Management Plan. [The motion carried on page 103.](#)

[PAGE 104](#): The Council moves to approve Framework Amendment 3 and submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to the Framework Amendment 3. We deem the regulations presented by staff at this Council meeting as necessary and appropriate for implementing the amendment. We give the Council Chair the authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule as necessary and appropriate for implementing Framework Amendment 3. [The motion carried on page 109.](#)

[Page 115](#): The Council moves to approve Amendment 3 to the FMPs and submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to the Amendment 3. We deem the regulations presented by staff at this Council meeting as necessary and appropriate for implementing the amendment. We give the Council chair the authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule as necessary and appropriate for implementing Amendment 3. [The motion carried on page 118.](#)

1 **CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**
2 **184th REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**
3 **HYBRID MEETING**
4 **ISLA VERDE BEACH RESORT**
5 **CAROLINA, PUERTO RICO**
6

7 APRIL 23-24, 2024
8

9 The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened at the Isla Verde
10 Beach Resort in Carolina, Puerto Rico on Tuesday morning, April
11 23, 2024, and was called to order at 9:03 A.M. by the Council
12 Chairman Carlos Farchette.
13

14 **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**
15

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, good morning, everyone. We're going to get
17 started here.
18

19 Okay. Good morning. Welcome everyone to the 184th Caribbean Fishery
20 Management Council meeting being held in San Juan, Puerto Rico,
21 April 23, 2024. We're going to start with a roll call.
22

23 I'm going to start with Cristina on my left.
24

25 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Good morning. Cristina Olán,
26 Council Staff.
27

28 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Liajay Rivera, Council Staff.
29

30 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Buenos días. Graciela García-Moliner,
31 Council Staff.
32

33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Buenos días. María López, NOAA Fisheries.
34

35 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Buenos días. James Kreglo, Saint Thomas Council
36 member.
37

38 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Good morning. Jean-Pierre Oriol, Saint
39 Thomas Council Member.
40

41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Buenos días. Good morning. Ricardo López,
42 Puerto Rico DNR.
43

44 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Good morning. Vanessa Ramírez, Vice Chair.
45

46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Chair.
47

48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Morning. Miguel Rolón, Council staff.

1
2 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** Good morning. Diana Martino, Council Staff.
3
4 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Good morning. Andy Strelcheck, Regional
5 Administrator, NOAA Fisheries.
6
7 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Good morning. Kate Zamboni, NOAA's Office
8 of General Counsel.
9
10 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Buenos días. Roberto Sabater, Council member.
11
12 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Buenos días. María Irizarry, Council
13 Staff.
14
15 **SENNAI HABTES:** Good morning. Sennai Habtes, EBFM TAP Chair, and
16 Bureau Chief of Fisheries, DPNR, Fish and Wildlife.
17
18 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Good morning. Nicole Angeli, U.S. Virgin Islands
19 Division of Fish and Wildlife Director.
20
21 **PATRICK P. O'SHAUGHNESSY:** Good morning. Pat O'Shaughnessy, Office
22 of Law Enforcement, NOAA.
23
24 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Good morning, everybody. Miguel Borges, NOAA Office
25 of Law Enforcement.
26
27 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries
28 Science Center.
29
30 **ADYAN RÍOS:** Bueno Diaz, Adyan Ríos, Southeast Fisheries Science
31 Center.
32
33 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Good morning. Brent Stoffle, Applied Fisheries
34 Anthropologist, Southeast Fisheries Science Center.
35
36 **VANCE VICENTE:** Vance Vicente, SSC Chair.
37
38 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning, everyone. Julia Magras, DAP Chair,
39 Saint Thomas/Saint John.
40
41 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair,
42 Puerto Rico.
43
44 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, DAP Chair,
45 Saint Croix, Virgin Islands.
46
47 **MARTHA PRADA:** Good morning, everyone. Martha Prada, Caribbean
48 Fishery Management Council Liaison.

1
2 **JENNIFER LEE:** Good morning. Jennifer Lee, Southeast Regional
3 Office, Protected Resources.
4
5 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos-Caraballo,
6 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
7
8 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico
9 Fisheries Liaison.
10
11 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ:** Good morning. Liandry de la Cruz, Fisheries
12 Liaison, Port Sampler, Fish and Wildlife.
13
14 **LEIGH FLETCHER:** Good morning. Leigh Fletcher, Bioimpact.
15
16 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Jannette Ramos-García,
17 Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Member.
18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Next on the agenda, yeah,
20 adoption of the agenda. Oh, I'm sorry. We have got to do people
21 online.
22
23 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. We have people online on the list
24 here. Guillermo Cordero, interpreter, Alida Ortiz Sotomayor,
25 Cynthia Grace-McCaskey, David Behringer, Elizabeth Van Deren, Jack
26 McGovern, Jesús River-Hernández, Julie, Kiara Matías, Matt
27 Damiano, Nicole Greaux, Rachel Banton, and Sarah Stephenson. Let's
28 see if there is somebody else. Yes. There is Nikhil Mehta, and
29 Sarah Stephenson again. Let's see if we have other names. No. We
30 don't have any. Oh, Edward. Edward Glazier.

31
32 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

33 **CONSIDERATION OF 183RD COUNCIL MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION**

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. So, next on the agenda is the
36 adoption of the agenda. Any corrections, additions to the agenda?
37 Hearing none, somebody wants to make the motion to accept the
38 agenda as written.

39
40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Motion to accept agenda.

41
42 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Second.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, a motion made by Vanessa Ramirez, seconded
45 by Jean-Pierre Oriol to accept the agenda as written. Next is a
46 consideration of the 183rd Council meeting verbatim minute,
47 verbatim transcription. Any corrections, comments? Hearing none,
48 we need a motion to accept the verbatim minutes as written.

1
2 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Motion to accept verbatim.
3

4 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Second.
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Vanessa, seconded by Jean-Pierre Oriol
7 to accept the verbatim minutes as written. Following on the agenda
8 is the Executive Director's Report. Miguel?
9

10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**
11

12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't really have
13 anything new to report because we are still waiting for actions by
14 NOAA Fisheries. So, we'll inform in August about the budget and
15 other issues that we are working on.
16

17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Miguel. Next on the agenda, we have
18 Vance Vicente with the SSC report.
19

20 **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT**
21

22 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, all.
23 Thanks for the invitation. I will provide a summary of our first
24 2024 SSC meeting, which was conducted between April 9th and April
25 11th.
26

27 On the first day of the meeting, we had Adyan Ríos and Kyle Shertzer
28 presenting the Southeast Data Assessment Report for the U.S. Virgin
29 Island queen triggerfish, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and also, Saint
30 Croix. Regarding the SEDAR U.S.V.I. queen triggerfish, U.S.V.I.
31 Saint Thomas/Saint John and Saint Croix, these are my notes
32 regarding the data that was used for the models. The data used in
33 the SEDAR 80 models included, one, the commercial landings, both
34 trap landings and dive landings. Some limited information from the
35 Trip Interview Program length samples. Third, the National Coral
36 Reef Monitoring Program, the Reef Visual Census or RVC length data,
37 which was also used to construct an index of relative abundance.
38 The terminal year for all assessment models.
39

40 Ah. Ea rayos. Sorry, I was looking at my own screen. I was-- Okay.
41 You can keep on going down, please, for the-- Hold on there. Okay.
42 Yeah. That's a summary of the data that was used for the models.
43

44 Next slide.
45

46 For the stock status. The stock assessments were not able to
47 estimate the overfishing status for the Saint Croix or Saint
48 Thomas/Saint John queen triggerfish. Thus, their status remains

1 unknown. But each model was able to estimate short-term harvest
2 levels that would prevent overfishing, that is the overfishing
3 limit, OFL, by assuming, which we don't know, that the future
4 recruitment will continue at recent levels. Number four, both Saint
5 Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John queen triggerfish, for both, the
6 models determined that overfishing is not occurring.

7
8 Regarding the acceptable biological catch, we were mandated to
9 present to the Council for their consideration. After a discussion
10 of the uncertainties that exist in the model, the SSC agreed to
11 set ABCs for the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas and Saint John queen
12 triggerfish stocks using the Tier 3b. Okay? This is for data poor
13 populations. And under Tier 3b, the ABC is determined from the
14 overfishing limit as buffered to account for scientific
15 uncertainty. ABC was a buffer times the OFL, where the buffer must
16 be less than 0.9.

17
18 The SSC members accepted the framework, the reference model, that
19 it is highly constrained and that there is a lot of uncertainty.
20 The general integrated modeling framework of Stock Synthesis 3,
21 which was the model that was used, is an acceptable and flexible
22 framework for the current and future applications of data from
23 queen triggerfish. Two, the current data, life history (both
24 determined through previous meetings), and stock assessment, as
25 reviewed by the SSC, represent the best scientific information
26 available, which are useful for management. Third, there are many
27 sources of uncertainty in this highly constrained stock
28 assessment, as I said before, that need consideration in future
29 assessment and current discussions on setting catch limits. Four,
30 several issues regarding research recommendation, which are listed
31 below, that needs strong consideration in future stock
32 assessments.

33
34 So, next slide. Research recommendations.

35
36 Okay. Research recommendations regarding the data. Two that are
37 very important. All are important, but two that I wanted to point
38 out is that we need to document the discards. We know that there's
39 discards occurring in both islands, but we don't have any specific
40 or enough data. So therefore, we recommend documenting discards
41 and continue collecting gear specific commercial landings.
42 Second, we need to collect and investigate recreational data, which
43 we know is significant, but it has not been documented. That's a
44 big gap.

45
46 Third, increase the number of port sample length measurements.
47 Continue fishery independent survey work. Continue examination of
48 growth, stock demographic studies, and connectivity patterns.

1 Consider an economic index concerning the decline in the landings
2 and effort. Investigating implicit assumptions about recruitment
3 signal, considering variability in size at age. Evaluate bin size
4 coarseness and consider looking at monthly trends. Consider if a
5 fishery independent recruitment index, that is in mature
6 individuals, are feasible, given protracted tropical reproductive
7 seasons and plasticity.

8
9 The assessment research recommendations are, one, investigate the
10 high steepness as related to connectivity and reproductive
11 compensation assumptions. Two, explore a multi-area assessment or
12 MSE, which is a Management Strategy Evaluation, considering
13 uncertainty in local versus external recruitment. Incorporate age
14 and grow data directly into the model to estimate growth and
15 propagate uncertainty. And revisit initial catch assumptions and
16 unknown recreational and historical catch.

17
18 The SSC members suggested that the ABC control rule chosen during
19 the SSC meeting is a precautionary approach that absorbs some of
20 the uncertainty. This comment was made in response to a short
21 presentation given by Matt Damiano on the robustness of an F_{MSY}
22 proxy based on a spawning potential ratio, SPR, of 0.4 or 40% to
23 nonstationary in recruitment. Another SSC member provided some
24 general caution against reducing the complexity of the current
25 assessment model framework moving forward, to avoid additional
26 strong assumptions that more simplistic models will require.

27
28 There was a motion that the SSC moves to accept the catch at FSPR
29 40 as the ABC for 2024. And those numbers are the following. The
30 ABC for Saint Thomas/Saint John for the queen triggerfish is 97,809
31 pounds. The ABC for Saint Croix is 18,808 pounds for the queen
32 triggerfish. We voted on that. Eight members of the SSC votes
33 "Yes". There was one up abstention in view of the uncertainty of
34 the model, and one was absent. So, by majority, the motion carried.

35
36 And then there is a graph here which shows in black, this is the
37 catch between 2019 and 2022. Okay. As you can see, there has been
38 a significant decline in the catch for both areas, for the Saint
39 Thomas/Saint John platform as well as for the Saint Croix platform.
40 Also, we show with this graph the updated OFL following Tier 3b,
41 which is the model that we use. And as you can see, this is for
42 '24, '25, '26. There is going to be a reduction because of all the
43 uncertainties proposed, but they're all well above the recent catch
44 levels, very significantly so. And also, the catch, as you can
45 see, is way below the updated ABC Tier 3b FSPR 40, as well as for
46 the current ABC Tier 4.

47
48 Then there was an announcement for the American Fisheries Society,

1 which is a symposium that is co-organized by members of the U.S.
2 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Pacific Island
3 Fisheries Science Center, PIFSC, and the Southeast Fisheries
4 Science Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. The objective of this symposium
5 is to propose an innovative session of full-length presentations,
6 lightning talks, and a panel discussion that will provide a broad
7 forum to share ongoing research, challenges, successes, and future
8 directions in fishery-dependent data collections, scientific
9 survey activity, community engagement, assessment science, and
10 management of these unique island fisheries. And there's the link
11 for the for the meeting. For more information, you may contact,
12 Matt Damiano.

13
14 We also discussed about participation during the SEDAR 91 Caribbean
15 Spiny Lobster. So, for the data workshop, we proposed Michelle
16 Schärer, Jorge García, and Juan "J.J." Cruz. They also proposed,
17 the scientific committee proposed me to be the Chairman for the
18 review workshop. And for the assessment workshop, Todd Gedamke,
19 Eric Williams, and Jason Cope. So, that's for the Council to
20 consider.

21
22 Then we also, proposed the following people to participate in the
23 Eight National Science SSC workshop in 2024, which will be
24 conducted in between August 26th and 28th at Boston. They selected
25 me as a delegate, and J.J. Cruz, also as a delegate, Todd Gedamke,
26 also as a delegate, and Jason Cope.

27
28 Regarding the revision of the annual catch limit for the rainbow
29 runner, this is what we discussed. One, the SSC requested to have
30 only one recreational or commercial ACL for the rainbow runner. We
31 were asked to tell the Council to consider adding their rainbow
32 runner to their reporting list. There's so much uncertainties, we
33 don't know. Some people reported that there is a lot of catch.
34 Some people say it is scarce depending on location and on the type
35 of gear and so on. But we need to find out what's happening with
36 the rainbow runner. Also, to have a long annual casualty for the
37 rainbow runner. Four, insist on the data collection for
38 recreational fisheries.

39
40 Five, think about the potential of species that can be developed
41 into a full blast fishery. Even though it does not seem to be an
42 overfished species, there seems to be a potential for a full blast
43 fishery. So, we are concerned about that. We don't want to go into
44 the game too late. Sixth, the Council is thinking of having a
45 workshop on ciguatoxin fish. And seven, regarding changes in the
46 environment, this species, regarding the rainbow runner, is seen
47 more often than before, maybe related to changes in temperature,
48 or oceanography, sargassum floats, and number of fisheries

1 associated with the fisheries.

2
3 And now, lastly, regarding other business. There was a presentation
4 where we discussed the queen conch being listed under the
5 Endangered Species Act. Right now, what does this imply to the
6 fisheries and to the fishermen that depends on this? We still don't
7 know. There's still a recovery plan to be developed, a recovery
8 team, a development of critical habitat, and all that is still in
9 a more or less early stage. There's an outline, but there is not
10 any specific plan to follow.

11
12 Regarding well, one thing that automatically comes when a species
13 is designated as threatened or endanger under the Endangered
14 Species Act, is that the agencies, all federal agencies and state
15 agencies would have to go through a Section 7 consultation. In
16 other in other words, at this stage, what it applies is to
17 development. For example, you know, dredging of San Juan Bay,
18 installation of utility lines, and so on, before the court issues
19 a permit, they have to conduct a consultation with the U.S. Fish
20 and Wildlife and NOAA.

21
22 And that's it. I open the floor, Mr. Chairman.

23

24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25

26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Vance. Any questions for Vance?
27 Vanessa?

28

29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramirez for the
30 record. Vance, thank you for the summary that you bring to the
31 table. I have the opportunity to be connected in the virtual mode
32 for the meetings, but for the benefits of the Council member that
33 are here and we're not in the discussion, could we give, like, the
34 opportunity to the DAP Chairs to talk about the declining that you
35 presented the graphics for those year between 2015 to 2020. Is
36 there any other external issue that makes these graphics go down?

37

38 **VANCE VICENTE:** No. I don't have any objection. It's up to them.
39 But I want to tell you that all three Chairs of the District
40 Advisory Panel were at present in the meeting, and they have always
41 been, and they have always been very active, very proactive. And
42 was the Chair of the Council, he was present in the April 9 and
43 April 11 meeting. But, Julian, do you want to say something?

44

45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

46

47 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras for the record. So, I'm going
48 to speak here, for the Saint Thomas/Saint John district where we

1 happen to see some declines throughout the years. There are many
2 factors that play in to the declines, especially when you look
3 from 2017 going to present. We had the hurricanes where a lot of
4 the fishers lost their entire trap business. They lost their boats.
5 They lost their traps. So, it took some time for the fishers to
6 get back up and running. Then, you know, a lot of restaurants and
7 hotels were completely damaged, so some of them never reopen. So,
8 we lost a lot of customers due to that. Then we had COVID. During
9 COVID, all the restaurants was pretty much shut down, so the
10 fishers had to depend on the local people buying the fish for
11 consumption.

12
13 And then, for the queen triggerfish, it's completely a market
14 driven fishery. It's a size driven fishery. There's a certain size
15 of the queen triggers that would sell on a regular basis, which is
16 what we call the plate sized fish, which is approximately one pound
17 to a pound and a half, in that range. Now we do have a few customers
18 that, on occasions, would call and put in an order for the bigger
19 fish, which they would filet, and they use them for fish tacos,
20 etcetera. So, on the queen triggerfish side, a lot of the bigger
21 reproducing fish are being released by a lot of the fishers.

22
23 So, you know, there's still a lot of work to do in collecting the
24 information that was needed for this to move from Tier 3 to Tier
25 4. So, you know, throughout the time, with the recommendations by
26 the SSC for studies to be done and information to be collected, I
27 strongly feel that when we come back to do another assessment that
28 we can collect better information. Because when we first started
29 the oldwife assessment, the smallest size fish that were being
30 released was never captured, until one of the meetings that I
31 attended.

32
33 I attended all the meetings actually. But in one of the meetings,
34 when I realized that that was a problem for the models to run
35 properly, I went, and I collected some of the small ones that we've
36 been releasing. I brought them in with Virginia Shervette and her
37 team, with Jesus Rivera, and they were able to do the life history
38 on those smaller fish. But it was a very, very small number of
39 fish.

40
41 So, we noticed, that going forward, we need, in every assessment,
42 to somehow try to get those smaller fish. So, that's one of the
43 studies that needs to take place, that that information needs to
44 be collected. We even talked about getting a permit, doing a study
45 where we can do a small amount of traps with, like, a one inch to
46 really get the small, small queen triggers, but you're going to
47 see it. You're going to also be able to collect a lot of the other
48 juvenile fish and get that information also.

1
2 So, I'm looking forward to seeing that happen. So, that's my
3 explanation on the decline that you see there.
4
5 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thank you, Julian. Any other, okay, from
6 Saint Croix? Sure.
7
8 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez for record. This fishery in Saint
9 Croix is a market driven fishery too. As a diver we choose whether
10 to catch this species or not. They are there in numbers. We see
11 them every day, but our main catch is parrotfish.
12
13 There was a good amount of restaurant in Saint Croix where they
14 only sold triggerfish. These restaurants closed down for many
15 reasons, I cannot say which, and we lost those clients. But the
16 fishermen in Saint Croix decide whether to catch this or not when
17 they do their bycatch. This is a bycatch for us because our main
18 selling fish over there is the parrotfish, the lobster, and the
19 conch. And I also, I believe that it could be the lack of putting
20 them in their commercial catch reports.
21
22 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you. Nelson, DAP, Puerto Rico?
23
24 **NELSON CRESPO:** For Puerto Rico, the queen trigger most of the
25 fishermen only collect the queen trigger when they have orders.
26 So, it's not a main target around the island. I know that we have
27 fishers that bring it to the shore, but not in big quantities.
28 Only when the restaurants, small trucks want to make turnovers,
29 tacos, they put the orders and the fishers go for it. So, it's not
30 a big target.
31
32 **VANCE VICENTE:** Well, thank you very much for all the three Chairs
33 of the DAP. So, I pass the microphone to Kevin.
34
35 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks, Vance. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast
36 Fisheries Science Center. So, let's recall that what we're looking
37 at here are reported commercial landings. This is not population
38 size, just so everybody's clear on that. So, these are reported
39 commercial landings. We don't do this in isolation.
40
41 So, we have a fishery independent index that's going up. It's very
42 positive. We've got size composition that's very positive. So,
43 this is not a bad thing. This actually says there are more fish in
44 the water because they're not being caught. Right? So, that's
45 what's reflected in the size comps. That's what's reflected in the
46 fishery independent index that's from that RVC, that diver surveys.
47
48 So, these big drops, as the DAP Chairs have said, because of the

1 market, because of other factors, not because of a declining
2 population. So, just so that everybody's clear on that. Thanks.

3
4 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you, Kevin. I pass the microphone to the
5 Chair.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Mr. Sabater.

8
9 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a question. In your data, can you
10 determine if the effort to catch those fish, at that time, can be
11 measured? Because some kind of decline is part of the effort in
12 your data. Can you obtain that?

13
14 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Actually, for the SEDAR model, the catch per
15 unit effort, I think, was estimated by a number of vessels in
16 relation to the fish, fish landing, pounds in fish, and the number
17 of traps per vessel. Am I right on that, Kevin? Or Adyan.

18
19 **ADYAN RÍOS:** So, we did not have a fishery dependent index of
20 abundance. We did not have a CPUE for the Virgin Islands, for
21 either island platform. It was a topic that did receive some level
22 of discussion because we do want to understand what's happening to
23 effort. Why is effort declining? Is it because there's a problem
24 with the stock or is it because of other human social dynamics
25 that are happening?

26
27 And I'll just reflect back to, it is a topic of discussion. In
28 this case, the stock does not seem to be unhealthy, because of the
29 additional information that we have outside of the data that comes
30 from the fishery. We do have, you know, an explicit research
31 recommendation that was put forward by the SSC to understand that
32 so that we have that on the table when we're interpreting our stock
33 assessment, so we're not confused about what's happening to the
34 fishery.

35
36 So, I think consider an economic index or other ways of
37 understanding what's happening on the flip side, of what's
38 happening to the fishers, but not necessarily to the stock itself.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Julian?

41
42 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras for the record. One of the things
43 that was discussed heavily by a couple of the SSC members, every
44 time I talked about the decline in the restaurants, not there
45 anymore, big restaurants that used to just, their main fish served
46 was oldwife, the scientists were listening, but there's no actual
47 hard evidence on a piece of paper saying that what I was saying
48 was true.

1
2 They believe what we were saying. There was some discussion on the
3 table, off the record, about really doing a study to go back 20
4 years to present and let's look at all the restaurants that were
5 there that were actually selling fish at high numbers and to where
6 we are today. And I think that that study is very important to
7 have, because it will close the gap of uncertainty.

8
9 Uncertainty is what drives a lot of these models in a good way or
10 in a bad way. Most of the time, it's on a reduction side. And I
11 think if we have the evidence to show that this is actually
12 occurring, then when the scientists sit down and the Southeast
13 Fishery Science Center run their models, it will make the process
14 easier to run.

15
16 So, I know that was one of the research recommendations, and I
17 would really love to see that project as one of our top priority
18 projects to get completed. Thank you.

19
20 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thank you, Julian. Well, your comments are
21 on record. So, when we review the verbatims of the April 9th to
22 April 11th meeting, we can bring that up. These were my
23 recommendations, and we believe that we should follow-up on them.
24 Okay? Thank you.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay, thank you. I have a question for—Andy, go
27 ahead.

28
29 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Carlos. So, I was going to say
30 something similar to Kevin, and I just want to reemphasize his
31 point. Because when I see graphics like this, it would give me
32 pause that, are we setting our new catch levels going forward too
33 high relative to what's being landed? Obviously, the fishers have
34 explained, obviously, this is market driven. And what Kevin talked
35 about is there's a lot more data and information that tells the
36 story here. Right?

37
38 And looking at the CPUE indices, looking at the length information,
39 obviously, those trends are either increasing or remaining stable,
40 which is a good thing, which allows us then to specify the catch
41 limits the way they have been, and potentially, if the market
42 allows, obviously, to increase capacity in this fishery to harvest
43 more queen triggerfish sustainably going forward.

44
45 One question I guess I did have, and I think I know the answer,
46 but it was emphasized that we need to know more about discards,
47 right? So, from a commercial standpoint, are the fish being
48 primarily discarded because of the market and the need for this

1 plate size fish? And so large fish may be discarded or even small
2 fish that don't meet those plate size standards, is that correct?
3 Okay.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Andy. Vance?

6

7 **VANCE VICENTE:** Regarding the effort, I took this from the SEDAR
8 report, and it says that the catch per unit effort, compute catch
9 per unit effort, CPUE, for each trip as pounds of queen triggerfish
10 landed per trip divided by the effort reported, where effort for
11 the commercial traps was the number of traps hold per trip. So,
12 Adyan, can you answer on that?

13

14 **ADYAN RÍOS:** Early in the SEDAR process for SEDAR 80, Saint Thomas
15 queen triggerfish assessment, an index of abundance was developed,
16 and Vance is reading a portion from an earlier report. That index
17 was reviewed, and we did have a lot of input from the fishers about
18 that market driven behavior. So, the catch per unit effort coming
19 from the trapped fishery is very remarkably consistent because
20 they are consistently able to catch the amount of fish that they
21 seek to catch.

22

23 And, without further ways of treating the effort aspect of this
24 index, it's not useful as an indicator of population trends of,
25 you know, pulses in the stock, because the pulses that we see in
26 that catch per unit effort from the fishers is what we're calling
27 market driven. The amount that they go out to catch on a trip is
28 driven by the sales, and so, for that reason, the index that was
29 developed was not recommended for use and was not used in the
30 models used for the management advice presented in the summaries.

31

32 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you.

33

34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Vance, when you spoke about
35 ciguatoxin fish workshop. Are you talking specific to rainbow
36 runner, or are you talking about just fish in general?

37

38 **VANCE VICENTE:** Which statement? Where?

39

40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** You're talking about a ciguatoxin workshop.

41

42 **VANCE VICENTE:** Oh, I didn't want to bring any ciguatoxin topic at
43 this point. It was just suggested by somebody here. I said, "That's
44 not the forum right now." That should be looked at, you know, I
45 think, I believe, in a different meeting where all the fishers,
46 participate and experts on ciguatera. I don't know what is there,
47 I'm sure there's some recent data, but it has not been recollected
48 and analyzed. But we know of isolated cases, here and there.

1
2 But I think that's, at least my opinion, not as a Chair, but as a
3 as an individual. I think this topic should be dealt with in a
4 different forum.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Also, I know that there's no
7 recreational data on queen trigger, but I believe, and I'm going
8 to speak for the Saint Croix District only, that you're going to
9 find that there's very little, queen trigger harvest
10 recreationally on the island of Saint Croix. But that's yet to be
11 determined. Julian?

12
13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just one more comment since the rainbow runner is
14 up. You know, during this discussion, what we realized, especially
15 the SSC members and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, there
16 are a group of species that the information is not being collected
17 at all for management purposes. And setting an annual catch limit
18 for these species is difficult. And I know one of the discussions
19 was-- and I'm throwing it out there, I don't know if I'm out of
20 place throwing it out there. --was to have a discussion with all
21 the species that information needs to be collected for, to talk to
22 the agencies to get it added to the catch report forms so that
23 information can be collected. So, I just wanted to put that on a
24 record. Thank you.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Julian. Andy?

27
28 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. In response to that, I think that's a
29 great idea and should be a comprehensive list of species that would
30 need to be added to the reporting form. I did want to go back to
31 rainbow runner. I had a question about one of the SSC
32 recommendations. So, item three on the list says have a long ACL
33 for the rainbow runner. Can you explain what that means?

34
35 **VANCE VICENTE:** Adyan.

36
37 **ADYAN RÍOS:** I think that refers to the Tier 4 approach of obtaining
38 the ABC using the time period of data. However, that needs
39 consideration for what scalar and buffer get used?

40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But the question is, what do you mean by long
42 ACL? Do we have a short ACL?

43
44 **ADYAN RÍOS:** Yeah. I think it just refers to time. Graciela, do
45 you recall?

46
47 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** You wrote that one. One of the issues
48 with the rainbow runner, and I think that we're going to talk about

1 that, not at this meeting, because we are having issues with
2 rainbow runner. Because it's not in the form right now, there is
3 not much that anyone can do about it right now. The topic of adding
4 species to the forms, it's one that it's, to say the least,
5 contentious because, you know, right now it's a write in. If you
6 keep adding forms, you have to request from the local government
7 that they do change the forms of the fishers to fill in all the
8 information. So, that's, the main issue.

9
10 The second thing is that if we're going to do this for rainbow
11 runner, then we should consider all the other species that are in
12 the same boat. No pun intended. So, you know, it's a topic that we
13 really need to move forward with.

14
15 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thank you. I don't think we voted on any of
16 this very specifically. Regarding the rainbow runner, me as an
17 individual, again, not as Chair, my recommendation has been
18 consistent in that we do not know enough about the biology to
19 establish any ABC or ACL at all. Because we don't have that
20 biological information as we do have for the runner in other areas,
21 like in the Gulf of Mexico.

22
23 But we don't know the L-infinity. We don't have any of the
24 biological information necessary to use the von Bertalanffy growth
25 equations. We don't know enough. So, my position is to just get
26 the information the best way that we can before establishing any
27 regulations. But that's, again, that's me, Vance Vicente.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Vance. Miguel?

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, in other words, what we're saying is we do
32 not have enough information about the rainbow runner to do any
33 analysis that the SSC will have to look at. So, at this time,
34 probably, Mr. Chairman, we'll just table any possible action and
35 then ask us what the next step is.

36
37 The other thing you have to be mindful of, whenever you have a
38 species in the management unit, you need to have an ACL or
39 something. This is not the first time that we have a lot of species
40 in the management unit that we don't know things about it, but
41 then we have somebody else that looks at it or another species
42 that is similar, like the key species that we have, and that goes
43 through for anybody who is in that group. So, we have to be mindful
44 of those two.

45
46 So, Graciela, with the discussion, and Vance, what will be the
47 next step? Shall we wait for the collection of data during some
48 other time or between here and whenever we are ready?

1
2 **VANCE VICENTE:** Graciela, let me answer that because what we
3 discussed in the meeting, the last SSC meeting is I recommended to
4 hold one of the topics for the next SSC meeting to recollect all
5 the existing information, to see how much we little known, or how
6 much do we know in order to come up with some recommendation. But
7 then the argument came up, well, that species is not important.
8 There are other species that are more important. How are you going
9 to allocate the resources based on importance when this specie is
10 not important? But again, if it's not important, why does the topic
11 continues popping up?

12
13 In the last one, the 183rd meeting of the CFMC, it came up. In the
14 SSC meeting, the topic came up, and it keeps on.

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We love the name rainbow runner. That's what we
17 discussed.

18
19 **VANCE VICENTE:** Rainbow runner. That's it. Yeah.

20
21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, one of the things could be to task
22 the SSC, and based on what the Science Center has in their matrix
23 to actually look at the prioritization of stocks that we need to
24 look at and actually make a big effort to go after those are, you
25 know, high up in the in the top priorities for the Council. Having
26 said that, because we are moving rainbow runner from being a reef
27 fish species into a pelagic species, then I was going to ask-- is
28 Sarah online? --to ask Sarah to tell us where we are at with the
29 information that we have on the rainbow runner. So, Sarah, if you
30 can hear us?

31
32 **SARAH STEPHENSON:** Good morning. This is Sarah. Can you hear me?

33
34 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Perfectly. Thank you.

35
36 **SARAH STEPHENSON:** Okay. So, yes, at the SSC meeting, we presented
37 all the information that the Southeast Regional Office had for
38 this rainbow runner in light of the question of is there enough
39 information to respecify the ACLs. And so, that's what the SSC
40 decided.

41
42 For the amendment that we're working on, which is moving the
43 rainbow runner from a reef fish species to a pelagic fish species,
44 we have all the information that we need to do that because we've
45 already asked the SSC, is that appropriate? Is this a true pelagic
46 species as opposed to reef fish? And they made a motion that, yes,
47 it is, and they recommended to the Council that, yes, it should be
48 moved to a reef fish. And so, the Council discussed it and also

1 agreed, and so that's where we are.

2
3 So, in terms of the amendment, we can continue to move forward
4 with that. We just wanted to make sure that if another action was
5 going to be added, say, to modify the ACLs, that we wanted to do
6 that all-in-one package. But this sounds like a bigger issue for
7 the ACLs than just the rainbow runner. So, we might want to do an
8 amendment down the road that changes ACLs for more than this one
9 species, you know, based on what the SSC and the Science Center
10 kind of come up with, as far as options for that. So, does that
11 answer your question, Graciela?

12
13 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes. So, the next question is, what's
14 next? Can we wait? And I was just looking at Kate to see if we can
15 do that or just follow what we have in the document of the island-
16 based FMP and do a Tier 4 and come up with an ABC and an ACL.

17
18 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Graciela, if I may. Sarah, thank you. I do
19 remember that you presented the data, which we-- I'm sorry.

20
21 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I'm happy to have Vance finish what he's
22 saying, and then I can-- Okay. Kate Zamboni for the record. Yeah.
23 These are not necessarily two things that have to go in the same
24 amendment. If the Council feels like it is a priority to reclassify
25 rainbow runner as a pelagic species, that can be accomplished
26 through a full-blown amendment.

27
28 You know, I think the sensitivity is that there is currently an
29 ACL set for rainbow runner, and, you know, that will get carried
30 over as the ACL in that amendment now that it's classified as a
31 pelagic species, and maybe you don't feel good about that ACL as
32 a pelagic, so that's, I don't know. But if there is a need to
33 revisit that ACL, that certainly can be done at a later time, and
34 you can make recommendations on what sort of data you feel like
35 would be helpful to inform that decision.

36
37 But the short answer to the question is these two things do not
38 have to occur at the same time. But the current ACL will get
39 carried over as the default unless it is changed.

40
41 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes, sir. One more comment because we talked about
42 this for quite some time before. We heard your data; we saw your
43 data and we reviewed it, and we discussed it. The landing data we
44 have is extremely poor. I mean, I remember 50% of the time, there
45 was no information. It was confidential. No landings. The few
46 landings, well, it was 5 pounds, and then I then 2,000 pounds. I
47 mean, the whole range, which leads me to the point again that we
48 do not know enough about this specie to establish any regulation

1 at this point.

2
3 That's why I requested to the SSC members that we have a discussion
4 in the next SSC meeting, not only to rediscuss the data that you
5 provided, but also, we need data from the fishers. And I remember
6 Nelson said, "Hey. I know fishers that are fishing for the rainbow
7 runner." And he said, "I can get you that information," and that's
8 what I mean. There's a lot of fragmented information distributed
9 among such a wide spectrum that we need to recollect what we have.
10 Thank you.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I have Andy. Yeah. I have Andy and then,
13 someone online.

14
15 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, a lot to weave together here, but,
16 you know, I agree with Kate. Right? I think we can continue to
17 stay the course in terms of reclassifying it from reef fish to
18 pelagic. We could maintain the current catch limit.

19
20 Keep in mind that with the accountability measures, that they don't
21 just automatically get triggered if your landings exceed the catch
22 limit. We have to review the landings, if there have been
23 improvements in data reporting that have occurred, that
24 accountability measures don't go into effect. And we've had this
25 challenge for a number of species and rainbow runner certainly, I
26 think falls into that category as well, where we need to improve
27 the data forms. We need to improve the reporting, and ultimately,
28 that leads to then modifications to catch limits that the SSC could
29 consider going forward. But we don't have that for rainbow runner
30 at this time.

31
32 So, I think the best course of action would be to reclassify it as
33 pelagic based on the scientific advice we've gotten, keep the
34 current catch limit, and then see if we could make some reporting
35 improvements. And then, over the course of a period of time, we
36 could make some adjustments to the catch limit based on those
37 reporting improvements.

38
39 And so, I do want to look maybe at Ricardo and Jean-Pierre. So, in
40 terms of the reporting forms themselves, right, one of the things
41 we've talked about would be to share a letter, whether it's coming
42 from the Council, from the fishery service, a joint letter to your
43 agencies. I just wanted to look to you to see what the best approach
44 for that would be. You know, we'd like to work with you in terms
45 of ensuring that the adjustments or potential adjustments would be
46 something that you're willing to consider in terms of making
47 modifications to reporting forms.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Graciela.
2

3 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, if I may, in addition to that--
4 Graciela for the record. --is that we also need the recreational
5 take. So, Marine Recreational Information Program is not actually
6 working in Puerto Rico collecting data, so that would be really
7 needed because it is the majority of the sector ACL. So, you know,
8 it needs the two components. Thanks.
9

10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, I suggest moving this forward. If
11 we follow what Andy just mentioned, it's the way to go. Because
12 the rationale you have to have an ACL when the rainbow runner was
13 a reef fish is the same you have now. We didn't know beans about
14 it, but you still have is an ACL for the darn thing. The only thing
15 that we're doing now is changing it from a reef fish to a pelagic
16 because the fishers told us that the reality of life with this
17 specie is that it's more pelagic than reef fish.
18

19 So, Kate, I think we need a motion to do this or just have it put
20 on the record to keep going. So, in essence, we have already
21 decided to move the rainbow runner to the pelagic realm, or the
22 group of species that are pelagic. And then we are saying also
23 that we need to continue collecting information for the rainbow
24 runner, and other species. So, we need to modify.
25

26 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Well, I believe the Council has already
27 given staff direction to move forward on an amendment to reclassify
28 rainbow runner as a pelagic species. So, unless the Council is
29 inclined to change that direction, you do not need a motion to do
30 that. That amendment right now does not contemplate adjusting the
31 ACL. It would simply carry over what is currently there. So, again,
32 if that's what the Council continues to want to do, you don't need
33 a motion to change that.
34

35 If there is a desire of the Council to set forth, to adopt some of
36 these recommendations regarding data collection and wanting to
37 look more forward about future adjustments to the ACL, yes, you
38 should do that. I think the key thing there is making adjustments
39 to the reporting form and setting up that process. And again, that
40 might include additional species beyond rainbow runner. But, you
41 know, at this time, it would be appropriate for any of the
42 recommendations that the SSC has made, for the Council to move to
43 adopt which of those recommendations it wants to adopt.
44

45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Because, you know, if we get out of the rainbow
46 runner, we have a lot of stuff to cover. So, in essence, what we
47 are saying, what we are hearing is that you don't have to do
48 anything different from what you did before. So, the rainbow runner

1 will be in the pelagic species component. Then the staff is also
2 instructed, and we discussed it, that we need to talk to the Virgin
3 Islands government and Puerto Rico government to see if they can
4 modify the ticket system that they have to include these species
5 and other species that are of interest, of importance. And I
6 believe that Graciela can do that, in coordination with Ricardo,
7 Daniel, Dr. Angeli and Sennai and see what is needed to be done.
8

9 In addition, if you have a need for, let's say, rainbow runner,
10 get information as Vance was saying, we can even hire a graduate
11 student that can compile that information, and then once we have
12 that, we can present it to the SSC, the DAPs, and at least you
13 have a baseline to modify or not what you have in terms of the
14 rainbow runner. That goes through also for other species of
15 interest that SSC discussed. So, once we have that list, that
16 Graciela can compile, Mr. Chairman, we can then discuss it with
17 the appropriate people in Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, as well
18 as the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to make sure that we
19 collect the data as needed.
20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?
22

23 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, Sarah had already started working on
24 that list comparing what we have versus what we have in the forms.
25 So, that's already in the works, because it's going to be needed
26 for other species. So, we'll maintain the SSC and you informed of
27 the progress.
28

29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I never agreed with writings on CCRs, but
30 that's old news.
31

32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, what is the timeline for the efforts
33 that Sarah and the group are doing?
34

35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Bueno, for the rainbow runner per se.
36 So, that's--
37

38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, the list for the group of species. What can
39 we tell the Council, next meeting or in December?
40

41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** I mean, for the next Council meeting we
42 should know. We will provide the information to the local
43 governments and see, you know, basically what they think can be
44 done. And if we need to hire someone to do that kind of thing,
45 that we can do over the summer. We won't have a complete list of
46 everything during the summer if we're hiring someone to do that,
47 but we'll get moving on those priority species.
48

1 Now also remember that because the Council is also working with
2 EBFM, so some of the species might be important in that realm
3 rather than on the single species basis. So do keep that in mind.
4 Thanks.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. What are we going to do about, in the
7 beginning of this report about the ABCs for queen trigger? Can you
8 bring that up? I think that it requires a motion. No. Not that.
9 Where it says "ABC=buffer times less than" that's not it either.

10
11 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** The ABC is what the SSC gives you. So,
12 this the recommendation that is given to the Council, but the
13 Council has to, basically, by law, abide by the ABC. You, then,
14 put the buffer in terms of the management uncertainty and come up
15 with the ACL.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we're going to do that-- Adyan?

18
19 **ADYAN RÍOS:** I'm sorry. Just to clarify as well, the SSC
20 recommended a static constant value moving forward in time, as
21 opposed to a value that would change over time. And so, this says
22 2024, but I believe it's meant to say as starting in 2024.

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, okay. The Council has to be reminded of what
25 is this jargon that we're talking about.

26
27 The law says that ABC is set, as mentioned before, by the SSC.
28 There's very little that you can go about it. Okay? The SSC takes
29 into consideration all the information that the Center compiled
30 and sent you and also the modification. That's why we have it here,
31 and that's why Adyan is here. But then, once you do that, you had
32 to decide what buffer you would like to have on the ABC. The ABC
33 could be equal to ACL, a lot more than-- I mean, but it cannot be
34 less. The ACL cannot be above the ABC.

35
36 So, once you have the ABC, then the Council has to decide what
37 percentage of that ABC you can call it a buffer, and what your ACL
38 will be for that particular specie. If the ABC is a 100 and you
39 want a buffer to 5%, you have 95% of your ACL, but you cannot have
40 a 105. So, that's where we are with this.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

43
44 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. Kevin McCarthy. So, just to add on a
45 little bit to what Adyan said. This is the ABC for '24 to '27. And
46 if there's no new information, not a new stock assessment or an
47 update or something like that, that level would continue until
48 there is one, until there is new information. And so, the SSC

1 elected for that constant ABC, the OFL, the overfishing limit,
2 which is above the ABC and which you cannot cross without getting
3 into all kinds of problems, varies over time. That's an output
4 from the model. So, the assessment model has an OFL that bounces
5 around over time. It's always above ABC, but the SSC, elected to
6 have a constant ABC.

7
8 So, the buffer, the scientific uncertainty, which is OFL to ABC,
9 varies over time, because of the desire to have a constant ABC.
10 But it's always there. So, the OFL is always higher. It bounces
11 around. This sets a constant ABC. Right now, it will go on forever
12 until there's new information. And so, now it's in your court to
13 decide how you want to proceed with following on Miguel's comments
14 about your role to set the next level.

15
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi. This is María López with NOAA Fisheries.
17 And just in terms of process, I want to add a little bit more of
18 what Miguel said. So, what the Council does, once they make a
19 decision as to whether they accept these recommendations for ABCs
20 for the each one of the islands, then this is something that then
21 the Council will decide to move forward, if they accept these
22 recommendations, move forward with an amendment framework action
23 to each one of the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas FMPs, so that those
24 values that came from the assessment can be implemented, so that
25 what we currently have can be modified.

26
27 And then, also the Council will set a new ACL based on those new
28 recommendations, of ABC recommendations. So, that would be the
29 process that will come naturally after this process that we're
30 doing right here. And I just wanted to clarify that for everybody
31 because then that will be the role of the Council after, you know,
32 the SSC answers these assessment results.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, yeah, so what are we going to do about
35 the SSC's recommendations? This is going to require a motion.
36 Right? A motion by the Council. Am I right? Alright.

37
38 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I can make a motion. So, the motion is
39 to develop a framework action. You want it on the screen, Carlos?
40 Okay.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a screen for the motion.

43
44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** We are going to put it up on the screen.
45 Teamwork.

46
47 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Perfect. So, I'll just read it. *Develop a
48 framework action to adjust the ACLs and other management reference*

1 *points for Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix queen*
2 *triggerfish based on the SEDAR 80 stock assessments and the ABC*
3 *recommendations from the SSC.*

4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, it's a motion by Andy. Do we have a second?

6
7 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** I'll second that, James Kreglo.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Seconded by James Kreglo. Discussion?

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just to refresh the memory of people because
12 sometimes we get involved in this alphabet soup. Anyway, the reason
13 I asked Cristina for this favor is that sometimes we keep
14 forgetting that we discussed these issues over and over and over
15 again, but we have new people around the table. Kevin explained it
16 very well, but I just wanted to let you know the overfishing
17 limits. These are the concepts that we have by law. All accounts,
18 we have to abide by the same thing and same as the action agency.

19
20 So, the overfishing limit is that limit that corresponds to the
21 maximum yield in a fishery. If you're looking at any fishery,
22 that's a limit that you will never go over. Because if you go over,
23 then the fishery is in jeopardy. You may be able to extinct the
24 fishery commercially or do more damage.

25
26 Acceptable Biological Catch is what scientists tell us, based on
27 the information, life history, what you have heard today, all the
28 components that you need to make a decision, statistically
29 speaking, to provide the Council with a number that you can use
30 then as a reference point. It's acceptable biological catch. In
31 other words, based on the biology of the species, this is the level
32 that the scientists tell us you cannot go over.

33
34 You still have a time, you know, a range between the acceptable
35 biological catch and overfishing limit, but usually we do not want
36 to go over the ABC. Then you have the annual catch level, or the
37 annual catch limit, that's the action that you had to take in order
38 for you to decide, okay, based on the information that we have,
39 based on the SSC recommendations, this is the level that we can
40 accept. That level is based on the commercial/recreational sector,
41 the movement of that industry in those two areas.

42
43 You may have a buffer, you can call it equal, you say OFL equals
44 to ABC, ABC equal or better than ACL. Usually, you don't want to
45 be equal or have those levels the same, equal, because you have
46 all the fluctuations that may cause you a problem that you won't
47 be able to solve in the long run. If we were able to look at the
48 fish and tell exactly how much fish we can, all these levels could

1 be the same.
2
3 So, anyway, I just want to refresh the memory for everybody of
4 this alphabet soup. We also have another annual target. That's a
5 level that you shoot at when you want to manage a particular
6 species. But we are not discussing that at this time.
7
8 So, the motion that we have here is for the staff to prepare a
9 document that will allow you to look at the whole thing. And then,
10 you have a document that will modify or amend what you have
11 regarding these species. And please don't be shy. If you have a
12 question for Andy or the staff or anybody, this is the time because
13 sometimes it's difficult to grab all this.
14
15 So, while we're with this motion, you have a framework. The
16 framework is nothing but a list of things that you could do to
17 manage the species if A and B happens. So, you have this framework
18 that will adjust the ACLs and other management reference points
19 for this specie, in Saint Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix.
20 That's where we are. The information come from the SEDAR 88. SEDAR
21 is the 80, excuse me. 88 is way over there.
22
23 The Southeast program that encompasses the Gulf Council, the South
24 Atlantic Council, and the Caribbean Council worked with Southeast
25 Fisheries Science Center to examine the fishery using the numbers
26 that we have. So, the triggerfish is ready, with SEDAR 80, ready
27 to provide the information that the scientists need and the people
28 who are going to write this document need then to recommend to the
29 Council, based on the recommendations received from the SSC today.
30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any further discussion on the motion? So,
32 yeah. Ready to vote? Okay. So, I'm going to do the vote by roll
33 call. I'll start with James Kreglo.
34
35 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo. Yes.
36
37 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Jean-Pierre Oriol. Yes.
38
39 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, in favor.
40
41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramirez. Yes.
42
43 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck. Yes.
44
45 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater. Yes.
46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette. Yes.
48

1 *Motion carries. No abstentions. No nays.*

2
3 Thank you. Okay. Graciela?

4
5 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, you still have to make the
6 appointments for the SEDAR 91 and the National SSC.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks for the reminder. So, for the National
9 SSC, we have a list somewhere in there.

10
11 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the CCC, the Council Coordination
12 Committee has a subcommittee where all the SSCs or delegates from
13 the SSCs of all the eight councils get together every year/every
14 two years depending on what the topics are. This would be the
15 eighth meeting of all of the SSCs. It will be in Boston in August.
16 The topic is ABC in a changing environment. So, everything that
17 we've been talking about changes in the fisheries, etcetera, due
18 to climate variability, etcetera.

19
20 The Caribbean will be presenting on the use of local ecological
21 knowledge and what we've done with the conceptual models for EBFM.
22 This year they would require four delegates. They have to be SSC
23 members and one staff that traveled with them to prepare the report
24 that is provided then to the CCC and published for the general
25 public.

26
27 So, usually, we request that the SSC members volunteer for this,
28 and depending on their expertise and their interest in
29 participation, then the Council appoints them to represent the SSC
30 at these meetings. So, in this case, you have a Vance Vicente will
31 be attending as the Chair if the Council so appoints; J.J. Cruz,
32 who will be presenting on behalf of the Caribbean Council. Todd
33 Gedamke and Jason Cope. Jason is a NOAA employee. So, you know,
34 hopefully, he will have the funding to travel to this meeting
35 because he's been quite involved in the efforts of the SSC to move
36 forward with stock assessments, and he is very knowledgeable of
37 the climate change scenarios.

38
39 So, we do have two vacancies in the SSC right now that you will be
40 discussing during the closed session today. I see that Seara just
41 presented her resignation due to a change in her employment and
42 not being able to participate as part of the SSC anymore. So that's
43 the second vacancy that you have. And because there are four
44 delegates, I mean, I was hoping that the Chair would have the power
45 to make changes to the appointees depending on how this moves
46 along.

47
48 So, you may move forward with these four SSC members that you have

1 but knowing that you might have a change in terms of Jason, for
2 example, if he cannot attend, then appoint someone else. We are
3 going to have a hybrid meeting during the national SSC, so that's
4 also a possibility that he might attend virtually and not have to
5 incur in a funding issue.

6
7 So, these are the four volunteers that you have right now. And if
8 you're so pleased to appoint them, that would be--

9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. The Chair has the authority to appoint the
11 member. So, just a matter of informing the Council that these are
12 our delegates. And then if something happened, the Vance gets the
13 lotto, then we had to appoint somebody else. But we wanted to
14 inform the Council that the that the Chair will be able then to
15 appoint the SSC members.

16
17 This event is very important. It started in a long time ago in
18 Hawaii, and it proved to be a good way of exchange better
19 practices, scientific information, scientific methodology, all
20 this is discussed at this level. So, if nobody disagrees, then the
21 Chair can appoint the members that you mentioned. So, for the
22 record, Vance Vicente, can you read the other people? Just for the
23 record.

24
25 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, for the record, the SSC members to
26 be appointed to the National SSC in 2024 are Vance Vicente, J.J.
27 Cruz-Motta, Todd Gedamke, and Jason Cope.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, if we don't need a motion, I'll go
30 ahead and appoint those members to the National SSC.

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela wanted to say something on the record.

33
34 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the reason for the appointments to
35 be officially done is for the compensation to the SSC members and
36 the same for anyone who's representing the Council at these
37 meetings. So, just to make sure that they are appointed, duly
38 appointed for their compensation to be paid.

39
40 The travel and arrangements are being made by the New England
41 Council. That usually come through specific allocated funds for
42 these meetings. So, that's not a budget issue for the Council.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So now about the SEDAR 91. Next screen.

45
46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, for SEDAR 91, usually there are three
47 members of the SSC, and there are additional members from the
48 general public including commercial fishers, recreational fishers

1 or people who have data on the species that is being assessed. And
2 in this case, the appointment needs to be made, specifically, for
3 the SSC members. They do participate in two of the three
4 assessments. The review workshop has to be represented by the SSC,
5 by those members who have not participated in any of the other
6 workshops because they do have to review all the data and the
7 assessment process that the species goes through.

8
9 And then the Chair will be appointing other participants. We've
10 received information from Julian already regarding the people that
11 he wants to be able to participate in the in the SEDAR process
12 because they are very knowledgeable of the spiny lobster. So, the
13 Council will be receiving those names accordingly and making the
14 appointments for those other participants. So, specifically for
15 the SSC, you have for the data workshop, Michelle Schärer, Jorge
16 García, and J.J. Cruz.

17
18 For the assessment workshop, it will be Todd Gedamke. There is a
19 question mark here because he is a consultant that travels to the
20 Pacific, etcetera, so that one appointment might change, but Eric
21 Williams and Jason Cope. These are all virtual workshops, so there
22 is no conflict with the funding. And for the review workshop, Vance
23 Vicente will be attending as the Chair. Walter Keithley as one of
24 the reviewers and we're waiting on Richard Appeldoorn, because he
25 was on travel, to be appointed for the review workshop.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the same process, right? Don't need
28 no motion. I can just go ahead and appoint those. Okay. So, I bless
29 them.

30
31 So, next on the agenda. Sennai Habtes on the Ecosystem-Based
32 Fisheries Management Technical Advisory Panel Report.

33
34 **ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL**
35 **REPORT**

36
37 **SENNAI HABTES:** Nice job, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. I'll
38 be brief. Cristina, if you want to put up the couple of slides, I
39 have.

40
41 We are in kind of the writing and development phase right now, so
42 there's a lot of reviews, drafts, and meetings. So, there aren't
43 a huge amount of updates to give you, so I won't take up too much
44 of your time, but I will let you know where we are, and what things
45 we still have left to do.

46
47 So, just a brief overview. Again, we are providing scientific
48 advice on ecosystems-based fisheries management for decisions that

1 the Council needs to make. What this looks like currently is the
2 development of a fisheries ecosystem plan. It's a framework by
3 which the Councils can maintain marine ecosystems and the fisheries
4 resources dependent upon those ecosystems. And it is essentially
5 an infrastructure for the Council to implement decisions based on
6 ecosystems-based fisheries management in the U.S. Caribbean.

7
8 So, where are we? We, as you know, we have four working groups,
9 one on conceptual models, one ecosystem indicators, one for risk
10 assessments, and one for data repositories. As I mentioned in my
11 last update in December, we had an initial contractor that we'd
12 gotten funding from Pew Charitable Trusts to develop a first draft
13 of the fisheries ecosystem plan. That draft included all aspects
14 except for work for the data repository and the risk assessment
15 working groups as that required more information than was readily
16 available for her to draft into the framework that was being
17 developed.

18
19 So, that draft is currently out with all the working group Chairs
20 and myself for revisions and to identify strategic frameworks that
21 need to be included and to compile the information from the many
22 different partners and reports that are working on this as it is
23 not simply done through the EBFM TAP as I've mentioned before many
24 times because we do not actually have funding. We do it through
25 outside groups and collaborators to develop it through grants that
26 we can then use for drafting the FEP. At present, the conceptual
27 model working group has completed a summary report, including the
28 objectives and framework to put into the FEP. That is currently
29 being added into the draft that was previously developed.

30
31 The ecosystem indicators has a draft framework that's currently
32 under review, and we're working with our contractor technical
33 writer, which I'll get to in a second, to include that information
34 from both, and the NOAA ecosystem status report or the ESR that
35 was developed through a corollary project, to include that into
36 the FEP that we're drafting, as well as that contractor is looking
37 at evaluating, along with Tarsila, evaluating a new ecosystems
38 traits index along with indicators that were developed for the
39 ecosystem status report to summarize and include that in the FEP.

40
41 As I mentioned, Tauna Rankin, along with Council staff, had gotten
42 additional funding to hire a contractor, that is Leigh Fletcher
43 from Bioimpact. She is here. Leigh, if you want to raise your hand
44 for everyone to see. So, if you have questions about the work that
45 she's developing on the risk assessment and the writing that she's
46 doing to help us draft a risk assessment framework for the FEP,
47 she is here. She's learning from us. If you have questions on the
48 areas that we're going and the type of risk assessment frameworks

1 that we're developing, now is a good time to chat with Leigh and
2 to explain things that you're interested in seeing and things that
3 stakeholders you feel would be interested in having in the risk
4 assessment framework that we're going to be using.

5
6 The data repository, that's on me. I've developed the initial
7 objectives and needs, and we are working through other projects
8 that are ongoing, such as the Caribbean Branch Strategic Planning,
9 as well as SEAMAP-C's reorganization to try and merge all of the
10 data needs that are currently in the U.S. Caribbean into a single
11 draft strategy that can be used through what we're doing with EBFM,
12 to show the framework for a data repository or a fisheries
13 information network, whatever you want to call it. That is a huge
14 need for the U.S. Caribbean.

15
16 Last, we've had a couple presentations, or sorry, one presentation
17 that was done by Tarsila Seara, who is now with the NOAA Northeast
18 Fisheries Science Center on operationalizing ecosystem-based
19 fisheries management through inclusive research, engagement, and
20 partnerships. And that presentation documented a lot of the work
21 that she's done over the last three years here in the Caribbean as
22 part of the Lenfest group to incorporate a lot of the socioeconomic
23 indicators that are necessary in EBFM going forward.

24
25 So, our activity. So, far, we have the draft FEP developed. The
26 goals and objectives have been completed. We've taken the work
27 from all of the other corollary projects that are in development
28 into reports that are now being drafted and pulled into the FEP.
29 We're still waiting for a little bit on some of the ESR indicators,
30 but we have access to some of that information. So, I believe that
31 we have a path forward to merge all of those into a draft FEP
32 framework for the SSC, and eventually the Council to review. We
33 finished melding all the models, and we've taken that information
34 and developed it into strategic framework for a draft FEP.

35
36 We've also, in our last EBFM TAP meeting, which was in March of
37 last year, we developed strategic objectives that we could put
38 into each of the chapters that will be in the FEP and have developed
39 operational objectives for each of the working groups to move
40 forward. What do we have left to do? We have to develop the
41 performance measures and the management strategy. Part of that is
42 being done under the risk assessment process.

43
44 We also need to develop a feedback mechanism for adaptive
45 management that we will present in the FEP. And that, we plan to
46 do at the next EBFM TAP meeting, which I hope to schedule for
47 either the summer or the fall of this year in conjunction with
48 Council staff as soon as I get a moment to breathe.

1
2 So, that's where we're at. Happy to take any questions or hear any
3 comments. This is always a good time for the Council to inform me
4 on directions that they want us to take, things I may be missing,
5 or things that you want us to consider when the EBFM TAP working
6 groups start meeting again. Thank you.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks, Sennai. Miguel?

9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Dr. Habtes, thank you for the presentation. In
11 your professional view, what are the needs of the TAP that you see
12 the Council can, let's say, just as he said, that you need to move
13 forward?

14
15 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thank you, Miguel. I think that's a great question.
16 There are two huge areas that I think we really need. The first is
17 staff. Right? Liajay has been phenomenal in aiding, but other
18 Councils really dedicate a full-time person to managing this.
19 Right? The Gulf is now hiring someone to be their ecosystems
20 working group lead to develop how-- they have an FEP, but they're
21 developing ecosystems management. And I think if we want to be
22 serious about adopting this, we really need to have a full-time
23 person because it's more-- I have a full-time job. Everyone on it
24 has a full-time job, and it's hard to really dedicate the amount
25 of time that's needed to really develop this new type of
26 management, effectively, for the Council.

27
28 The second area is I really think we need to focus on building the
29 data infrastructure that's necessary for this type of management.
30 Online is very much in agreement with that. Right? So, I think we
31 really need to focus on building that data infrastructure because
32 EBFM requires a host of different data streams, and to be able to
33 use that effectively in a management strategy, it has to be
34 organized and efficiently produced so that it can go into our
35 management processes, like SEDAR.

36
37 Right now, each time we have our data workshops, we're pulling
38 data from so many different places. It takes a lot of time. I mean,
39 I really think just developing that sort of infrastructure for the
40 Caribbean and finding a way to centralize it where all of the
41 managing partners can contribute to developing that, would help
42 not only development of EBFM, but the rest of our management
43 process in the Caribbean.

44
45 I think those two areas really need to be the priorities that we
46 focus on. And I think we're building frameworks for how to do that
47 in the FEP, and there's a lot of people on our working group that
48 have information and are consistently working with all of our

1 partners to build that kind of strategy. But we don't want to
2 redouble efforts. Right? Like, if this stuff is getting done and
3 there is time, funding, and interest in building it, we need to
4 jump on it and just push to develop it for this region.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

7

8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, I don't want to spend too much
9 time, of your time on this, but I believe that what Dr. Habtes
10 mentioned is key to move forward if we are really serious about
11 this effort. So, I propose that, Graciela, Dr. Habtes, Carlos and
12 I meet, as soon as we can and look at this possibility. Because we
13 need to develop also the time frame. Let's say that we need to
14 hire a contractor to work on this so we can move forward with these
15 recommendations.

16

17 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** We would also need someone from the
18 Science Center because if we're speaking about centralizing data,
19 since they do host the commercial landings and recreational
20 landings, TIP data, etcetera, you know, part of what the Council
21 has been doing is working on a portal where that information can
22 be accessible. So, we also need to include the Science Center in
23 these conversations. They have been working on that database for
24 all of the work that has been done in the area. We had been talking
25 about, so we have the reports, but we would like to have the data
26 because it can be analyzed in a different way, etcetera. But then
27 that requires not only the structure on how we're going to do it
28 but also the storage facilities for these data.

29

30 Although they are not huge sets of data, they do require a little
31 bit of management and we have already started working on that with
32 the SEAMAP data that we are hosting at the Council with the new
33 server that we have in place now. So, and these are data that can
34 be accessed, you know, through VPN and stuff like that so that
35 students and other scientists can actually use it and look at other
36 ways of analyzing the information.

37

38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Can we use the IRA funding for that?

39

40 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Si, we actually have one of the proposals
41 to finalize that effort that had been taking place. And it's been
42 done over bits and pieces and people and contractors and things
43 because it hasn't been a dedicated effort. So, with this case,
44 that was the idea.

45

46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, if I may. I believe that this is
47 important probably between here and the next meeting. We should
48 meet with Dr. Habtes, Graciela, and the two representatives from

1 the local government, so they could be involved, to see how we can
2 move forward with this as a Council.

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** J-P. Kevin?

5

6 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Well, you're on the Council, so I yield my time.

7

8 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** No. Jean-Pierre Oriol, U.S.V.I. So, I guess
9 this question is more for Central NOAA staff. I guess I might date
10 myself here a little bit too. But, you know, this question about
11 data and data repository, specifically for NOAA back in 2008 or
12 2009 when NOAA in the Caribbean was formed, one of the principal
13 efforts was the discussion on centralizing database because of the
14 fact that NOAA not only conducts so much of the research, and you
15 know, getting the data, but then they also fund so much of it.

16

17 I mean, from a NOAA in the Caribbean standpoint, I haven't been on
18 that working group for a while now, but it was, again, one of the
19 things that was identified very early on, is how particularly
20 within NOAA and within NOAA funded projects to create exactly what
21 Sennai is talking about, so that it's not a heavy lift to go and
22 pull all of this data from number of different sources, but rather
23 because NOAA was the one developing or funding a lot of the data
24 that was being generated for the Caribbean region that all of that
25 was been there.

26

27 Does anybody know if any of that is actually moving forward at
28 all? I mean, I remember they were supposed to bring in services
29 from Digital Coast to be able to build that out or anything like
30 that. I mean, has any piece of that move forward at all? Does
31 anybody sit on NOAA in the Caribbean anymore?

32

33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

34

35 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I'm sort of the second Chair for the Science
36 Center on NOAA in the Caribbean. But I haven't heard any talk about
37 that in the short time that I've been involved. However, do you
38 know if there is documentation of those kinds of discussions, or
39 should I just start doing some digging?

40

41 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Yeah. I'd have to do some digging myself,
42 Kevin. I mean, Miguel, you were there. You know? This is when the
43 group was very first formed and then, because NOAA in the Carolinas
44 had taken off and they had created their sort of suite was to the
45 NOAA upper levels, you know, and so there was a group within the
46 Caribbean working with Jeff.

47

48 Jeff Payne wanted to replicate what was being done in NOAA in the

1 Carolinas to do that. And that's what was one of the things, you
2 know, you had the Southeast Fishery Science Center doing a lot of
3 research here. You have NOAA BioGeo doing a lot of research here.
4 You know, the university's getting funding. So, it was one of those
5 things that we were talking about very early on was creating this.

6
7 And, I mean, I think, particularly now, if there is a way to use
8 any of the BIL funding that's out there or something to finally
9 sit down and say, "Okay. Here's our one opportunity to pull all of
10 this effort together." Like, with the different funding streams
11 that aren't going strictly into programs, but rather project based,
12 this is the time for us to actually figure that piece out. So.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

15
16 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. This is Kevin. So, a couple of things.
17 So, I think that what we need to do is some homework and start
18 digging and see what was proposed, what might have been done, so
19 we're not trying to reinvent the wheel. I would also suggest that
20 into one of Sennai's points, what I found with our strategic
21 planning work is we've got somebody hired, Rachel, who many of you
22 have met and know. That's her job, right, to run that. And it's
23 made a huge difference when you've got some dedicated staff to
24 doing that. So, I suggest and, you know, Miguel's point of maybe
25 getting a contractor in, somebody that can be focused on that and
26 keep everybody else on task. Because as Sennai said, everybody
27 else has other jobs. But that's made a huge difference for that
28 project. I suspect it would make a huge difference in this case.

29
30 You could also put that person on keeping folks on task, figuring
31 out what has been done in that NOAA in the Caribbean initiative,
32 if it got anywhere. I would also say that for any Science Center
33 involvement in these things, I would ask that the Council send a
34 memo to the Science Center requesting that. Because it turns out
35 that the people that might be best suited to do some of this are
36 not in my group. They may be in fisheries statistics because those
37 are the folks that deal with databases. So, we may be involved to
38 help with that work, but you also need the folks that this is
39 really what they do, the database side of things. Because it's a
40 whole, as we all know, it's a whole body of work that I'm not an
41 expert in, but they are. So, it could be that there are multiple
42 people that might be involved in this kind of work from the Science
43 Center.

44
45 So, just a couple of thoughts that, you know, and Clay could then
46 direct everybody to assign the right people.

47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I believe that we should put our house in order.

1 So, if we follow Dr. Habtes' recommendation from the group, we can
2 meet and not discuss it anymore here. So, we can meet and then
3 decide, number one, the objective of what we need to do, why,
4 etcetera. And then we can put together maybe a 2-page document
5 that we can share with the Council and the Center.

6
7 Because going back to what the commissioner was saying, yeah, we
8 did that a long time ago, and we have all grandiose ideas. But the
9 thing is, when you don't have the money or the person attached to
10 it, it's very difficult to continue it. So, that's what we're
11 seeing here. So, I believe between here and the August meeting,
12 again, we can meet, Graciela, Carlos, myself, Dr. Sennai, and
13 representative from the local government to go over this, and then
14 we can inform at the August meeting what is that we need.

15
16 And what Kevin mentioned is very important. We need to know,
17 especially now that you have this person, who to talk to about
18 this possibility?

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy and then, Graciela and Sennai.

21
22 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I mean, Jean-Pierre brings up a fantastic
23 point, right, that the opportunity is really now because we have
24 this historical amount of funding from the Inflation Reduction Act
25 and bipartisan infrastructure law. So, one of the things I'll
26 follow-up on is that NOAA Fisheries received \$349,000,000 of that,
27 about \$145,000,000 is going to essential data acquisition and
28 modernizing stock assessments, right? So, this is beyond obviously
29 stock assessments, but I don't know at this point how much of
30 that's been kind of decided and allocated across the entire fishery
31 service enterprise, how much may be available still to be decided
32 and whether or not some of that could be carved out for specific
33 work in the Caribbean. That seems like a huge opportunity.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela? Mean in the meantime-- Oh, okay. Go
36 ahead.

37
38 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, one thing. So, when we have been
39 contacting other agencies that don't have anything to do with NOAA
40 or the USGS, for example, and trying to retrieve some of the data,
41 most of the data is in paper format, and maps are in paper format
42 and things like that. So, we have, over the years, have acquired
43 some of that and made it into the digital era, brought all that
44 into the, more than anything else, in terms of EBFM, trying to
45 figure out habitat and species and species distribution, etcetera.

46
47 So, there are a number of efforts that are parallel to what we're
48 doing but they are all looking at us, the Council, to provide some

1 information at Puerto Rico Climate Change Council, the Caribbean
2 Regional Ocean Partnership, CariCOOS, BioGeo mapper that NOAA has
3 provided. So, it all comes back to what we're trying to do. So,
4 all we really have to do is to make it Caribbean centric in this
5 case. That's, you know, the real focus of this data infrastructure
6 work.

7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. If I may. This is precisely, we don't want
9 to, as I said to Graciela, you don't have to go into the details
10 here, but that's precisely what we need to do when we meet Dr.
11 Sennai and the group, identify all these issues. By the way, the
12 reason that these people ask the Council to do that, we don't need
13 to. The Council is not paid to provide information for everybody
14 and his brother.

15
16 Everybody has his own task to do. But what we are trying to do
17 here, actually, one of the proposals that we have with the IRA
18 funding is to have this hub that would allow us to have all that
19 information in one place and contributors it. We also have a hub
20 for spawning aggregations. We have now until May 1st, we have to
21 modify the proposal. So, we will make a stronger point and add
22 more language into the proposal that we'll be using IRA fundings,
23 if approved, to try to connect all this into one thing.

24
25 The other thing is that I had authority to hire people if we had
26 the money. So, me and the Chair, once we have the recommendation
27 from the group, just like Sennai mentioned, we kind of structure
28 it in a way that we can then react to a positive way to your
29 recommendations. So.

30
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. Thanks. Just two things. One, I want us to
32 realize that, like, we say that the data infrastructure that we
33 need is not very big, and I think that's not going to be true going
34 forward. We have some of the largest numbers of managed species in
35 the U.S., and, like, the data that's necessary to build the type
36 of management we want to see is going to be very big. Just a good
37 example is the habitat data we collect alone from SEAMAP, in terms
38 of video data, it's almost 16 terabytes a year. Right? And if we
39 are going to be archiving that, right now, we're doing it through
40 a patchwork of online cloud servers and, like, external hard
41 drives.

42
43 You know, if you expand that out to the number of species that we
44 need to do this for, rather than just conch, lobster in a
45 generalized reef fish video, that data growth is exponential, and
46 we are not currently thinking about these needs in our management.
47 And that is a mistake, and it's going to lead us to a point where
48 we are now, which is that we don't have the information on the

1 species we want to make the management decisions we need. So, I
2 just wanted to make that point.

3
4 The second thing is, Miguel, I believe I sent you guys in December
5 kind of a draft structure for how we could use EBFM infrastructure
6 towards climate vulnerability assessments. Please feel free to use
7 any of that information towards what you're drafting for May for
8 the IRA funds. If you guys have questions on how to incorporate
9 that or need more specifics, just let me know. I'm always happy to
10 develop that again.

11
12 And then I wanted to address, commissioner Oriol's point about
13 Digital Coast. A lot of that work went towards habitat satellite
14 data through the National Ocean Service. Unfortunately, they tap
15 into a larger structure of datasets and models that are nationally
16 used, and they don't often fit well for the resolution that we
17 need here in the U.S. Caribbean because we are smaller islands.
18 And so, unfortunately, it hasn't worked to fit into a lot of the
19 data that we use for fisheries assessments here, and we haven't
20 done a great job of, like, connecting those two things. And so, I
21 do think we would need help from our federal counterparts to
22 connect that data service to the type of data that we're collecting
23 here and build better bridges for utilizing that kind of data
24 structure in our fisheries management needs.

25
26 But generally, what we've done historically, particularly from an
27 oceanography and a marine science standpoint, is we've developed
28 our own models, our own habitat information, and that doesn't make
29 it onto, you know, that service platform. And so, to kind of
30 backtrack to get into it, I think would be much more difficult
31 than developing a parallel system for the U.S. Caribbean. Because
32 I think, as we've seen and we know, needs are a little bit different
33 to the federal management needs here in the U.S. Caribbean. And if
34 we're not taking that into account in developing a structure that
35 works for us, ten years from now we're going to be in the same
36 place where we're saying, why didn't we do this 15 years ago? And
37 I don't want us to I don't want this Council, I don't want the
38 U.S. Caribbean to be there with fisheries management.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks, Sennai. We're going to take a quick 10-
41 minute break. Oh, sorry. Kevin?

42
43 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Sorry to be so insistent.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That's alright.

46
47 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, at the beginning of my presentation, there's
48 a short section about queen conch, which I'm sure everybody's going

1 to be interested to see. However, the speaker, she has to get on
2 another call, so she's only got right now to do it. If we can take
3 five minutes or so, and then we can break, and then I'll come back
4 and do the rest. I need a break as well as anybody, but if we could
5 just have five minutes, that'd be great.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We'll do that.

8
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you.

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks. Thanks, Kevin.

12
13 **SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES**
14 **U.S. CARIBBEAN CONCH SURVEY PROJECT**

15
16 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Are we all set? Okay. So, as I said, I'm
17 going to shift this over to Jennifer Doerr, who's at the Science
18 Center. She's on remotely, and so, Jen, please, take it away.

19
20 Thank you. Next slide.

21
22 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Okay. Great. Thank you, Kevin. And sorry that
23 I have to jump in so quickly and then depart so quickly. But I did
24 want to join you for a few minutes this morning, just to give you
25 a brief overview of what we're doing in our U.S. Caribbean for the
26 queen conch survey project that we're running.

27
28 It's an MSA funded survey project that's scheduled to extend for
29 about three years, for the next three years. And for this project,
30 we're focused on standardizing our survey approaches with the
31 overall goal of conducting island wide surveys to generate density
32 and size structured population estimates. Of course, it would be
33 suitable for revisiting and revising some of the traditional stock
34 assessment models that have been used, and really moving us toward
35 a successful stock assessment process. So, I don't know if you can
36 go to the next slide.

37
38 So given that it's a 3-year project, we are doing and surveying
39 one island group per year. We started with Saint Thomas and Saint
40 John last year in 2023. We are moving on to Saint Croix this year
41 and we will be there in July conducting surveys. And then, we will
42 follow that up and end with Puerto Rico in 2025.

43
44 The basis of the design is a randomly stratified approach, and
45 we're incorporating the benthic habitat categories from the
46 published habitat maps. And then, we're binning by water depths in
47 5-meter bins, and we're surveying the 0-to-30-meter depth range,
48 with the intent of incorporating deeper surveys later on in the

1 project, once we get that aspect set up. At each random survey
2 location, we're conducting a 10-meter radial survey, where divers
3 swim around in a circle and essentially count and measure all of
4 the conch that we find within that circle.

5
6 And then a second component that we're incorporating is to spend
7 time focused on mapping the spatial extents of known aggregation
8 areas around these island groups and conducting some targeted
9 radial surveys within those boundaries to really compile and get
10 at age composition information and estimate some within
11 aggregation densities of reproductively active adults. The images
12 that we put here on the slide of Saint Thomas and Saint John, are
13 showing the sites that we surveyed around each island, as I said
14 last year. Next slide, please.

15
16 So, these are just some brief results, from what we did last year.
17 We did complete a total of 133 radial surveys around the islands,
18 and then we were able to add in additional four surveys that
19 targeted those known aggregation areas. The overall mean densities
20 across both islands were 64 conch per hectare. And we broke this
21 out by age class overall, and the means for those were
22 approximately 24 juveniles per hectare and 40 adults per hectare.
23 These numbers could be considered a little low and possibly
24 concerning given the threshold levels that we have been talked
25 about at length of that 100 conch per hectare level, which would
26 ensure reproductive activity and contribute to population recovery
27 in the area.

28
29 And I will pause here just to just to say that our juvenile and
30 adult age class categories are more reflective of what current
31 fishing regulations are and not the typical morphological
32 observations that are used in a lot of surveys. So, when we split
33 these out in the juveniles, those are any individual that are less
34 than that 9-inch or 23-centimeter shell length. And also, that lip
35 thickness that's less than three eighths of an inch or nine and a
36 half millimeters. And then adults, of course, are anything greater
37 than those minimum size regulations, and thus would be considered
38 part of the exploitable population.

39
40 There's some size frequency graphs up here. We look at these, you
41 can see that there is a peak in that 11 to approximately 14-
42 centimeter shell length category, approximately the year to age
43 class for these conchs. That can be indicative of a positive
44 recruitment event, but that also could be an artifact of just the
45 survey approach and not really being able to locate those year one
46 individuals since they can be considered infaunal with some of the
47 smaller sizes.

1 We're moving forward with investigating these data further to look
2 at the relationship between these shell lengths, and then integrate
3 the lip thickness for the adults, shown here, to determine if the
4 adult population is composed of newly maturing or potential young
5 adults, or if these might be older adults with thicker lips.

6
7 And then on the right side of the slide, looking at the within
8 aggregation surveys, we did do four radial surveys within a spatial
9 extent of this aggregation, which was an approximately one-hectare
10 area. This aggregation was located in fairly shallow water on the
11 north coast of Saint John. And you can see the differences here in
12 density between the surveys within an aggregation versus the broad
13 scale approach. So, for these within aggregation surveys, we
14 estimated a density of 1695 conch per hectare. And again, this is
15 broken down into densities of 621 juveniles per hectare and 1074
16 adults per hectare. The size frequencies, again, within this
17 aggregation show a mix of maturing individuals, as indicated by
18 the high numbers of sub adults and newly mature adults here. And
19 again, similar to the previous size frequency, we're working on
20 integrating the lip thickness information into these frequencies
21 to further inform the age class structure, and the age composition
22 within this aggregation.

23
24 And I'll wrap this up by saying that, of course the information
25 gathered from these surveys will be used to extrapolate island-
26 wide population and standing stock estimates. But also, that the
27 survey results shown here highlight the need for standardization
28 of survey approaches and careful consideration when it comes to
29 site selection, especially in temporal replication of regional
30 surveys. And this is a point of further discussion. We're
31 continuing conversations with the SEAMAP-C program coordinators,
32 and some of the territorial agencies to combine our approaches,
33 and further the utility of the information gathered from our
34 respective survey efforts. And thank you, that is all I have.

35 36 **QUESTION/COMMENTS**

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel and then Julian.

39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you for the presentation. Do you envision
41 that at the end of the project, you will be able to know the
42 density of viable reproductive animals per hectare. As you know,
43 in the literature, when you go to literature, when we have been
44 working with this, some of them are healthy when you have 60 or 75
45 per hectare. In the countries of Central America, you're talking
46 about 100 to 200. In some cases, well, that's the question.

47
48 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Thank you. Yes, absolutely. We do know that

1 those threshold levels vary regionally, and that we need to look
2 carefully at each region to determine what the appropriate
3 threshold levels are. These broad scale surveys will inform those
4 reproductive centers, and also give us an idea of potential areas
5 to focus our surveys on future years, so that we can estimate these
6 densities of reproductive adults in abundances, and also capture
7 a frequency of reproduction, egg, mating, and egg laying, and those
8 sorts of activities that are occurring within the adult population.

9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you. Julian?

11
12 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras for the record. Can we go back a
13 slide, please? The one with the areas that were surveyed. Yes. So,
14 I have three questions. And I'm going to start off, with the first
15 question. How were these sites chosen to be looked at? The sites
16 that were done. Let's start with that first question.

17
18 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Okay. So, as I mentioned, they were randomly
19 selected from the benthic habitat maps that were developed by NOS.
20 So, we tried to have equivalent effort across vegetated habitats,
21 hard bottom habitats, and then organize those into 5-meter depth
22 bins. And they were randomly selected from those categories. And
23 then, as we were in the field, we obviously had a much higher
24 number of sites on the list to visit, but due to some inherent
25 difficulties, while we were in the field, these are the only sites
26 that we were able to visit in roughly about a 12-day period.

27
28 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. Thanks for that answer. Because the reason
29 why I asked that question, I'm here looking at the areas for the
30 Saint Thomas sites that were done. There are a lot of areas there
31 where that's not where the conch is. Because conch is not fished
32 in the Saint Thomas/Saint John district. Very little is fished. I
33 think more of recreational than commercial. Commercial is very,
34 very low on the fishing side in the Saint Thomas district. What
35 was the deepest area that was dived?

36
37 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** So, if you look off the south the sort of
38 southeast coastline of Saint Thomas, that was an area that we
39 surveyed that was right at 30 meters. And we did find, fairly high
40 numbers of reproductively active adults in that area. So,
41 potentially an aggregation spot that we should, we'd hope to
42 revisit later. And then and then we also did some in the 25,
43 approximately 25-meter depth right on the northeast coast of Saint
44 Thomas, where, again, we found evidence of reproductive activity
45 of adults.

46
47 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. The reason why I asked that, as a fisher, we
48 know where the conch beds are in Saint Thomas/Saint John District,

1 and a lot of them lie within a 100 to 140 feet of water. There are
2 so many conchs in those areas that we catch them inside the fish
3 drops. So, if you're catching conch in the fish drop, just think
4 how many in that area.

5
6 This becomes very alarming for us when it's said that the numbers
7 seem to be low, and it could be a potential problem. This is why
8 we always say, "This is where the fishers come in to be part of
9 these projects" because a lot of the areas there that are surveyed
10 are not really where our conch beds are. So, I'm just throwing it
11 out there. I know you said that there's going to be more work done,
12 but I'm throwing it out there that we need to include the fishers
13 when doing these projects because the outcome of the report, what
14 it's saying to us right now is there's not enough conch to sustain
15 our fishery here in Saint Thomas, and that's very alarming when we
16 know there are a lot more conch because we don't fish them.

17
18 So, I just want to put that on the record for right now. Thank
19 you.

20
21 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Absolutely. Thank you for that comment. And,
22 I should add that, Dr. Juan Agar, we are putting together some
23 workshops, some local workshops to definitely involve the fishing
24 community, and to point out or point out to us these areas that
25 you know of so that we can incorporate those into our survey
26 design.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin.

29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Just one follow-up to Julian's comments.
31 Can we go forward one slide? So, if you look at the overall
32 densities, it says 64 conch per hectare. So, that includes the
33 zeros. Right? So, that doesn't mean there aren't very many conchs
34 out there, because when you look at the next column of overall
35 density within an aggregation, it's almost 1700. That's a lot of
36 conchs per hectare no matter where you go.

37
38 So, because she's got this 2-stage design, right, let's look across
39 the shelf, see where the conch is and then when we find them, we
40 go within the aggregation. And this is data that's often been
41 lacking to do that second stage, to go within the aggregation. And
42 that's where "do you have enough conch for reproduction, do you
43 not" really come into play. And there's a whole bunch of adult
44 conchs. There's over there's almost 1100 conch per hectare. So,
45 that's a lot of conchs.

46
47 So, this isn't showing there aren't many conchs out there. This is
48 showing quite the opposite that within an aggregation, when you

1 find an aggregation, there's a lot of conchs. So, that's an
2 important takeaway, I think.

3
4 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Thank you for clarifying that. It just becomes
5 alarming that first where it says, "six-". So, I just wanted it to
6 be on a record, and now it's on a record. So, pulling it, so
7 everyone now can hear that, you know, there will be areas where
8 you won't see the conch, but there are going to be the areas where
9 you have the reproduction taking place and the quantities are
10 there. That's very important to be clarified. Thank you.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

13
14 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I also want to make a point. Thanks, Jen, for
15 your presentation. Good to see you again. The purpose for random
16 sampling is to show this exact type of pattern. If you go to places
17 that only have the conch, you're losing a lot of information.

18
19 And, like, we go back and forth a lot of that conversation in
20 meetings at the SSC and the Council, but I really want to point
21 out, like, that's why we develop sampling through statistical
22 survey sampling the way we do, so that you can pull out more than
23 just what is the absolute number of the conch. And that's why we
24 do designs this way.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Martha.

27
28 **MARTHA PRADA:** Thank you. And thank you, Jennifer, for your
29 presentation. It is great. Excuse me. I'm Martha Prada for the
30 record, from the Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

31
32 Thank you, Jennifer, for your presentation. It's very enlightening
33 to see this kind of work being presented in this forum. I am the
34 coordinator of the Statistical Scientific and Technological
35 Advisory Group for the species at the regional level. So, the issue
36 of discussing and analyzing the densities of the queen conch on
37 the population over the entire shelf is a very well discussed
38 topic, and we all recognize the importance of understanding,
39 really, what is going on with the reproduction of the species,
40 what is happening within the aggregation and outside the
41 aggregation. And so, the development of your proposal and your
42 work, Jennifer, is very great to see it and now we are trying to
43 get the message across the region, the entire Caribbean region.
44 So, we continue these conversations and, hopefully, expecting to
45 integrate this concept into the broader scales and management
46 perspective that can evaluate it in the non-determined findings
47 that are required for exporting the species. And so, these kinds
48 of concepts based on the scientific basis, are very well received

1 and recognized. Thank you.

2

3 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Thank you, Martha.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy.

6

7 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thank you for the presentation. Maybe
8 you don't have this readily available. I'm curious with the 130
9 radial surveys that you completed, kind of what proportion of them
10 had conch numbers of a 100 conch per hectare or greater. You know,
11 because Kevin obviously mentioned the distribution includes zeros
12 up to obviously some of your highest quantity estimates of conch.
13 So, I'm just curious how that average looks relative to all the
14 sites sampled.

15

16 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Yeah. Yeah. Thank you, Andy. That's a good
17 question. I'm actually looking at the data right now.

18

19 We actually had a fairly low proportion of surveys without any
20 conch, which was which was good to see. And we did have some very
21 high densities aside from the aggregation areas that we surveyed.
22 and one of those that I mentioned was the deep 30-meter surveys
23 off of the southeast coast of Saint Thomas, where we had, for
24 example, the density in those areas was over, again, over 1,000
25 adults per hectare.

26

27 So, it would take some time to tease that all apart and get into
28 that and particularly combine that with, again, the lip thickness
29 information to look at the age structure in those aggregations and
30 also record the incidence of reproductive activity within those
31 areas, as well as link that to the benthic habitats that we
32 surveyed. That is all in the works and I hope to have that available
33 for another discussion.

34

35 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras for the record. One more
36 question. Is there any plan in the future of, using RVs to do
37 deeper dives that, you know, the humans can't go down and stay
38 down for a long period, so we can see what the densities are.

39

40 And then just to piggyback on what you said earlier. Yes, I'll be
41 more than happy to provide information and areas to look at. But
42 I know, if we can get the RVs to do some deeper dives, I think it
43 would be also great to add the information to the quantities that
44 conch gather all over in the deeper waters. Thank you.

45

46 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Yes. Thank you. And, actually, Kevin and I
47 have talked quite a bit about utilizing remote vehicles to do those
48 deepwater surveys, and he can fill you in more on those plans. We

1 are trying to access a small underwater vehicle for surveys in
2 July in Saint Croix, because I know, in particular, we'd be
3 interested in the deeper areas off of Lang Bank, and looking at
4 the conch populations that are around that area.

5
6 So that is something that we hope to do as a pilot this year, and
7 then move forward with that on a more regular basis to look at
8 some of the deeper, what are being called, refuge populations or
9 refuge areas for these islands so that we can look at densities
10 within those deepwater areas.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance and then Graciela.

13
14 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Thanks again, Jennifer, for your presentation.
15 One quick question, because I don't want to take more time. Do you
16 happen to take notes or observations on the milk conch? Because
17 once strombus gigas or aliger gigas becomes restricted in certain
18 areas, I mean, and if there is a demand, fishers they're going to
19 go after the milk conch. So, are we collecting any site information
20 on other species of conch, relative abundance, egg masses? That's
21 my question.

22
23 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Okay. Yes, good question. We actually do just
24 note if there are other conch species within the area, although we
25 did not count them. That could be something that we can incorporate
26 into future surveys. But one biological aspect I'll note of that
27 is that typically the extent of queen conch and milk conch, don't
28 overlap all that often due to the sediment characteristics.

29
30 We typically find that milk conchs are in slightly more soft
31 sediments or slightly more silty sediments than queen conch is
32 able to tolerate. So, they have different geographical separation.
33 But we did we did run across one of our circles, I'm looking for
34 it right now, that was a milk conch aggregation, and we did observe
35 reproductive activity. And I'm also aware from previous surveys
36 around Puerto Rico, very high densities of milk conch in certain
37 areas. And as I said, that could be something that we could
38 incorporate in future surveys and take notes, so that they would
39 be available later on.

40
41 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

44
45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Quickly, we're going to send you a link
46 to some of the reports from the mesophotic reefs because queen
47 conch has been in our fisheries surveys through the coral reef
48 conservation program. And right now, we have an ROV diving up to

1 130 meters through Reni García. So, we do take notes on the conch
2 and try to make sure-- the ROV can manipulate the conch and stuff,
3 so we know if it's alive or not. So, that information should be
4 coming online pretty soon. And that, includes surveys in Puerto
5 Rico, in the Virgin Islands also. So, to 130 meters.

6
7 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Okay. Great. Thank you, Graciela.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. We're going to take a quick
10 10-minute break.

11
12 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks, Jennifer.

13
14 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Thanks, Kevin.

15
16 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Bye. Thanks.

17
18 **JENNIFER C. DOERR:** Bye.

19
20 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to get going again. Where is Kevin?

23
24 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Alright.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Ready? Okay. So, she's all yours, Kevin.

27
28 **UPDATES**

29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. This is Kevin, from the Science Center.
31 If we can start up the same presentation and go forward one slide.
32 Alright. I know you've all been waiting. Your favorite presentation
33 of the meeting, here it starts.

34
35 So, I'm going to talk about, the work that the folks in the
36 Caribbean Fisheries Branch have been doing. We put together this
37 slide as sort of a broad overview. I'm not going to talk about all
38 of these topics, but I'm going to hit on a few of them in upcoming
39 slides. The stuff in different colors, like the Western Central
40 Atlantic Fishery Commission and that sort of thing and then all
41 the species on the right. The different colors don't really mean
42 anything. In the original document, those were links to other
43 sites. But I am going to talk about a few of these things.

44
45 And so, we're involved, as many of you know, and are also involved
46 in our strategic planning work. We do a lot of data collection. We
47 also rely on many other folks to collect data that we then use in
48 our data analysis and data provisioning and, of course, we do stock

1 assessments as well.

2
3 So, first I'd like to introduce our newest, Caribbean Fisheries
4 Branch staff member, Matt Damiano. He has been well traveled in
5 his educational career. He got his bachelor's at Oregon State
6 University, followed by a master's at the University of Maryland,
7 and then finally a PhD at North Carolina State. Most recently,
8 before joining the Caribbean Fisheries Branch, he was a
9 postdoctoral associate and, in that role, he was the lead analyst
10 for Dolphin Fish Management Strategy Evaluation and Stock and also
11 was a stock assessment scientist for the Atlantic Red Snapper
12 Research Program. So, he was actually doing his postdoc at the
13 Southeast Fisheries Science Center Lab in Beaufort, North
14 Carolina.

15
16 So, we're very happy to have Matt joining us. He brings a lot of
17 skills that we're going to make use of, in particular, is that
18 management strategy evaluation expertise that's going to give us
19 a really useful tool in our toolbox of analysis.

20
21 So, yesterday, at the Science Center, Cisco Werner, who many of
22 you have met in the past, was visiting. So, my boss, Shannon Calay,
23 asked all of her branch chiefs to put together your three biggest
24 successes in each of the branches. So, I asked the Caribbean branch
25 to give me their list. And so, we boiled that down to our three
26 that we gave to Shannon, and these are the first two. I have
27 slightly rewritten them from what we provided to Shannon. But
28 basically, I think one of our biggest successes has been to have
29 more Science Center staff time and resources and leveraging other
30 staff and resources to doing work in the region.

31
32 I think we're really starting to have a meaningful impact and
33 building capacity with collaborators. We've got better
34 communication, better interaction with stakeholders. I think we
35 can all agree that the atmosphere we're working in today is much,
36 much different than say five years ago. So, I consider that a huge
37 success.

38
39 The next success, I think we can chalk up to, our collaboration
40 between the Science Center and everyone down here working in the
41 region, living in the region, is some real success with getting
42 stock assessments through. Recall that it was not so long ago that
43 it was a real struggle to get stock assessments, that although the
44 work was done well, the result was not found useful for management
45 advice for a variety of reasons, some of them having to do with
46 the way the laws are written.

47
48 But in any case, we're now at a place where we've got SEDAR 80,

1 that you all just talked about, that was successfully completed
2 and provides management advice. It also was an opportunity for the
3 assessment staff to work in collaboration with the SSC to develop
4 a better product. I think that is also a big change from what we've
5 seen some years ago. We've got a much more collaborative
6 association with the SSC. I think that's been for the best for all
7 concerned.

8
9 SEDAR 84, we just completed a data workshop, back in, I think it
10 was January, might have been February. Everything's starting to
11 run together for me. But any case, it was a couple of months ago,
12 and I've been involved in SEDARS since, either SEDARS 4 or 7. So,
13 I've done a lot of these things. And when I left the SEDAR 84 data
14 workshop, I felt as good about that data workshop and how it
15 progressed and what we got out of that as anyone I've ever been
16 involved in.

17
18 So, that is primarily due to the people who are involved, many of
19 you are here in this room, and it was a really good data workshop.
20 We got a lot of things done. We figured out how to do a lot of
21 data provisioning and analysis better than we had been doing them.
22 So, the number of collaborators was terrific. So, I felt really
23 good about that one. So, I would call that a huge success as well.

24
25 And then I would also point out that the strategic planning
26 project, which has been going on for three years now, we started
27 it a little bit sooner, but most of that was planning to plan.
28 And, anyway, we've got a strategic planning project. Again, many
29 of you were involved. We've completed 12 projects, 20 more are in
30 progress. I think that's helped to strengthen this these
31 collaborations that I talked about.

32
33 We've increased communication not only within the Science Center,
34 but with all of the stakeholders, all of the collaborators in the
35 region. And you'll see at the bottom there a whole bunch of
36 acronyms. All of those folks were involved. And even in just in
37 the Science Center, there were people from four different
38 divisions, 11 different branches, and the directorate, which is
39 people above my pay grade. So, I think it was and continues to be
40 a really informative, collaborative, and useful process for
41 getting some things done.

42
43 So, a couple of things I want to talk about. We received at the
44 Science Center, some of the Inflation Reduction Act funding, and
45 I'm going to talk about a couple of ways we're going to spend those
46 funds.

47
48 So, we've had, funded through other means, some fishery independent

1 survey work, which we do in collaboration with Puerto Rico fishers.
2 We just yesterday had a meeting here in this very room and trust
3 me, it was even colder then. So, things are improving. But we had
4 the meeting with the fishers yesterday to plan for year two of a
5 study. But we want to take what we've learned in Puerto Rico and
6 not only extend the work in Puerto Rico but move it over to the
7 Virgin Islands and begin some of these fishery independent surveys
8 there in collaboration with commercial fishers and other
9 stakeholders.

10
11 So, there's a deepwater reef fish survey that's happening in Puerto
12 Rico. It began on the West Coast of Puerto Rico. It's now
13 throughout island wide. We want to move that into the Virgin
14 Islands. That is done in cooperation with Fishers. We also want to
15 move the existing survey in Puerto Rico into shallower water.
16 You'll you're all familiar, I think, at this point, with the NCRMP
17 diver survey.

18
19 That is a survey that right now gives us our best and longest time
20 series of fishery independent data we can use for an index of
21 abundance. So, we want to overlap those two surveys, so that we
22 have essentially a survey from 450 meters, I think that's the
23 deepest depth of that deepwater survey, all the way up into shallow
24 water where the divers are operating. And so, if those overlap,
25 now we're now we're covering a much greater depth range. And we
26 want to do the same thing in the Virgin Islands. So, when we move
27 that deep water survey over into the Virgin Islands, we'll go from
28 these deep depths all the way up to overlap with where the existing
29 NCRMP diver survey is happening.

30
31 So, we're using cooperative research program dollars as well as
32 the Inflation Reduction Act dollars. And this was important work
33 that was recognized in our strategic planning workshop. So, we're
34 not going off script here. This is something that folks recognize
35 as important.

36
37 So, the second fishery independent survey is a lobster trap survey.
38 This is actually the one that we were meeting with Puerto Rico
39 fishers to get set up, yesterday. So, we're going to do a second
40 year in Puerto Rico. And again, this is a survey we want to move
41 to the Virgin Islands, and we'll do that with Inflation Reduction
42 Act Funding. It is cooperative research with the fishers.

43
44 And, again, we've got Cooperative Research Program Funding that
45 we're also putting into this. Again, this came out of Caribbean
46 Strategic Planning Workshop. So, we want to get that happening
47 this year. I'm trying to get all of the contract things set up so
48 that people can bid on the contract. And I know that there are

1 folks here that, or I certainly hope there are folks here in the
2 Virgin Islands that will be interested in being part of that work.
3
4 So, we've got a couple of additional things that we're doing in
5 2024. There's been a lot of talk today and in other meetings about
6 some of the pelagics, the HMS fisheries. Also, I think we're going
7 to see a talk later about sharks. Well, that's something we've
8 been thinking about at the Science Center.
9
10 So, we want to start a project, that I'm just calling characterize
11 the shark and HMS fisheries, here in the U.S. Caribbean. That's
12 going to start, initially, looking at some of the existing data
13 that we have and also trying to get people on the ground, in the
14 Virgin Islands we'll start with, because we have fewer data from
15 the Virgin Islands than we have from Puerto Rico at this point,
16 with the HMS Fisheries and sharks. So, we want to get that going
17 this year.
18
19 We will continue to support data entry for DRNA. We take some of
20 the funds and add some additional funding to the Cooperative
21 Statistics Program. We do something similar with Port Sampler
22 Support in the Virgin Islands. We also want to work with
23 stakeholders and better understand sort of their management
24 expectations and requirements. And by stakeholders, I'm talking
25 about everybody, not just necessarily the people in this room, but
26 what do other folks who don't normally participate in this process,
27 what would they like to see come out of management? And you know,
28 how do we make management or the management expectations? How do
29 we use that to better inform the way we provide information for
30 management?
31
32 And one thing that I didn't put on here, but since it came up in
33 Jennifer's talk a few moments ago, I'll bring it up now, is some
34 of the Inflation Reduction Act money we're going to spend is to
35 come up with, hopefully, a better way to conduct some of these
36 conch surveys. And by that, I mean, we're going to build a camera
37 system that we can tow behind a boat with the idea that will cover
38 a lot of territory across the shelf, so that you don't have to use
39 a lot of expensive diver time to do these broad level surveys. You
40 can cover a lot of ground.
41
42 We also want to build in, using artificial intelligence, machine
43 learning kinds of software, what's a conch and what's a rock, and
44 have this have this camera system help locate those aggregations.
45 You can then either, better assign your divers to various areas to
46 go do the survey, or you can utilize some other autonomous vehicle,
47 or perhaps just change your search pattern with this towed array
48 that we're going to build. Eventually, we'll get it so that it's

1 engineered to go deeper.
2
3 Right now, we just want to make sure we can get it to work, and we
4 also want to train the software because the whole idea is how do
5 we do more with less funds? People are expensive, so how do we do
6 this in a way that we don't have to pay for lots of people time
7 when they're better spent focused on very specific dives, very
8 specific kinds of tasks, not sitting there going through hours and
9 hours and hours of video or doing a whole bunch of surveys when
10 their expensive diver time might be better utilized.

11
12 So, we're going to try and do more, with some technology. So,
13 that's part of how we're going to spend some of that IRA money,
14 that Inflation Reduction Act money.

15
16 So, that's it for my part. We've got a second part coming up, but
17 I'm going to pause here for any questions.

18
19 Great. You picked it. You learned it all.

20

21 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

22

23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai Habtes?

24

25 **SENNAI HABTES:** Not letting you out of here that easy, Kevin. So,
26 thanks for the presentation. You've done a really great job in
27 highlighting how it meets both, I think, territorial needs as well
28 as, like, the CFMC priorities.

29

30 The one question I have is where are we on, I think, determining
31 a structure that these things aren't simply one offs? Right?
32 Because that's something we don't generally talk about; every five
33 or ten years we come up with a new set of, you know, ways to
34 improve our fisheries' independent data collections in the U.S.
35 Caribbean. But for some reason, that doesn't last for, like, four
36 or five years after we've done them.

37

38 And, you know, I think we all can point to a host of different
39 reasons as to why that happens. But my question is, how are we
40 developing better structures to make sure that the work that we're
41 doing on this data collection, from both the NOAA and the federal
42 side, as well as the DRNA and DPNR side, is a structure that will
43 last in perpetuity, so that we don't have to keep reinventing the
44 wheel every 15 years?

45

46 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Right. Thanks, Sennai. That's a great question
47 and something that, you know, I think we've all, or many of us
48 anyway, have struggled with. So, I think there are a couple of

1 things.

2
3 One difference now versus even four years ago is there's now a
4 Caribbean branch. Right? So, there's now somebody to champion that
5 cause. And that has led to additional funding, for example, for
6 the deepwater snapper survey. That had been something that was run
7 through grant money, and now it's, you know, funding is always
8 elusive, but now it's in much better, more longer-term funding
9 situation. So that's one.

10
11 You know, we're now able to better work with folks that have done,
12 like, the RVC work, the NCRMP diver survey, where we're now working
13 with them to better integrate their results into stock assessments
14 and that's always a good argument to continue funding. But I think
15 the other thing is coming out of the strategic planning, there are
16 a couple of groups that are working specifically on what are the
17 various funding options, and how do we better tap into them. And
18 then there's the whole governance group that, okay, even if we
19 have money, it can sometimes, as you know as well as I do, it can
20 sometimes be a real challenge to get that funding into place even
21 if we've received it. So, I think that we're coming at it from a
22 number of directions.

23
24 I also think that success breeds success. So, when we can
25 demonstrate-- so this IRA money isn't going to last forever. I
26 think we've got four years of it or something like that. If we can
27 demonstrate that we've built programs that are providing
28 information that is useful and actionable, we can make a pretty
29 strong case for continuing it.

30
31 I don't have a, yes, here's exactly how we're going to do it, but
32 I think we're coming at it from a lot of directions now that maybe--
33 - and I think because we've got a number of branches at the Science
34 Center, not just the one I'm in, but the there are several others
35 that have Caribbean in their name. That really changes the game,
36 because now we've got champions for getting and keeping funding.
37 Hopefully that was helpful.

38
39 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Kevin, thanks for your presentation. One
40 question. There's a lot of sources of information that are
41 fisheries independent, which do not become incorporated. To give
42 you an example are those research, scientific studies that are
43 performed for the private sector, and will give you an example.
44 For example, Reni García, you know, he's been doing collection of
45 zooplankton and fish larvae. He did it for me for ten years in the
46 same location, in the south coast in Puerto Rico. He continues to
47 do so on the north coast of Puerto Rico. And apart from that, there
48 are other sources of information that were generated by scientists

1 and using scientific method.

2
3 And I've never seen that being incorporated into any of the plants
4 or anything. It's just as if they are nonexistent. These are always
5 publishing reports. Okay? Some of them in journals, sometimes,
6 whenever we have time, but very rarely. And I think that's a lot
7 of information that the Caribbean section that you are directing
8 should, at some level, at some time, should be incorporated. Just
9 a comment. Thank you.

10
11 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks, Vance. Yeah. And I agree with you.
12 Some of it we have tried to tackle with the large database that
13 Rachel Banton has put together as part of the strategic planning
14 work. So, a lot of those things as we become aware of them are put
15 into that database that's searchable and within that--

16
17 She's done a number of presentations. But briefly, you know, the
18 years that the study happened, who was involved, who do we talk to
19 get the data. So, it's not a repository of the data themselves,
20 but it is contacts and the kinds of data and the kinds of
21 information that were collected. And then the other thing is trying
22 to, always this is a continuing ongoing process, to better get the
23 word out, to better communicate, because we have to know that it
24 exists in order to use it. So, the first step is finding out that
25 it exists.

26
27 And we're always looking for better ways to put those data requests
28 or the request for data out there. And there's a process within
29 SEDAR, and we've got to do better. We can always do better about
30 asking more people. You know, "We are going to do a stock
31 assessment next year on species x. Who's got data?" So, there
32 that's part of the process, but we do need to build those
33 communication channels to better get at it, you know, at finding
34 those data. Because any scrap of information we can include, I'm
35 all for it.

36
37 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you, Kevin.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Any more questions for Kevin? Alright.
40 I had one about lobster traps, but I'm just going to let that go
41 for now. I'll talk to you.

42
43 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Well, you feel free to ask. I'm happy to answer.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, I'm always harping about lobster traps if
46 you know? Are you talking about the three-by-two-by-two Florida
47 style, or are you talking a trap that's baited for lobster?
48

1 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, the meeting we had yesterday, we had a number
2 of fishermen in this very room, at these very tables, and we worked
3 with them to come up with a consensus design. It's a wire trap.
4 It's not the Florida trap. It's a consensus design because in the
5 survey, we got to have a standard trap. It doesn't have to be the
6 best trap. It can't be the worst one. Right? It's have got to be
7 able to catch stuff. And over the course of many hours, they came
8 up with a consensus design. This is the one we think we want to
9 use.

10
11 And so, we would do the same thing in the Virgin Islands, because
12 what's consensus over in Puerto Rico may not be consensus in Saint
13 Thomas, may not be consensus in Saint Croix. So, we'd want to do
14 the same kind of process, have the fishers involved. This is our
15 expertise. Here's what we know. Now, Fisher one and Fisher two
16 might not agree, but they have got to come to some kind of
17 consensus. And so, we went through that process.

18
19 And I don't have, other than coming up with a standard approach,
20 it's really the fishers that are coming up with that consensus
21 design, and that's the one we use. Because we can't have everybody
22 doing something different or we can't interpret the results, right.
23 So, you get that consensus design and that's what's being used and
24 that's what's being used in Puerto Rico. And like I said, when we
25 do this in the Virgin Islands, it's going to it could be a whole
26 different design.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sure. Yeah. That's fine. Because I know our
29 FAC, we have a draft lobster management plan, and design is one of
30 the things we're trying to come up. So, whenever that consensus
31 design is finalized for the Virgin Islands, I'd like to maybe
32 follow-up.

33
34 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** No. This is not what we're imposing on anybody
35 else. This is just for the study.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right.

38
39 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** This is just for the survey. The rules of the
40 Virgin Islands and trap design is outside of my wheelhouse.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But I'm imposing for our FAC,
43 anyways. Yeah. Graciela?

44
45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So just a question. So, the fishers
46 involved in this design, do you think that they will also consider
47 being participants of the SEDAR 91 that's coming up? Some of them?
48 Because the Council needs to appoint fishers that are involved in

1 the fishery.
2
3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I'm happy for you all to consider them. Yeah.
4 It'd be great if they want to be involved. So, I can get you the
5 names.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We got a break for lunch. The hotel is
8 saying that the food is ready, and we have got to go. 1:30, return.
9
10 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, Matt, when we get back, Matt will be on?
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. Sennai.
13
14 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay.
15
16 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks, Matt. Carlos, just one quick thing before
17 you break. We have-- Nicole, did you--
18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Hold on.
20
21 **SENNAI HABTES:** Just, Nicole is going to mention we have a Go Fish,
22 Go Wild, which is our new newsletter, and Nicole is going to talk
23 about that.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
26
27 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. So, thanks. Cristina is holding up and
28 has a stack of these magazines, we do as well. This is the second
29 issue of our division of Fish and Wildlife Magazine. It details
30 all types of activities we do, but of special importance this
31 month, are profiles on both of our port samplers.
32
33 And so, we encourage you to take this, learn more about what the
34 division of Fish and Wildlife does outside of these meetings,
35 outside of fisheries, and within the fisheries and on the ground.
36
37 So, "Go Fish, Go Wild" is going to be published twice a year. And
38 if you have any projects that you're working on in Virgin Islands
39 that you would like featured, our assistant director, Ayesha
40 Morris, generally, interviews folks, and puts their kind of
41 verbatim work right into our magazine. So, it's a really nice way
42 to get out that general story, the story around the data that's
43 getting collected, the story around the press releases that are
44 going out. So, please feel free to take one of these. We have
45 plenty for everyone. Thank you.
46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks, Nicole. I did see something about that,
48 and I was wondering what it was about. So, I'll definitely grab

1 one. Thanks. Okay. Lunchtime.

2
3 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on April 23, 2022.)

4
5 - - -

6
7 APRIL 23, 2024

8
9 TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

10
11 - - -

12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to get going again. You all
13 can take a seat. So, now, so I think now we're going to hear from
14 Matt.

15
16 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Can everyone see my screen?

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

19
20 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Great. Are we ready to go, or are we waiting
21 for folks to get situated?

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. You can go ahead. Most of us are here.

24
25 **HARVEST CONTROL RULES IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT: LESSONS FOR**
26 **CONFRONTING NON-STATIONARY IN THE U.S. CARIBBEAN**

27
28 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Okay. Great. Hi, everyone. Matt Damiano,
29 Southeast Fisheries Science Center. I'm going to give you a short
30 talk today called Harvest Control Rules in a Changing Environment:
31 Lessons for Confronting Non-Stationary in the U.S. Caribbean. This
32 is predominantly a presentation on work that was done by my
33 colleague, Kyle Shertzer, with some additional work provided by
34 myself. So, without further ado, let's talk about non-
35 stationarity.

36
37 So, statistically, stationarity is the idea that you have a process
38 that is random and sort of unchanging over time. That's what I
39 have here in this top figure. So, imagine this is some kind of
40 process like the temperature of sea surface water. It it's random
41 in a way that is predictable, and it's random around this average
42 here, which is marked on the hard black line around zero.

43
44 One of the challenges that we face in stock assessment is what
45 happens when the effects of non-stationarity start to influence
46 some of the biological quantities that we're trying to measure.
47 And so, non-stationarity can occur when there is a trend in a
48 process over time, something like this where it's steadily

1 increasing, or we can see a shift in the average. So, in this case,
2 we see an average over these first 100 years that is predictable
3 around this average, but then it shifts up to these five marks. Or
4 we can have non-stationarity in the form of increased variability.
5 So now instead of having this relatively predictable range around
6 the average, we have this much wider range. And so, again, keep in
7 mind something like an example of sea surface temperature in water
8 because that is one of the kinds of environmental non-stationarity
9 that we see in the South Atlantic.

10
11 So, up in the top left we have sea surface temperature, and what
12 we see is that during these years, we would consider this a
13 stationary process because it's centered around an average, and
14 the variability is pretty random and predictable. But then from
15 here up until the present, we see something like a shift in the
16 average. So, now the average, instead of being down here, is up
17 here. And so, we start to see much warmer than usual temperatures.

18
19 Similarly, if we look at this index of upwelling in the ocean,
20 again, we have a stationary process during this period, around one
21 average with relatively predictable variability. But then we see
22 that variability now start to shift downward, so we see less
23 upwelling. And similarly, here we have bottom temperature, where
24 normally we would observe variability around this mean. But even
25 starting in the early 2000, we see some lower-than-normal bottom
26 temperature, and then more recently, some much higher than usual
27 bottom temperature.

28
29 So, these are essentially some examples of environmental non-
30 stationarity. So, meaning environmental processes that are in some
31 way changing over time.

32
33 And so, as you can imagine, this kind of environmental non-
34 stationarity can have effects on fish populations. Maybe most
35 typical is the expectation that things like increasing water
36 temperature are going to change the distribution of fish over space
37 and time. One of the popular theories being that fish are going to
38 move either further north or to deeper water so that they can stay
39 in water that is within the temperature they prefer. But it can
40 also have other effects like on growth rates. Some fish aren't
41 going to be able to grow as quickly in warmer water. There may be
42 effects on the survival of fish. Fish may not thrive as well in
43 colder or warmer water. And then most relevant to this
44 presentation, environmental non-stationarity may be having an
45 effect on recruitment.

46
47 And so, in the South Atlantic, what we've seen from recent stock
48 assessments of mostly grouper species, black sea bass, gag grouper,

1 scamp, red grouper, red porgy, and snowy grouper, suggest that
2 recruitment is declining. For species that we don't have stock
3 assessments for some of the trend reports for these other species
4 have suggested something similar. Abundance is decreasing,
5 possibly due to poor recruitment. And here's just a list of some
6 peer reviewed publications that you can look up if you want to
7 learn more about some of these more species-specific instances of
8 poor recruitment.

9
10 I do want to emphasize that this paper by Caitlin Wade et al. that
11 came out last year, was one of the biggest revelations as far as
12 the trends that we saw across multiple species, and so I highly
13 recommend reading that paper if you're interested.

14
15 So, from those assessments in which we estimated recruitment, these
16 are the patterns that we got. What we see is that starting after
17 around, 2005 to 2010, there have been these very stark declines
18 observed across multiple species. I'll give everybody a moment to
19 sort of take in this slide. So, just as a reminder, we don't
20 actually observe recruitment. We don't go out and count small fish
21 like that. We always estimate it within the model. So, that's what
22 these are. These aren't observations so much as estimated
23 quantities from each of these stock assessments.

24
25 Okay. Now that the shock value has probably worn off, I will go to
26 the implications of recruitment non-stationarity. So, we provide
27 a lot of the catch advice from these stock assessments based on
28 benchmarks that are measured in terms of biomass. Now because non-
29 stationarity can have a large effect on recruitment, this has a
30 ripple effect in terms of the amount of biomass that is estimated
31 in the model. Where this becomes especially tricky is if one or
32 more of these stocks enters into an overfished status. Now because
33 biomass is being affected in ways that we can't predict, the
34 goalpost, as far as rebuilding time, is going to move, and it
35 becomes really unclear when exactly we can rebuild to a target
36 level of biomass. So, that's the bad news.

37
38 The good news is that a few simulation studies that we've done
39 suggest that fishing mortality-based benchmarks like F40% or
40 proxies of F40% like F_SPR40 are robust to recruitment non-
41 stationarity. And so, in the South Atlantic, the scientific and
42 statistical committee takes the approach of using recent
43 recruitment to set short-term catch advice. So, this is consistent.
44 And even if we don't know exactly what level of biomass we have,
45 the nice thing is that this kind of catch advice, this management
46 procedure of using F40 or a proxy should just drive the stock level
47 down toward its target level. So, in this case, if we're fishing
48 at F40, it should drive biomass down to 40% of its size.

1
2 And so, I have a couple of examples from these simulation studies.
3 The first of which was done by Kyle Shertzer on South Atlantic
4 scamp, and the second, I did for South Atlantic black sea bass
5 using a management strategy evaluation.

6
7 So, the scamp simulation took the estimated recruitment from the
8 stock assessment and projected four different levels of
9 recruitment over 80 years. And so, up here in the right what
10 happens is every 20 years the mean, the average of recruitment
11 shifts to a new level. But we fish at F40% during the entire 80-
12 year time frame. And so, we start with this low recruitment, then
13 it goes to an average, a mid-level between, and then a high level
14 of recruitment. And so, if we fish it at F40 and then measure the
15 resulting spawning stock biomass, we see that it has a very
16 predictable effect on spawning stock biomass.

17
18 So, if you were to take your thumb and put it over that y axis
19 that says the amount of SSB and pretend that you have no idea what
20 this SSB level is, if you fish it at F40 or some proxy of that,
21 you know it's going to reduce the spawning stock biomass to that
22 target size. And so, that's really heartening to know because if
23 non-stationarity is making biomass sort of unknowable, we can set
24 a sufficiently precautionary level of fishing that absorbs that
25 uncertainty.

26
27 And so, from my own work using management strategy evaluation, I
28 projected the population forward under F40 and 75% of F40 and
29 looked at three different levels of recruitment. In black, the
30 average from the historic period to the left, and then these two
31 lower levels corresponding to averages taken over this decreasing
32 period of time. And we see the same thing.

33
34 Fishing at F40 over the course of, I believe, 50 years into the
35 future has a predictable effect on spawning stock biomass. It
36 reduces it to the target level. Now, yes, the level of spawning
37 stock biomass is lower when you have lower recruitment, but you
38 are fishing down to a target where you can avoid overfishing.

39
40 So, this demonstrates the same take home message, which again is
41 just that this particular strategy is robust to non-stationarity
42 in recruitment. And so, bringing this back to the SSC's ABC
43 recommendation for SEDAR 80, they recommended catch at F_SPR40.
44 So, this was a precautionary approach given all of the sources of
45 uncertainty in the queen triggerfish assessment, that should at
46 least be robust to any kind of non-stationarity in recruitment.

47
48 Now, of course, there is a strong need for further research because

1 as we've seen in the South Atlantic, we're not really seeing the
2 kinds of distribution shifts that most people would expect. Our
3 reef fishes in the South Atlantic aren't moving further north, and
4 they're not really moving to deeper water. What we're seeing
5 instead is this recruitment failure for all of these grouper
6 species.

7
8 And so given that environmental non-stationarity may have effects
9 on fish populations in ways that we don't expect, we may want to
10 conduct, other analyses. One of which I think would be useful is
11 looking at correlations between ecosystem indicators, which can
12 include fishery dependent catch per unit effort as well as indices
13 of relative abundance from fishery independent data, and look at
14 the correlations between those and large-scale oceanographic
15 process indices, like the Atlantic meridional overturning current
16 or other indices related to the Gulf Stream.

17
18 And then I would also recommend management strategy evaluation and
19 simulation studies so that we can actually test the kinds of
20 harvest control rules used in the Caribbean and see if they're
21 going to be robust to non-stationarity in fish population dynamics,
22 not just recruitment, but also growth and survival. And so, with
23 that, I'd be happy to take any questions that you have.

24 25 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Matt. Any question for Matt?

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance.

30
31 **VANCE VICENTE:** Hi, Matt.

32
33 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Hey, Vance.

34
35 **VANCE VICENTE:** Hope that your health has come back after your
36 COVID experience, by the way.

37
38 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Thanks. Yes. Feeling much better. Hopefully,
39 you can hear it in my voice.

40
41 **VANCE VICENTE:** My question is similar to the one that I asked you
42 during the last SSC meeting, and it's when you saw this drop in
43 recruitment, particularly the scamp, despite that we knew that
44 there was a lower recruitment, it was a few years after that the
45 scamp was declared as overfished, and the catch was limited by
46 about 40% in order for these species to recover. Do you have any
47 comment on that?

48

1 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Yeah. I've been able to talk about this a
2 little bit with some other folks from the Atlantic branch of the
3 Southeast Fisheries Science Center since we had our meeting a few
4 weeks ago. And the thinking was that-- I'm going to go back to
5 that slide with all of those plots. The thinking was that once we
6 first saw this low recruitment, for a lot of these species, it
7 wasn't clear whether this was outside of the realm of general
8 variability around the mean. And so, I think, among those
9 scientists who were more involved with this, they thought perhaps
10 the recruitment would return and that we weren't seeing something
11 like a regime shift. It was a few bad years in a row that could be
12 followed by good years in the future. And it was really only
13 recently that it became evident that this was happening for a lot
14 of different stocks at once and could be part of a process having
15 an impact on multiple stocks, not just scamp.

16
17 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thank you, Matt.

18
19 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Yeah.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Matt? A quick question
22 on the no distribution shift. Is that, like, none at all or just
23 minimal?

24
25 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** So, the study I'm referring to by Jie Cao and
26 some others, found that among about 20 species of reef fishes in
27 the Southeast U.S., only black sea bass appeared to have a
28 distribution shift. And it wasn't likely one where the black sea
29 bass moved, so much as productivity of black sea bass decreased a
30 great deal off of eastern and southern Florida, and maybe increased
31 a little bit off of North Carolina. But for those other species,
32 which I believe include all of the stocks in that recruitment
33 graph, there were no distribution shifts.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thanks.

36
37 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Yeah.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further questions or comments for Matt?
40 Graciela?

41
42 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Hello, Matt. Graciela here. So, remind
43 me, please, the increased temperature, is that related to an extra
44 tropical area rather than fully tropical areas?

45
46 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Yes. I think we're talking about the extra or
47 subtropical regions when I'm showing you those graphs.

48

1 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thanks. And the reason why I'm asking is
2 because, you know, we are really tropical area down here and it's
3 completely different from even Florida or Colombia and Venezuela.
4 So, you know, we're smack in the middle of really not knowing how
5 things are going to change, at least in terms of the EEZ and what
6 the Council is concerned with, more than anything else, the
7 deepwater species of groupers and snappers. So, you know, in terms
8 of that, I think that we need to do a little bit of search for
9 what we know about the spatial distribution or redistribution of
10 those species in this area.

11
12 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Absolutely.

13
14 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thanks.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Anything further for Matt?
17 Hearing none?

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks, Matt.

20
21 **MATTHEW D. DAMIANO:** Okay. Thank you.

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Next is the Equity and Environmental
24 Justice implementation plan. Brent?

25
26 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Thank you. I was just waiting to see if Heather
27 was able to join through.

28
29 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Hi, everyone. Can you hear me?

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** There we go.

32
33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes. Thank you.

34
35 **NMFS SOUTHEAST EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EEJ)**
36 **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

37
38 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. So, I'm Heather Blough with NOAA Fisheries
39 Southeast Regional Office, and I'm going to co-present today with
40 Dr. Brent Stoffel from our Southeast Fisheries Science Center. You
41 all have heard several presentations on this effort over the last
42 several years. First, on the National Equity Environmental
43 Strategy that we released last spring. You are okay on the second
44 slide there.

45
46 First on the national strategy, we released last spring and then
47 we briefed you on the focus group work that we conducted last
48 summer and fall Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and

1 throughout the southeast to get stakeholder feedback on ways that
2 we could advance those six national objectives that were in the
3 national strategy. And then most recently, we briefed the joint
4 district advisory panels last February on the comprehensive list
5 of suggested action items that came out of all of that public
6 engagement work that we did last year. And since that time, we
7 have looked through all of the suggestions that we received and
8 considered the priorities that the district advisory panels
9 highlight for us along with input that we received from the Gulf
10 and South Atlantic Councils. And we put all that information
11 together and drafted our regional implementation plan, which was
12 due to headquarters early this month. And so, it's currently with
13 headquarters under review.

14
15 It's intended to be a living document, which will review and update
16 at least at 5-year intervals if not more frequently. And, really,
17 this is the first time that we've ever undertaken an effort to
18 advance a common set of objectives around equity and environmental
19 justice within the agency. We're learning as we go and definitely
20 expect both, the information that we're putting into the plan and
21 the results and outcome of the plan, to continue to improve as we
22 learn more information and continue to work with you all, and our
23 other fishery management Councils and partners really on this
24 effort.

25
26 So today, we're going to focus on giving you, really, a preview of
27 the subset of suggested action items that we carried forward into
28 our draft plan. We've separated them into two distinct categories.
29 One, we are calling the immediate or near-term action items about
30 two thirds of the items we've put in that category, and those are
31 things that we intend to accomplish during the first life cycle of
32 the plan with existing resources that we have on hand. And then,
33 the remaining items that we carried over there, identified as
34 longer-term action items that will pursue additional resources to
35 support because we really believe they're important to achieving
36 the objectives of the national plan, but we don't have the
37 resources to undertake those at this time.

38
39 And then most of the priorities that the district advisory panels
40 outlined for us, they don't perfectly align with the action items
41 that came out of the focus group work or the objectives of the
42 plan themselves, but we do believe that we have been able to
43 largely or at least partially address the full list of priorities
44 that we received, in some form, in the plan. And so, as we walk
45 through this with you, we will sort of note those areas of overlap
46 that we identified. And then, at the end of this may we have some
47 discussion or respond to questions around that.

48

1 So, that's kind of the format of today. Does anyone have any before
2 we get started? Okay. I'm going to turn it over to Brent to start
3 with our research and monitoring objectives.

4
5 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Thank you, Heather. Our research and monitoring
6 actions aim to improve and expand the social science needed to
7 fully identify and understand our underserved communities and
8 their EEJ related concerns, needs, and interests. The DAP
9 priorities that overlap with these actions emphasize the
10 importance of collecting both, fishery dependent and independent
11 data, including, fishers and cooperative research, and engaging
12 youth in the fisheries. Our immediate or near-term actions would
13 have us conduct research and analysis to identify underserved
14 communities and understand the issues and challenges and
15 understand their issues and challenges, including barriers to
16 entry, and partner with the Councils, communities, and others on
17 tools to accomplish that work to involve underserved communities
18 in participatory research and citizen science, and to evaluate how
19 some key factors like allocation decisions and seafood imports
20 impacts local communities.

21
22 We also intend to pursue funding to conduct a situational analysis
23 of marine aquaculture development in the U.S. Caribbean to identify
24 forms of aquaculture that are best suited to regional conditions
25 and explore opportunities for more accessible pathways for
26 authorizing small scale or experimental projects. We plan to
27 examine spatial analysis of offshore wind development with
28 connection to marine and terrestrial, natural and cultural
29 resources. We want to identify challenges and lessons learned from
30 disaster events to help improve and monitor disaster response
31 efforts.

32
33 For example, I would like to just sort of sidetrack here to bring
34 up that in June, S-K has a newly opened funding opportunity for
35 infrastructure redevelopments, so to prepare for climate issues,
36 things like, how do we prepare for climate change? Well, one of
37 the things that they can do is look to improve the conditions of
38 the infrastructure, in relation to things like storm surge, and
39 those kinds of conditions. And so, I would encourage you to look
40 at that announcement, and if we can assist you in navigating that
41 process, please let us please let us know. The reason why I know
42 about this is because I reviewed an actual proposal last year, and
43 for \$500,000 a shrimp dock in Florida was able to be refurbished
44 to be able to withstand some of the increasing climate related
45 issues. So, I think that would be a good opportunity for folks in
46 the Caribbean to take advantage of.

47
48 We want to, evaluate equity issues throughout commercial and

1 recreational fisheries. We want to examine the importance of
2 diversifying operations in fisheries. We want to analyze the
3 impacts of our services and management decisions on communities,
4 including the expected versus actual impacts of fishery management
5 actions. And we want to conduct research to illuminate specific
6 underserved populations and issues, including themes such as
7 consumptive or subsistence use of fisheries and the role of women
8 in the local fisheries.

9
10 Looking at our policies and plans. Our policies and plans actions
11 aim to address various institutional barriers based on access and
12 complexity, and these were identified during our stakeholder
13 engagement work. Several of these actions also overlap with or
14 address the DAP's cooperative research priorities in different
15 ways.

16
17 Our immediate or near-term actions aim to ensure equitable access
18 to offshore aquaculture grant and research opportunities, and
19 climate related benefits and services, establish best practices
20 for how we develop and deploy fisher surveys, collaborate with the
21 Council and headquarters on ways to address trade and other market
22 barriers through our national seafood strategy, and possibly by
23 adopting strategies employed, by the Culebra Fishing Association
24 pilot initiatives or proposed in FAO's voluntary guidelines for
25 securing sustainable small scale fisheries. We want to pursue a
26 safe fishing zone designation for Lang Bank from the International
27 Maritime Organization, which I believe, Carlos, you're probably
28 going to talk about later today or this week.

29
30 We want to work with the Council to identify and address any
31 unintentional procedural barriers to engagement and to proactively
32 eliminate or minimize any barriers associated with the design of
33 new limited access programs. For example, the Council and NOAA
34 Fisheries are currently working together to explore the
35 development of permits for certain fisheries, which may or may not
36 be limited in access based upon what the Council intends to
37 accomplish. And finally, we want to work with our attorneys and
38 headquarter to develop policy guidance addressing use of various
39 forms of financial assistance to support our underserved community
40 engagement objective.

41
42 Our longer-term items are focused on simplifying our fishery permit
43 application and renewal processes, which at this time is applicable
44 in the Gulf and South Atlantic, however, it can be applicable in
45 the Caribbean region if they pursue federal fishing permits. And
46 next, developing a policy framework to support more routine and
47 consistent efforts to gather, consider, include, and apply local
48 and traditional ecological knowledge in our data collection,

1 science, and management process.

2
3 Our benefits actions focus on leveling the playing field with
4 respect to the opportunities and services we provide so that all
5 stakeholders have equal access. These actions overlap with the DAP
6 priorities related to educating fishers on the importance of
7 sustainability, collecting both fishery dependent and independent
8 data to inform our management decisions, and getting young people
9 involved in the fisheries. Our immediate or near-term actions would
10 have us track the percentage of opportunities that accrue to
11 underserved communities where we were able to do so, so that we
12 can get an understanding of what that looks like.

13
14 The types of opportunities we're thinking about in this context
15 would include things like contracts and grants, experimental
16 fishing and research permits, educational training, and internship
17 opportunities. We've included several items focused on reducing
18 barriers to accessing grants, careers and mission related jobs,
19 and the capital needed to successfully compete for fishery and
20 aquaculture opportunities and maintain profitability. We want to
21 promote the consideration of underserved community needs and
22 federal fishery disaster assistance allocations in collaboration
23 with headquarters, states, and territories, and other partners.

24
25 Other items would have us collaborate at all levels of government
26 to explore and pursue opportunities for preserving or creating new
27 infrastructure and working waterfronts. This is a critical need in
28 all three regions, and there are a number of opportunities we could
29 explore and take advantage of if we allocate time to do so. And
30 we've included a couple of items that try to address requests to
31 use our authorities to help communities mitigate the threats that
32 they are facing from large scale infrastructure and energy projects
33 and related natural resource injuries.

34
35 We also identified a couple of longer term we believe are needed
36 to effectively support this objective but would require additional
37 resources. Those include advancing and improving science and
38 management in the U.S. Caribbean by increasing funding for data
39 collection, processing, and analysis, and prioritizing enforcement
40 in the region. And second, collaborating with underserved
41 communities, the aquaculture industry, and the fishing industry to
42 develop or support high school technical courses and other
43 vocational training and technical assistance programs in fishing
44 and marine aquaculture with a focus on underserved community
45 members. I'll turn it back over to Heather. And you can go to the
46 next slide.

47
48 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Next slide, please. Thanks.

1
2 So, our outreach and engagement actions are focused on further
3 diversifying the way we communicate to address some of the barriers
4 that we had identified through our public engagement efforts so
5 that we unintentionally limiting or impeding underserved community
6 engagement and the work that we do. And the district advisory panel
7 priorities that most closely aligned with these actions focus on
8 supporting the Saint Thomas Fisherman Associations interest in
9 conducting outreach at ECO Fest, increasing education and outreach
10 to recreational fishers on a broader scale and also improving
11 efforts to address identified language and communication barriers,
12 just generally.

13
14 The immediate or near-term actions that we included here are to
15 organize a workshop with our regional Sea Grant staff that's
16 focused on exploring ways we can better partner to advance this
17 outreach engagement objective. Yet, the focus group work that we
18 had conducted throughout the region last year really demonstrated
19 how beneficial Sea Grant can be to this cause in places like Puerto
20 Rico where we have a really strong and well-functioning working
21 relationship. So, we want to talk about, like, where that's working
22 well and where we could make some improvements and get more support
23 in that area.

24
25 We also intend to develop guidance and options for meeting
26 identified translation needs in a more consistent way with the
27 funds that we do have on hand. Headquarters recently established
28 and loaded a new contract with the state department that they've
29 invited us to use to support some of our Spanish translation needs.
30 And they also gave us a small amount of direct funding that we can
31 use to conduct or contract regional services for those products in
32 situations where, you know, the local dialect and terminology are
33 of highest priority. So, this type of guidance would really focus
34 on helping us to prioritize how we use those funds and also
35 possibly take better use of other tools like Google and services
36 like Google translate things like that to fill in the gaps.

37
38 We also want to develop more tailored topic specific strategies to
39 communicate with constituents about our perspective and current
40 regulatory changes versus grants and other opportunities that we
41 have available, the status and schedule of our federal fishery
42 disaster declarations and assistance, and also the fisher surveys
43 that we're conducting. You know, why we are collecting those data?
44 How are we protecting and using the data in science and management
45 decision making?

46
47 Brent has already started to share some information about
48 opportunities that are available with your Council liaison so they

1 can help us get the word out on those. And we could also consider
2 here, in these tailored strategies, ways that we can work with the
3 STFA and other fishing associations on achieving some of our
4 collective outreach objectives. We'll establish new strategies to
5 better support our plain language mandates and objectives here.
6 And we also want to work with our regional collaboration teams and
7 other NOAA partners to explore the possibility of creating what
8 we're calling virtual meeting hubs in some communities that could
9 help us to increase access to virtual meeting opportunities within
10 communities that are having technological or other barriers to
11 accessing participation in those.

12
13 So, the other longer-term items we included here would have us
14 pursue funding to further increase our ability to meet translation
15 needs by really allocating more resources to that and integrating
16 that capability into our annual budgeting and planning
17 initiatives. So, really normalizing the process of translating the
18 products and services that we're producing. Another would identify
19 or create one or more multilingual stakeholder liaisons at SERO
20 and at the Science Center with the goal of providing, really, a
21 one stop shop service to stakeholders that call with questions
22 about a range of issues.

23
24 We want to continue and expand the work that we initiated through
25 the Sea Grant workshop that we're organizing this year towards
26 really institutionalizing a network of community liaisons
27 throughout the region that will help us to achieve our outreach
28 and engagement objectives in the most strategic and cost-effective
29 way that we can. And then, we also want to develop and support new
30 strategies to facilitate the more frequent and meaningful outreach
31 and interaction with our female stakeholders.

32
33 So, this inclusive governance action is really those that touch on
34 the work that you do most directly, because they're largely focused
35 on helping us to enable underserved community engagement and the
36 decision processes related to our mission work, right? And so, a
37 lot of these overlap with the work the Council's doing and the
38 district advisory panel priorities that most closely aligned with
39 these actions focus on corporate research, education and
40 communication. The immediate or near-term actions that we included
41 here would have us work with the Council's on strategies to
42 increase underserved community participation in public meetings
43 and input processes, and also on Council and other advisory bodies
44 that we are setting up. This would include exploring options to
45 help ensure that all stakeholders feel secure to voice their
46 perspective even when it differs from popular opinion, and also
47 amplifying messaging that's being put out from our headquarter
48 offices about the status schedule and process for nominating and

1 appointing Council members to help people getting a better idea
2 about the real pathways to Council appointments.

3
4 We've included an action here that encourages the Councils to
5 consider engaging existing committees and advisory panels or
6 establishing new advisory bodies to advise on equity environmental
7 justice issues related to the fishery issues they're addressing,
8 and also support implementation of our common regional equity
9 environmental justice objectives. We'd like to collaborate on the
10 development or distribution of materials to address identified
11 educational barriers and also hope to work with our marine
12 resources educational program steering committee to ensure those
13 training opportunities are accessible to underserved community
14 members.

15
16 And we want to work with the Council's SSCs and APs to
17 collaboratively identify research priorities together, and also to
18 consider ways that we can better enable fishers to contribute to
19 or participate in the research priorities that we're able to fund
20 through competitive grants, exempted fishing permits, and other
21 mechanisms where possible. Finally, we've included an action here
22 that would increase stakeholder engagement prior to our ESA
23 listings and the development of recovery plans in critical habitat
24 designations by hosting accessible informational meetings and
25 public hearings or other mechanisms.

26
27 The longer-term actions we've included here would have us explore
28 opportunities to leverage the support of community liaisons to
29 gather and report input from rural and other underserved
30 communities with limited capabilities to participate in our
31 decision processes and that could really be maybe an offshoot of
32 the work that comes out of this year's Sea Grant workshop. We want
33 to develop more targeted competitive grants and pilot projects to
34 support greater participation in regional research and monitoring
35 activities.

36
37 Okay. Our last objective is to create an empowering environment,
38 and the actions that we included here are really more internal
39 facing. So, they don't have direct overlap with the district
40 advisory panel priorities, but they're really intended to provide
41 the support structure for them as well as all of the items really
42 in our entire implementation plan.

43
44 And the immediate or near-term actions that we've included here
45 include commitments to integrate our immediate or near-term action
46 items into our organizational priorities through strategic
47 planning processes, and also develop a strategy for pursuing
48 funding needed to address the longer-term action items that we've

1 included in the plan. We want to establish teams to support
2 implementation of the regional plan, and we're envisioning those
3 would look similar to those that we used to develop the plan, but
4 maybe more expensive on our end. So, we did work with Graciela and
5 others, with your Council liaison when we're putting the focus
6 group together and Graciela and really looking through and
7 exploring the suggest action items that came out of those.

8
9 We'd like to develop partnerships and support scholarship
10 internship and mentorship programs to support underserved
11 community access to careers within our organizations. And we also
12 want to organize and participate in interagency workshops to
13 leverage resources and address some of the more complex cross
14 jurisdictional issues and challenges that we identify throughout
15 this process.

16
17 So, the longer-term unfunded actions we believe are really critical
18 to increasing our capacity for this work include hiring additional
19 social scientists, EEJ coordinators at both, SERO and the Center,
20 and biologists at a SERO that would be Caribbean specific,
21 providing more routine plain language training for all of our
22 staff, as well as specialized training for grant reviewers, court
23 agents, and others who interact directly with the public. And then
24 finally, identifying points of contact who can provide technical
25 assistance with grants and other funding opportunities. That was
26 identified as a barrier to underserved community access to some of
27 those benefits that we're offering.

28
29 **BRENT STOFFLE:** So, as we finish up here, as we noted earlier in
30 this presentation, the draft plan is currently undergoing review
31 at headquarters and tentatively scheduled for a final June rollout.
32 We'll take into account the additional input that you provide today
33 when it comes back to us to address headquarters review comments
34 later this month. Once finalized, we will begin working with you
35 on the implementation planning.

36
37 To get a sense of some of the things that are happening at both,
38 the national and regional level already, we've already begun to
39 hear that a position is being created for a national EEJ
40 representative position out of headquarters. We've secured funding
41 for translation services through FY25. We've developed a webinar
42 platform for trilingual real time translation and two-way
43 communication. We've secured funding to train and engage local
44 liaisons in upcoming data collection efforts.

45
46 We are in the process of developing a, quote, unquote, train the
47 trainers on EEJ workshop. This will be a workshop to train those
48 who will go out and educate stakeholders about EEJ and how to get

1 involved. We will return to Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I. to share
2 the final implementation plan with stakeholders and answer any
3 questions. We will begin to conduct oral histories to document EEJ
4 issues related to changes in the fisheries.

5
6 We will begin to address the blue economy specifically related to
7 offshore wind and spatial planning. We will, update information to
8 ensure that fisheries management has the best information
9 available about the fisheries in order to mitigate negative
10 impacts. We will have regularly distributed information about
11 grant, research, and educational opportunities with liaisons, and
12 we'll formalize this process, also having it translated. And, in
13 May, I will work at MREP. I'll be in a workshop at MREP in Saint
14 Croix, where I'll have the opportunity to talk to fishermen and
15 other stakeholders regarding the utility of social science and EEJ
16 in fisheries management.

17
18 While we're currently discussing this as being on a 5-year time
19 schedule, we can see those edits, changes, and those things can be
20 made in the real time. So, we don't have to wait five years if we
21 figure out a new thing or if we can address something in the
22 immediate present. So, we see this not as a 5-year update, but
23 more as a living document. So, other than that, Heather, I think
24 we pretty much covered it.

25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Unless anybody has questions.

27
28 **BRENT STOFFLE:** We'll just open it up for any comments or questions
29 that any of you may have. I realize it's a lot to digest. Imagine,
30 doing 29 focus groups and having over, how many was it? Over 370
31 actionable items that had to be binned and boiled down into six
32 categories, and then addressing three different regions with the
33 diversity that we have. It's, quite a lot to digest.

34
35 I imagine for you it must seem overwhelming; for us there were
36 days that felt very overwhelming too, but I think that we're on
37 the right path.

38
39 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** We did include the full text of the action items
40 that we carried forward, along with the district advisory panel
41 priorities and handouts, that hopefully you all have.

42
43 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions? Commissioner?

46
47 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Afternoon, everyone. This is really just—
48 I'm trying to frame my thoughts. It looked like two things stood

1 out to me in terms of just going through the presentation where
2 some of the long-term projects. So, me personally, and this is
3 kind of my hat that represents not just the Virgin Islands, but
4 all islands. And so, I serve as the Chair for the All-Islands
5 Committee, for the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. One of the things
6 that we talk about when we talk about the environmental justice is
7 really the empowerment within the islands for people. And so, one
8 of the comments that I just wanted to make is first and foremost,
9 where we had opportunities, whether it be scholarship, fellowship,
10 anything like that, that that might be something that's longer-
11 term funded, and I think that needs to be near-term funded because
12 the ability to build our own, to remain in the region, remains a
13 top priority of every single territory under the U.S. flag.

14
15 So, we have a really good example of how under the Coral Reef
16 Conservation Program, we have the Coral Reef Management Fellowship
17 that's been around for some 22 years, I think, now. And if you go
18 through and you look at the success rate as to where the placement
19 of these fellows is, every single one of them is working in a coral
20 reef jurisdiction. And most of them, I can speak for the Virgin
21 Islands right now, where we've had four or five after their
22 fellowships, they're all still within the territory. And so, again,
23 we're trying to promote and build our own, use our local
24 universities to help us recruit, but then finding ways that we
25 place them and keep them in the territory to continue to do our
26 natural resource management work.

27
28 The second comment that I had, and again, it's a bigger funding
29 item, but it ties back together what we were talking about this
30 morning. And it goes back to the data that belongs to the region
31 in terms of fully us understanding what's going on with our
32 fisheries and our fisheries resource management. Those bigger
33 ticket items seem to be longer funded, but I think that the more
34 we've discussed our data management, it's like a priority that
35 needs to be addressed now, currently, and not future. But, I mean,
36 if we can find, you know, where that large source of funding that
37 can put that structure together is, then that's information that
38 stays within the regions, for the regions, for the people to have
39 access to, and then it's the data that we use to build the next
40 fisheries management cohorts out of our territories. So, just
41 wanted to put those two comments up.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

44
45 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Do you provide any funds for the implementation
46 of obtaining data from the recreational sector of fishers? Do you
47 have that we can fund the assistance since we have one in Puerto
48 Rico here for the commercial, but none that I know of for the

1 recreational fishermen. Thank you.

2
3 **BRENT STOFFLE:** I lost the question there. Could somebody repeat
4 the question?

5
6 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Do you provide funds or something or so that we
7 can implement in Puerto Rico data collection from the recreational
8 fishermen?

9
10 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Okay. Let's be clear on what our level of
11 involvement in this process is. That is something that would have
12 to happen further up the scale than where we're at. Right now,
13 we're identifying those issues. Like, that would be a great issue
14 for us to approach someone with, to say, "people would like to
15 know if there is this funding opportunity."

16
17 We don't provide funds, but what we're hoping to do is if we have
18 access to information that they do exist or that these programs do
19 exist, that these things will be made shareable with you so that
20 you can participate in the process of getting those funds, that
21 you would have access to that opportunity. But we're not at the
22 level where we have a line-item budget where we can say we're going
23 to take 30% of our budget to look at recreational issues in the
24 Caribbean. That's not where we're at in this process.

25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** We have, though, like, identified data, additional
27 data collection research in the Caribbean right as a priority here
28 that is unfunded, but we do intend to put together a funding
29 strategy for all of the unfunded items that we have included so
30 that we are actively pursuing funding to address those needs,
31 because we simply don't have the money in some cases.

32
33 I'm not sure who spoke first. We do have some of the internship,
34 a mentorship, those kinds of things under the funded short-term
35 actions too. I think we're already doing some of that work and
36 want to, definitely, continue supporting those opportunities where
37 we have the funds to do so. But we've also identified some other
38 ones, which might be more of the ones you were talking about under
39 the longer term to support internships too within the islands where
40 the people can stay in the islands and give back. And so, that's
41 another area where we want to put together funding strategy and
42 pursue additional resources for that, right?

43
44 It's hard to get the resources if we haven't identified the need
45 and really put together, like, a strategy for pursuing resources
46 to address the need. So, I guess we're seeing that as part of the
47 first step here. Right?

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

2
3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries
4 Science Center. So, my question to Heather and Brent are, so, one,
5 I think the scholarships and the and the internships and all that
6 stuff, I think that's fabulous. So, I hope that proceeds well. As
7 far as the data collection side of things and trying to work on
8 funding and all of that stuff, how are you tying that in with some
9 of the other priorities and work that people are moving forward in
10 the region.

11
12 So, for example, the Council has a strategic plan, and, you know,
13 SERO and the Science Center have strategic plans. And the SSC has
14 put forward a bunch of research priorities. And we've got a whole
15 bunch of people, as I showed earlier, that are working on strategic
16 plans that have prioritized various data collection programs, and
17 many of those are moving forward. So, how do we, integrate and
18 coordinate all of these efforts, because you all are moving forward
19 with this, which I think is fabulous.

20
21 It would be, given we live in a world of limited resources, we
22 don't want to reinvent the wheel all the time. Right? So, how do
23 we better coordinate or how do we ensure that we coordinate all of
24 these different efforts to bring funding to various priorities?

25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, our intent is to totally synchronize all of
27 those, Kevin. Like, right now, we just identify the need, right,
28 for more and better data. And really this came out of the focus
29 group work that we conducted. Once we have our final plan cleared
30 right and rolled out by headquarters, the next step would be to
31 start implementation planning, right. And that would totally
32 involve all of the divisions, right. The people who are going to
33 be doing the work, the Council, looking at what the Council
34 priorities are, working with the outreach and education panels,
35 the whole thing.

36
37 So, I think our intent is that implementation of all of these
38 actions would be collaborative, right, and super strategic. So,
39 we're making best use of the funds that we have available.

40
41 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Great. Thank you.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have a chat, Cristina?

44
45 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Grisel Rodriguez wrote in the chat,
46 "DNR does run a recreational statistics program with wildlife and
47 a sport fish restoration funds and we are working with the
48 Southeast Fisheries Science Center to build up the program."

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Andy?
3

4 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. If there's not any more questions, I
5 just wanted to say a huge thank you to Brent and Heather and the
6 EEJ team, but also to the Caribbean Council. When we went to all
7 three of the Fishery Management Councils in the Southeast, we were
8 met with skepticism with the exception of the Caribbean Council.
9 We were met with energy from the Caribbean Council and excitement,
10 and we were greatly appreciative of that energy and input, and
11 thankful, especially, for the input from the Council members, the
12 Council staff, as well as the DAPs that have greatly benefited the
13 plan.
14

15 And so, as we finalize the plan and, ultimately, move forward with
16 implementation, I do encourage you to take a really hard look at
17 it and see how we have integrated all of this great feedback and
18 input from the Caribbean end of the plan. As I've talked to my
19 team and the Science Center as well, we want this to be a cultural
20 shift for NOAA Fisheries as a whole that this is how we do business,
21 right? The Caribbean is no more or less important than any other
22 region that we are managing, and we want to make sure that we are
23 working hand in hand with all of you.
24

25 And I think the greater challenge, which Roberto kind of drew upon,
26 is funding, right? And so that's where I think we are all facing
27 the challenges of short-term versus long-term funding. What we can
28 do within the capacity and resources we have. But I think what
29 will be really important moving forward, is how do we implement
30 this and talking to you further about where you see our priorities,
31 where do we see our priorities collectively collaborating with the
32 Council. So, thank you for all your input.
33

34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Miguel?
35

36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I also like to thank the Brent and the group
37 because this is the first time that we put all this together, and
38 it would make sense, a lot of sense. But following Andy's,
39 question, I believe that the Chair and I will discuss it
40 afterwards, with Graciela, and see how we can move forward with
41 some priorities that we can identify and follow-up. And those
42 priorities, will be discussed with the Chair of the DAPs and the
43 groups. And hopefully, we will do this year, because this year is
44 the end of the 5-year cycle, as you all know. And probably, we
45 could identify, once we get the money, because right now we have
46 a promise but no money in the bank. There are some issues with the
47 IRA funding and SAP.
48

1 But anyway, Mr. Chairman, just to put it in the record that
2 Graciela and I will work with you, see if we can move this forward
3 with Heather and Dr. Brent. I hope that we can do that by the
4 summer. So, in August, at the August meeting, we can say, "Okay,
5 1, 2, 3, these are things that are achievable and that we can do."
6

7 And now that I'm talking; the other regions are preparing these
8 EEJ plans. This is part of what we are going to discuss at the CCC
9 meeting in May. All the Councils get together to discuss it. And
10 I believe that the Regional Office, Southeast Regional Office is
11 ahead of others in terms of this presentation.
12

13 For the Council member that doesn't know much about the whole
14 process. It took a lot of time to realize that we needed to put
15 together a plan like this, so we move forward. In this plan, we
16 have scientists, Dr. Brent, Heather, and others, and I believe
17 this is a step in the right direction.
18

19 The plan called for billions of dollars. I remember one time,
20 Graciela and I were asked how much money you need to manage the
21 fishery Council, and I said, "Well, tell them billions and
22 billions" because that's what Carl Sagan used to say, "billions
23 and billions of stars". I never said that again because they put
24 in the report. So, I told Graciela, I would never make a joke to
25 those people in Washington. They don't have a sense of humor. So,
26 we need to then commit ourselves, Mr. Chairman and Graciela, to
27 present to the Council at the next meeting in August those
28 priorities that we can achieve. And we will be able to discuss it
29 with the DAPs, the Chairs, and the people that are the players in
30 there. Thank you very much.
31

32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Brent?
33

34 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Thank you. I'd like to say thanks to both, you and
35 Andy, for your kind words and your collaboration. I mean, 20 years,
36 we've come a long way for how we do business and I imagine where
37 we could be 20 years from now, you know, with this kind of effort.
38 I would like to encourage you, as you think of priorities, not to
39 lay one into your mindset, but offshore wind is coming, and it's
40 coming very fast. And so, if this can have potentially really
41 fantastic impacts, and it can also cause issues of displacement
42 for the fisheries. And so, I think that, again, not to put anything
43 into your priorities list, but I would seriously consider that as
44 a major concern for something coming down the pipe.
45

46 So, anyway, thanks again. And again, there's so many more people
47 to thank, but especially people like Jannette and Alida and Wilson
48 and Liandry and Nicole for all of their efforts to help us get

1 this thing off the ground and working. And of course, María and
2 Sarah, who are integral in the data collection, analysis, and data
3 sharing. So, there's a big group. It takes a village.

4
5 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** And Graciela.

6
7 **BRENT STOFFLE:** And Graciela, of course.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Brent. Thank you, Heather.
10 Good to see you again.

11
12 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** You, too. I'm sorry I couldn't be there in person.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. And, Andy, thank you for those kind words
15 for the Caribbean. Woo-hoo for the Caribbean.

16
17 So, next on the agenda is María with the FMP's amendments and
18 action updates.

19
20 **FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS: AMENDMENTS AND ACTIONS UPDATE**

21
22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good afternoon. This is María López with NOAA
23 Fisheries, Sustainable Fisheries Division - Caribbean Operations
24 Branch. This is the part where we are going to start talking about
25 the general amendments that the Council and NOAA Fisheries have
26 been working on for your consideration. So, can you go to the next
27 slide, please? Okay.

28
29 So, these is the status of the current actions as of April 2024.
30 We have the Framework Amendment 1 to all the FMPs, Puerto Rico,
31 Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix: Spiny Lobster Reference
32 Points. Reference point, this is the first one of the amendments
33 that came from the SEDAR 57 spiny lobster assessment. Those
34 regulations have been in effect since April 15, 2023.

35
36 Next, we have the Amendment 1 to each one of the island-based FMPs:
37 buoy gear definition and use. Those regulations have been effective
38 since August 21, 2023. And as a reminder, this is the one that
39 prohibits the use of buoy gear for the recreational sector and
40 allows up to 25 hooks on buoy gear for commercial fishers.

41
42 The next action is a Framework Action 2 to the island-based FMP.
43 This is an update to the overfishing limit, the ABC, and the ACL
44 for spiny lobsters, and this is based on the 2022 update assessment
45 to the SEDAR 57 spiny lobster assessment, and this one will set
46 new ACLs for spiny lobster under each FMP. So basically, this is
47 an update to framework amendment 2 to the regulations that are
48 effective right now since April 15. So, for this action, the SSC

1 recommended OFLs, and ABCs for 2024 to 2026 for spiny lobster for
2 each FMP. Right now, the status is that the final rule is being
3 reviewed in headquarters and we're expecting this to be published
4 soon.

5
6 The next action is Amendment 2 to each one of the FMPs, trawl, net
7 gear, and descending devices. This is an amendment that will
8 prohibit the use of all trawl gear, trammel nets, and purse seines
9 in the exclusive economic zone, and limit the use of gillnets to
10 surface gillnets with specifications for non-managed species and
11 requiring that descending devices are available, and ready for use
12 when fishing for reef fish in the in the EEZs. So, as you recall,
13 the Council took final action in December 2023. The Council
14 submitted the amendment to NOAA Fisheries in March 2024. And right
15 now, NOAA Fisheries is developing the notice of availability of
16 the amendment, and there will be a comment period open for 60 days.
17 So, so we're going to be taking comments on the amendment, and the
18 proposed rule is also going to be published, and these are
19 currently under development. So, we typically have fishery
20 bulletins that will announce these comment opportunities.

21
22 So, the next action is Framework Action 3 under the Puerto Rico
23 FMP: modification of triggerfish reference points. This is based
24 on the queen triggerfish assessment or SEDAR 80 for Puerto Rico
25 that was completed in 2022. So, at the December 2023 meeting, the
26 Council tasked staff to develop the action. So, right now, that
27 amendment is being reviewed by the Science Center, and they already
28 completed the review at SERO. So, during this meeting, the Council
29 will review the amendment, the draft amendment, and they are going
30 to select the preferred alternative, and the Council could take
31 final action if they wanted to do that.

32
33 The next amendment is a member Amendment 3 to each, Puerto Rico,
34 Saint Croix, and Saint Thomas and Saint John FMPs: management
35 measures for dolphin and wahoo. This is the amendment that will
36 establish recreational bag limits and size limits for all fishing
37 for dolphin and wahoo stocks. The amendment has been already
38 reviewed by SERO and the Science Center, and this amendment was
39 also brought to these meetings for your review. As you recall, for
40 this amendment you already chose preferred alternatives. Of
41 course, you can always adjust if you wanted to do that, but the
42 amendment is ready to take final action and be submitted to the
43 Secretary of Commerce if you wanted to do that.

44
45 So, those two amendments, the queen triggerfish and the dolphin
46 and wahoo, are the two amendments that we're going to be discussing
47 today, after this presentation.

48

1 Okay. So, these are other actions that are on the works as well.
2 So, Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP: reclassification of the
3 rainbow runner as a pelagic fish. We were talking about this
4 earlier today. Rainbow runner is currently classified as reef fish
5 in the Puerto Rico FMP, but is mostly caught as a pelagic species.
6 The stock would be reclassified as a pelagic fish under the Puerto
7 Rico FMP as recommended by the Council, SSC and the Puerto Rico
8 District Advisory Panel.

9
10 So, during the last meeting, the Council discussed a plan to
11 develop the amendment. The Council tasked the SSC with addressing
12 concerns about the commercial ACL, which is what we heard earlier
13 today. The SSC made a state made some statements regarding this
14 task that they had from the Council, and based on the discussions
15 that we had today, unless there are any additional discussions,
16 which I think we already talked about that earlier, but we can
17 certainly go back if you if we need to, the IPT then would resume
18 development of this amendment.

19
20 Any questions for now until now? Okay. Moving on.

21
22 The next action that we have, it's modification of red hind
23 seasonal closure in the Saint Croix EEZ to address pelagic fishing.
24 This is an action that would evaluate modifying the Lang Bank red
25 hind area closure to allow fishing for pelagic species during the
26 closure. So, during the December meeting the Council discussed a
27 white paper that was brought by staff. We had a presentation. The
28 Council also provided guidance on what type of actions and
29 alternatives they wanted to address. For example, the ones that
30 deal with gear types, fishing methods, and species that could be
31 fished for during the seasonal closure in Lang Bank in the east of
32 Saint Croix, in federal waters.

33
34 So, the discussion led to tasking the staff to develop the action
35 for further discussion, and the plan would be to bring this for
36 further discussion at the August 2024 meeting. So, for this action,
37 we still have to form an interdisciplinary planning team to
38 work on the action, develop a purpose, need, alternatives based on
39 all the guidance that was provided to by the Council during the
40 December meeting, and then bring it in for discussion.

41
42 There was one request for the Saint Croix District Advisory panel
43 to have a meeting, schedule a meeting for information gathering
44 for that. So, this is one task that the Council may want to take
45 care of so we can prepare and bring this information to the IPT so
46 they can work on developing this action. Any questions on this
47 one?

48

1 Okay. Moving on. The next action, and this is another one that we
2 discussed earlier today, triggerfish reference points based on
3 SEDAR 80 for Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John. So, this is
4 based on the results of the queen triggerfish assessment or SEDAR
5 80 for the U.S. Virgin Islands. The SSC made recommendations today
6 based on their April 2024 meeting, and those recommendations led
7 to the Council making a motion accepting the ABC recommendations
8 and moving forward with development of the action. So, now, staff
9 will take that guidance, and we'll start developing a framework
10 action to update reference point for each one of Saint Croix and
11 Saint Thomas and Saint John.

12
13 So, let me see here really quick. Okay. So, these are the actions
14 that we have right now that are more-- the actions that we have,
15 like, sort of a plan, already, to move forward. I think this will
16 be a good time for the Council to set the priorities of what do
17 they would like staff to start working on. For example, can we go
18 back to the to the previous slide really quick, Cristina?

19
20 Okay. From the actions that we have in here. So, we have two
21 actions that NOAA Fisheries is already working on the rules, on
22 the proposed rule. And then we have the queen triggerfish that
23 we're going to be, you know, hopefully making decisions today, and
24 we also have the dolphin and wahoo making decisions today. So,
25 once the Council makes a decision to submit this to the Secretary
26 of Commerce for approval, then NOAA Fisheries takes over and starts
27 working with the proposed rule, final rule, etcetera. So that
28 Council process, at least, you know, in terms of development, ends
29 there. Now there's a comment period, which is, you know, open
30 comment period for everybody.

31
32 So, for can you go to the next slide, please? And this leaves us
33 here with three actions, which is, one, the rainbow runner, that
34 we talked about this morning, and then we have the Lang Bank
35 evaluation for opening the water column for fishing for pelagic
36 during the seasonal closure, and then the SEDAR 80. So, we are,
37 anticipating that we could work staff, and I'm talking for
38 everybody here that work with us, but we're anticipating that we
39 could at least work with two amendments for the rest of the year.

40
41 So, it will be good to set some priorities. So, we have three in
42 here, and if you have any preference of what we need to be moving
43 forward, that will be good guidance to have right now.

44

45 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

46

47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. María, based on the workload that you have
2 and the work that needs to be done, what are the two priorities
3 that you will consider if you were the start on this that the
4 Council could move forward with this year connecting with 2025?
5

6 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Well, I think I would like to hear from
7 Council members, to see what would be-- we can work with two of
8 the amendments, I believe, at this time. So, I would like to hear
9 what you all say.
10

11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. We need to hear you first. I'm serious about
12 it, because we can ask for the sun and the moon here, but then the
13 stuff is-- time is precious.
14

15 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Absolutely. Okay. So, but I will speak not in
16 terms of our workload, but in instead just speaking in the sense
17 of what I would think is a priority for the Council. I will work
18 with the SEDAR 80, because these are the resource from the
19 assessment, so we can put that in place. And then the other one,
20 because we already have some guidance, would be the Saint Croix,
21 the Lang Bank to start that evaluation because, to me, that is an
22 action that is going to take some time. It's going to involve a
23 lot of input from different areas and a lot of creativity too. So,
24 we already discussed that the rainbow runner is lower priority.
25 So, that's how I see it, but we still want to get it done.
26

27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The reason I mentioned this is because, María
28 and the staff, they have a lot of work, and excellent work that
29 they do, and they can guide us and Andy. And then the Council can
30 decide, "okay, out of those priorities, we agree with this one."
31 We may add this other one, and that's why we move forward in 2024
32 and 2025.
33

34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?
35

36 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. And I'm going to phrase this a little bit
37 different than María. So, first, I think one suggestion would be
38 if we move forward with the red hind seasonal closure on pelagic
39 fishing that we maybe combine the rainbow runner action into that
40 one, right? So, it's just one pelagic action, especially given our
41 conversation that's not necessarily an urgent priority, but
42 something that could be worked into another amendment.
43

44 But what I think would be beneficial to hear from the Council
45 members is really what is going to be most important and impactful
46 from a conservation and management standpoint, right? What are the
47 urgent issues in the region? We have obviously a lot of ideas and
48 things that have emerged. We've talked some today, for example,

1 about updating catch limits and accountability measures based on
2 improved data, right? I don't know if we're quite there yet and
3 having all the improvements, right? We're still waiting on Puerto
4 Rico, but that's certainly been on my priority list knowing that
5 we've been having some updates to the data over time. The permit
6 system for deepwater grouper. Right? That's another one that we'll
7 be talking tomorrow and maybe can't decide quite yet, but hearing
8 from Ricardo in terms of what Puerto Rico is doing with deepwater
9 snap-- excuse me, deepwater snapper or not grouper, and
10 understanding what may be needed from the Council perspective.

11
12 So, I would kind of pose it from the standpoint of less about
13 workload, more about what's most important to the Council, and
14 then we can figure out how to position it within our workload.

15
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, I'm sorry, Graciela. Just wanted to
17 mention. This last slide that I have in here, those three actions,
18 we have the development of the federal permit system and other
19 discussions that we have. But then, can you go one more? And, so
20 in here, I mean, this is what Andy was mentioning. These are the
21 items that we need to address in 2024 that we're asking the Council
22 to address.

23
24 You all have seen this before. So, we have the 2023 AM discussion,
25 which is also including revisiting ACLs. We talked about that this
26 morning that we have species that will benefit from a revision to
27 the ACLs. There are also the actions to be taken when pelagics
28 ACTs are exceeded, because as you know, the pelagic species do not
29 have, if they go over the ACT, there's not an action set, like,
30 for example, the reef fish to close the fishery, etcetera.

31
32 Another issue that we have right now, at least in Puerto Rico, is
33 that we don't have recreational landings. And by not having,
34 recreational landings, it means that the monitoring of the ACL are
35 done with the commercial ACLs. So, what that means is that if a
36 commercial ACL goes over, then the control measure is going to
37 apply to all sectors. So, those are things that are, I think,
38 should be prioritized because it's something that we were going to
39 see, continuously.

40
41 There are other things in here that, for example, management of
42 coral, sea urchins and sea cucumbers are not necessarily super
43 priority, but it is something that we have to deal with and this
44 is something that the Council may want to reclassify these species
45 as ecosystem component species, because we have an ACL of 0 for
46 this species and the status is unknown. So, we don't have any
47 information to determine the status of this species right now. But
48 that's something that, perhaps, is not a priority as some other

1 things.

2
3 One thing that is very important that we already talked about some
4 this morning is the queen conch rebuilding plan. And this needs
5 coordination between SERO, the Science Center, and the Council's
6 SSC so we can start working on that.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

9
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I'll start from the last point. So,
11 hot off the press, I mean, there is a vessel collecting sponges of
12 the west and southwest coast of Puerto Rico right now. We don't
13 have an ACL for sponges there, on the ecosystem species. So, you
14 know, we had talked about reclassification of these but if there
15 is an interest in harvesting from the deep waters for natural
16 products and pharmacological activity, etcetera, then we might
17 want to, you know, bring in sponges with an ACL of 0.

18
19 So, those are the things that are happening right now. You can go
20 to the Internet, and you can look at things, the Falkor that is
21 fishing, of the area, which is extremely interesting because it's
22 bringing species that might be colonizing the shallower water or
23 vice versa. So, we have to know what's there, but then on the other
24 hand, you know, the collection of specimens needs to be monitored
25 at somehow. So, that's FYI right now because it's just happening
26 and it's just coming up in conversations.

27
28 So, regarding the ones that are already started, the rainbow
29 runner, you know, let's get it over with and done. There are other
30 issues with pelagics, but I think that we heard this morning from
31 Kate and the conversation that we had, that we could complete what
32 we have right now and then start dealing with the other pelagics.
33 The Lang Bank and the red hind seasonal closure, if we get the
34 funding for the third year from the Coral Reef Conservation
35 Program, the same monitoring that took place these past two years
36 in Abrir la Sierra of the west coast of Puerto Rico will be moving
37 to Lang Bank. So, there is already ongoing collaboration with
38 Gerson, specifically, in identifying the places for actually
39 assessing the spawning aggregations of Lang Bank.

40
41 The issue of opening the water column still remains because it has
42 been discussed many times at the Council. But there are issues
43 with the fishing gear that it's used and that can be a detrimental
44 to the high coral formations of the Lang Bank, which is a very
45 high rugosity area in some parts. So, we have to deal with that.
46 The planers that are used for trolling and things like that, that
47 we can continue to discuss that. I was just talking to Miguel about
48 might be a requirement for doing maybe virtual, hybrid scoping

1 meetings because it's going to impact both, the demersal fishery
2 and the water column. And not only that, but it will impact both
3 the commercial and the recreational harvest of species within an
4 area that has been seasonally closed for a long period of time.
5 What am I missing? Can I go back to the one before? Sorry.

6
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, the thing is how can we harmonize what
8 you are saying with what Andy just mentioned before. He's a Council
9 member; he has his priority, but we would like to hear-- and this
10 is why I agree with María --we want to hear from the other Council
11 members. But it's very difficult to make decisions like this unless
12 you are, from the beginning, working on all this stuff, and that's
13 why I asked for guidance.

14
15 But going back to what Andy mentioned, for María and Graciela, can
16 you translate that into actions that we can take today?

17
18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, I believe the recommendation that Andy
19 was mentioning was to address the rainbow runner and-- what was
20 the other thing that you said? --the pelagics in one amendment,
21 that action. Correct me if I'm wrong, please. Somebody.

22
23 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** No. That's correct. We can combine the two
24 actions. You can't do the Saint Croix action in a framework, but
25 you can do it the other way where you can include rainbow runner
26 in an amendment, right? So, I was just thinking, rather than
27 produce two documents, produce one document. And since we don't
28 need to rush into management of changing rainbow runner, then we
29 can combine it with that red hind action.

30
31 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. That's fine. They're both amendments.
32 So, that's--

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I got a quick question on that. Is the U.S.V.I.
35 managing rainbow runner or just Puerto Rico?

36
37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** No. So, that will be a document that would
38 include an amendment to the Puerto Rico FMP to deal with the
39 rainbow runner, and we can do it all in one document, and it will
40 be an amendment to the Saint Croix FMP to deal with the pelagic
41 issues. So, I mean, that way we can do all at once.

42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Can we do it? Does the Council agree?

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Council members?

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not all at the same time, but at least tell us
48 what you think.

1
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** I will look to staff, right, if they think
3 it's simpler to just do the rainbow runner action, we could
4 certainly do it that way, separate. I'm just looking for economies
5 of scale trying to put them together.

6
7 I don't view the rainbow runner action as a high priority, right?
8 So, I'm just trying to integrate it with something that may be a
9 higher priority. I think what's on the screen here, certainly is,
10 you know, priorities for the next couple of Council meetings. I
11 think we do need to have discussion then about, you know, what's
12 next as well, and what's waiting in the wind.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, Graciela or María.

15
16 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Can we go to the next slide? This one. So, I
17 want everybody to keep in mind that we also are going to be
18 discussing federal permits for Puerto Rico, because that was the
19 interest that the Council showed last time. Although we are not
20 ready to take any actions and draft any documents at this time,
21 this is something that the Southeast Regional Office is going to
22 be bringing to the August meeting, if possible, an example of a
23 limited access permit on deep water snappers, because that was
24 what the Council showed most interest. And it doesn't mean that
25 that's the way it's going to be, it's just an example so you can
26 see how something would like that would look like under the current
27 infrastructure that we have in NOAA Fisheries, because this would
28 be a federal permit.

29
30 The other two discussions that are that are listed in there, the
31 Grammanik, Hind Bank discussion I added it in there because this
32 was something that was discussed during the December meeting. We
33 saw a presentation by Dr. Nemeth, but however, there were no
34 specific actions discussed or task, so I don't envision that that
35 is something that we will be dealing with during this year, and
36 the Council certainly could decide to take action on that if they
37 wanted to, and then we can readjust if needed.

38
39 And then the other thing that was discussed during that meeting as
40 well, is looking into issues and address questions regarding to
41 management in Bajo de Sico for the nassau grouper recovery. So,
42 this is something that was determined to be addressed at a future
43 meeting. So, I just wanted to bring those couple of more things
44 for your consideration. So, I apologize. Usually, I go through the
45 whole list and then go back, but this time, I just wanted to bring
46 some effort, given that we are already like three or four months
47 into the year, trying to set our priorities straight.

48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Oh, wait. Because otherwise, we won't be able to
2 come-- Can we just, as a Council, if you agree with Andy's
3 suggestion and then work with the rainbow runner and put it in
4 with the other document that we're discussing, with the two
5 documents.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I agree.

8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, we agree on something. And the next one?

10
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I mean, I think this is something that perhaps
12 we have I can bring it back to the office and then with an IPT
13 discuss if it's feasible to do them together in terms of-- because
14 we're trying to be efficient. Right? But at the end of the day,
15 once we go through the actions, if we determine that it's better
16 to do it separate, then that will be the way that we would go.
17 Because looking at it, you know, I'm being very honest, it looks
18 like the Lang Bank may be a little bit more complex, and it will
19 need more time for evaluation, and there's so many different
20 factors in here.

21
22 So, I mean, I think at this point, maybe what we need is, like,
23 okay, move forward with those three actions, queen triggerfish,
24 rainbow runner, and the Lang Bank, and then, maybe in the August
25 meeting, we can report as to what would be our recommendation as
26 an IPT as to what would be best to do, but we can certainly start
27 working on that. Unless, for the queen triggerfish, if there is no
28 urgency to deal with that right now, and we can wait a little bit
29 longer, then we can do that as well. But I want to hear what you
30 guys have to say.

31
32 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But I have a question for Kate because
33 the SSC has provided an ABC for the queen trigger from the Virgin
34 Islands. What's the urgency in moving forward with that change?

35
36 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I think the urgency is how old the data is
37 at this time. Right? And it just seems like the longer you wait,
38 the older that data becomes, and you know, there might be questions
39 out about its reliability.

40
41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, you know, that's one issue that we
42 have. Then on the other hand, the queen trigger necessitates
43 additional information that, you know, it came out of the SSC and
44 the SEDAR process, etcetera. So, at some point we will have to
45 move into the research priority that we need to fill in the missing
46 information that we have to really bring up to date that.

47
48 But we talked about priority species earlier on, so I think that,

1 probably, you know, a task for the SSC and the DAPs would be to
2 actually go through the prioritization of stocks, alongside with
3 the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and the Regional Office, so
4 that we can all be on the same page and use the matrix that has
5 been developed by the Science Center, that provides, you know,
6 look at all the data that are available for these stocks. And that
7 way we'll move forward, in terms of species that we already have
8 information for, rather than be back into this position of not
9 having new data, not having data that it's up to date, etcetera.
10 But we do have to comply with, "You've received that ABC, you need
11 to move forward with that."

12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The point is that we are not going to make all
14 this in one day, but at least we have a road map to follow. So, if
15 we follow what María is talking about, then we should allow them
16 to figure this out, follow what Andy mentioned before. And they
17 can come back and report to us, at the at the August meeting. In
18 the meantime, Graciela will be looking at, with María and others,
19 looking at this list of priorities.

20
21 And when we discussed Lang Bank, a long time ago, the issue why we
22 didn't allow fishing in the water column was because that will
23 present an opportunity for people to do the wrong thing on top of
24 that bank and use the wrong gear. That's the reason why the water
25 column was closed. So, it's not an idea, "We would like to open
26 the water column because people, innocently, will go by it." No.
27 It takes, you know, you have to consider all of that. So, it's not
28 something that you can do without really thinking, because you
29 will need to go back to the report.

30
31 So, Mr. Chairman, if the Council agrees, then the staff will work
32 between here and the August meeting and report back to us on what
33 is needed to be done to continue the work, especially, looking at
34 these three species, the queen trigger, rainbow, and the red hind,
35 and the Lang Bank. And of course, we'll be mindful that whatever
36 we do, we need to look at the other species that we have that would
37 need to be followed with information.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

40
41 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah, and that sounds like a good plan. So,
42 María, in addition to those two actions for August, you said the
43 permit discussion would also be in August. Is there anything else
44 that staff was planning on bringing back in August?

45
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** For August, I think that will be it. For
47 example, if we do queen triggerfish, we can bring something in
48 August because I mean it's pretty straightforward. It will be just

1 like the queen triggerfish in Puerto Rico that you will hear us
2 talking about it after this presentation. And then, the other
3 action I'm sorry. What did you say we are going to do?

4

5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Rainbow runner.

6

7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Yeah. We're not we're not going to plan
8 you're not planning to do anything else from that. One thing that
9 will take some time and some effort, and it's working with the
10 queen conch, with the rebuilding plan. We're going to start that
11 process in our office, start coordinating what needs to be done.
12 So, we're going to be working on that. I don't know that this is
13 something that we can bring for the August meeting, but we can
14 certainly start a discussion with that. And that will involve, at
15 some point some SSC involvement as well.

16

17 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. And that sounds like a good plan for the
18 August meeting. One of the thoughts that's kind of crossed my mind
19 during this conversation is we have a comprehensive list that you
20 put together, María, of everything that we've talked about in
21 recent years that is on the back burner. We're trying to decide
22 priorities that maybe not at this meeting, but a future meeting we
23 could actually go through and say "high, medium, low," or "3, 2,
24 1," and kind of characterize that so that staff kind of knows what
25 our priorities are, what would be next to work on.

26

27 The other thing that both the South Atlantic and Gulf Council do,
28 which I really like, is to map out, at least for about a year,
29 kind of the actions so they know what's coming when final action
30 is taken, what the new action would be. And so, we're really trying
31 to get at that from a priority setting here, so we can maybe come
32 up with some ideas and bring that back in August as well. Yeah.

33

34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Go ahead.

35

36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. We used to do that and at some point, we
37 would like to bring it back. Bill Arnold used to do all that horse
38 blanket and the planning. The beauty of that is you, at all times,
39 know where you are and where you're going, and also what you need
40 to move forward. So, Graciela and María can take a look at it and
41 report back to us at the meeting.

42

43 But I want to also mention that the DAP Puerto Rico is going to
44 meet to discuss permits. Not the permit that we're going to
45 discuss, but that will take place probably in July. And we are
46 going to invite Julian and Gerson to come to that meeting because
47 they probably can come to me with some ideas, and they can learn
48 from the idea we have in exchange, so we will follow.

1
2 But what they are going to be discussing is the permit system they
3 have in Puerto Rico and the permit system they may have in the
4 Virgin Islands and what can be harmonized with a federal permit,
5 if we ever have a federal permit. For example, in the case of
6 Puerto Rico, they ask for a residency of one year for the permit,
7 and that's not compatible with the requirement for the federal
8 permit. That will be in July. So then, Nelson can report to the
9 Council at the August meeting, as well as Julian and Gerson, on
10 this topic that they're discussing.

11
12 They are not talking about closing the fishery. They're talking
13 about just the way to harmonize the permits in a way that would
14 make sense to the fishers and the managers.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think it's important, like, what María
17 mentioned, that Saint Croix DAP input on this Lang Bank, fishing,
18 trawling, we need to get that input from them, because I think
19 there's a misconception of that water column thing, because they're
20 not fishing over the Hind Bank closed area. You know? They're on
21 the deep, but if they hook a tuna and they're drifting, fishing,
22 fighting their fish into the area, that's one thing. But I think
23 you need the DAPs input on this. Saint Croix for the Lang Bank.
24 Yeah. So, go ahead, María.

25
26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, let me see if I hear this right. So, going
27 back to Puerto Rico for the permit, Miguel, what you were saying
28 is you would like to have the Puerto Rico DAP meet to discuss
29 federal permits, what they would like to see in a federal permit?
30

31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. It's not me. They asked me to have a meeting
32 in the summer.

33
34 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Right.

35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And the main point they have is that the Puerto
37 Rico Department of Natural Resources, they have a set of permits.
38 And, you know, remember that they said they want to hear the latest
39 on that one. And also, they want to hear about possibilities of
40 federal permits. They already did that. They have the presentation
41 by the people that came here, and they have that, in terms of the
42 information. You know, if we wanted to have a federal permit, this
43 is a process. That was explained to them. But they also would like
44 to invite the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources to that
45 meeting so they can present to them, "This is the permits system
46 that we have so far. These are the species that are required by
47 the permit."
48

1 The other thing that they want to clarify, people confuse
2 commercial fishing license with permit, and we all know it's two
3 different things. You can have a commercial fishing license, but
4 you need to have a permit for this species in particular because
5 whatever reasons. So, that's what they all want to do. They want
6 to meet and come better prepared for the next meeting of the
7 Council. And also, for the possibility of discussing the example
8 of a federal permit to implement in the deepwater fishing for a
9 limited entry scheme.

10
11 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I would like to add one more point
12 to that, and that would be if there is some kind of permit or
13 licensing, whatever, from the EEZ, federal permit, would that be
14 usable in the state and territorial waters. So, instead of having
15 what Miguel mentioned about the residency requirement, etcetera,
16 going from the state to the to the federal waters, do it the other
17 way around from the federal permit--

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's precisely what they want to discuss.
20 Because if you don't know the reach of the federal government,
21 this permit, and the local governments, then you are not prepared
22 to discuss it at the level that you need to disclose it. That's
23 what Nelson, Gerson and Julian said. We talked to a little bit
24 yesterday in the afternoon.

25
26 The point is that fishers recognized that we need to regulate this
27 for the future, but we need to know the rules of the game before
28 we jump into any, you know, recommendations.

29
30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, the reason I was asking about the
31 purpose of the DAP meeting is because during the past meeting, the
32 past DAP meeting, where we had staff from SERO explaining the
33 federal permits and how it works, we had those questions. How would
34 it work? if we had it, can we do a compatible with the state? What
35 would happen if a person has residency in Puerto Rico? And we don't
36 have answers to this question yet, and so that's why staff wanted
37 to develop an example of a permit. So, all of those questions are
38 going to be included in that example.

39
40 So, my recommendation would be to wait until after staff presents
41 the example, because we would have gone through that exercise of
42 trying to answer all of those questions before the meeting, right,
43 and bring something to the Council. And then after that is
44 presented, I would think that the DAP would have a better idea of
45 how something would look like.

46
47 Like, if we have a meeting, if the DAP meets right now, they're
48 going to be asking the same questions, and, unfortunately, we're

1 not going to have answers for that, because we're still not there.
2 Because this is a little bit more complicated. Right? There are
3 many parts, and we can get there, but we thought-- and here, Dr.
4 Stevens, from SERO, she had the recommendation, "Let's put
5 something together. Let's answer all these questions. Let's bring
6 it to the Council so we can have all a better idea of how something
7 like this would look."
8

9 So that will be my recommendation for in terms of the of the
10 meeting of the DAPs.
11

12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** To tell you very bluntly, they don't care about
13 the federal permit at this time. What they're really worried is
14 the Puerto Rico permit system. And that's why they want to have
15 the meeting because the season starts now, not next year. So, I
16 will talk to Nelson and see if we can do it. And now that we can
17 have virtual meetings, we can have both. The meeting in Puerto
18 Rico, they want it in-person because they want to talk to the
19 Department of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico. The reason that we
20 invited Gerson and Julian is because they will be able to take a
21 look at the dynamics of this discussion.
22

23 The federal permit, they understand that we have to wait for those
24 answer to come. We can have this meeting that they want now and
25 then a follow-up meeting later on. But I will let-- Nelson, can
26 you join in and tell us what your thinking is? It's a little bit
27 more the discussion than just this and I want to give an
28 opportunity to Nelson to explain it.
29

30 **NELSON CRESPO:** Miguel, it makes sense what you say. It's better
31 to meet in the summer, July, and let the DAP members bring their
32 concerns, because there's a bunch of confusion between them. Let's
33 let them express, and then wait for what María's got for us and
34 then maybe we can meet after the August meeting to have a better
35 view of everything. I think that's a good idea.
36

37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
38

39 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just to chime in a little bit on what Nelson said
40 through a little discussion that we had yesterday afternoon. I
41 think it's important when you bring a group of fishers together
42 with such an important issue face-to-face instead of having a
43 virtual meeting that they can bring their concerns. I think some
44 of the issues, you know, they're concerned about. The permitting
45 system sounds good, but is it going to be available for the future
46 generation? How would the transferability and all of that be
47 involved in the entire process? So, I'm glad to hear what María
48 and them are putting together from when we actually had the

1 meeting, and then they met, I think, with the Puerto Rico DAP.
2 When these guys meet together, you know, we'll be their support,
3 give some suggestions also. And I think once that document is
4 produced out of that meeting and the document that María and them
5 are putting together, you can compile the two of them and then
6 come up with a nice permit that everybody would be pleased to work
7 with. So, I think it's a great idea. They got my full support.
8

9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

10
11 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I mean, I think the struggle I'm having
12 is what's the goal and objective of the permit, right? And I think
13 people have different things in mind in terms of what that permit
14 may or may not accomplish. And so, I am concerned about putting
15 the cart before the horse, so to speak, and not waiting for at
16 least a broader presentation with regard to the federal permit
17 system, how it operates, some of the functionality, some of the
18 things that could be considered. Almost like a broad scoping
19 conversation, like to show you what tools are available and then
20 going to the fishermen.
21

22 I hear your concerns from a fisherman standpoint, but I feel like
23 we are at the start of a process that's going to involve the
24 fishermen input that will then help frame those goals and
25 objectives better in terms of what would be built out of that
26 permit system going forward. But you need to know first and
27 foremost what tools are available, what it could look like, and
28 then we start designing it around that from there.
29

30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. When it comes to Saint Croix, with
31 compatibility with that federal permit, you know that in Saint
32 Croix, a mile and a half from shore, you're fishing for deepwater
33 snappers. So, that's going to be a kind of a tricky thing if we
34 decide to go along with something like that. María?
35

36 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. And that was a discussion that the
37 Council had during December. There was really no interest from the
38 U.S. Virgin Islands, at this time, to pursue a federal permit, and
39 there was interest from Puerto Rico to see how that would look.
40 Right? So, the example of the limited access permit, is because
41 the conversation was going that way. Right? But that doesn't mean
42 that that is THE permit that will work for what they want. It's
43 just an example.
44

45 And the reason we're doing this is because we have had this
46 discussion several times, and it has been kind of difficult to
47 pinpoint exactly what it is that the Council would like to do with
48 a permit. Right? Everybody understand that there may be a need to

1 have a permit, but how that permit would look like, and for what
2 is what it's difficult to-- and I don't blame you, you know,
3 there's so many different parts moving in here. So, that's why we
4 wanted to bring something to say, "Hey. This is a possibility of
5 something you could do." And maybe when you see how it would look
6 like, or something has changed or whatever, you will be like,
7 "Well, we don't want that. How about if we explore something else?"
8 Right? We just want to use examples so that the Council can narrow
9 the scope of what they would like to do.

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, before I get lost in this for Saint Croix
12 with Lang Bank again, what would be a good time for the DAP to
13 meet? I think a one-day meeting would work. But there is a person
14 at the DAP for Saint Croix that is a cofounder of the Golden Hook
15 Fishing Club that, you know, his input is going to be very
16 important. So, I'd like to know about when that meeting can be
17 held to get that data or that input.

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. We're jumping from one area to another. We
20 were in Puerto Rico having fun with the permit. And this other
21 one, in Saint Croix, is important. I offer the Chair and the group
22 we can have a virtual meeting anytime you want. We can polish it.
23 You have the 30 days. And then what María mentioned before, is
24 that they need their input to go over this. So, just let me know
25 when you want to have that DAP meeting, and we can put it together,
26 a virtual meeting.

27
28 In the case of Puerto Rico, they're talking about an in-person
29 meeting to go over the Puerto Rico permitting system, not the
30 federal permitting system. But what we're saying is because we are
31 working with the Council, and the Council works with the EEZ,
32 that's what María is saying, you know, we still need to answer the
33 question that they asked before, previously, by the Puerto Rico
34 District Advisory Panel.

35
36 So, we have the-- well, we have a promise of the funds, as I said,
37 but once we get the funds, we can have the two meetings in Puerto
38 Rico, the one addressing with Ricardo and the group of Natural
39 Resources the situation and the permit system. After Ricardo
40 presents at this meeting, or Daniel, the status of those permits
41 and then we can discuss it. And then we can have the information
42 that María was mentioning before, and we can have another-- that
43 meeting could be virtual, so we have more information.

44
45 The other thing is, remember, we are going to prepare an outreach
46 and education paper, a fact sheet. What is the permit? That's
47 something that the fishermen are asking us so we can do it. It
48 will be done in 2024, but not necessarily has to be done between

1 here and August. So, sometime, if we are not hit with another
2 hurricane, we are going to have, at least, for the December meeting
3 concrete document. Here is the example of the permits. Here are
4 the things that we can do, and we can move forward with that.

5
6 In the case of the Saint Croix point, then it will be harder
7 talking to María and you, and Gerson, of course. What is the timing
8 for that meeting, DAP? And then can we do it virtually, or does it
9 have to be in person?

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, May 8th, I have an FAC meeting, and
12 all the members on there are DAP members. So, I can let them know
13 what we're looking for. And if you want, we can have a virtual May
14 9th. But, I mean, it's up to time availability here.

15
16 I was going to say we can just switch the FAC May 8th to a DAP at
17 night because we meet at 6:30, but I forgot to have I have Brent
18 on the agenda for May 8th. So, that's out.

19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The other thing is that we do not need to receive
21 all the information from the DAP. We can have the information from
22 your group meeting, you know, the recommendation. Many of the DAP
23 members in Saint Croix are members of the advisory group. And then
24 whenever you think is appropriate, we can have the meeting of the
25 actual DAP of the Council. So, yeah, both.

26
27 The important thing is that we need to send the information to
28 María. As she mentioned before, they kind of answered that, to the
29 question that she may have.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I can make that happen.

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We bless you this time. Where are we? ¿Ya
34 terminamos, María?

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Are we good?

37
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. As a recap. Alright. Thank you for
39 having this discussion. This helps a lot to kind of like, figure
40 out what we're going to be doing the rest of the year.

41
42 So, what I will say is that for the August meeting, we're going to
43 work with staff to bring the rainbow runner action and the queen
44 triggerfish for the U.S. Virgin Islands. We're going to, of course,
45 we have to bring this to the IPT and check, you know, obviously in
46 workloads, etcetera, but that would be the plan. And then, try to
47 have that first permits conversation, bringing that example of the
48 federal permit so that we can start discussing that during that

1 meeting.

2
3 So, in terms of development of actions, that's my understanding.
4 And then for the Lang Bank that we were going to wait until the
5 Saint Croix DAP meets, so we can get more information about, you
6 know, so we can work on a purpose and a need for that and ensure
7 that this is what the Council wants to do. And then, based on that,
8 if we're going to wait until the Saint Croix DAP meeting, then
9 that will be something that will have to be worked on for the other
10 meeting if possible, that will be in December.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And also, María and Graciela, if you please send
13 us the key question that you would like the DAP Saint Croix to
14 address so we will guide the discussion with them, in a better
15 way, more positive and effective.

16
17 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** I mean, for those who are not aware, I
18 mean, the interdisciplinary planning teams that go into each one
19 of these documents that need to be prepared, includes social
20 scientist, economist, legal aspects of what we're putting forth,
21 biology, essential fish habitat, stock assessment if they are
22 available, etcetera. So, it's planning to get everyone on the same
23 page to write up and to talk about everything that needs to go
24 into the document. So, that's why, you know, that idea of a making
25 a timeline of the different actions and when the IPTs can meet,
26 etcetera.

27
28 Because in addition to that, there is all the other things like
29 the SEDAR that, you know, we're coming up on workshop for the spiny
30 lobster. We're doing yellowtail snapper and parrotfish for Saint
31 Croix. So, all those things are happening at the same time. So, I
32 think that probably putting a timeline, like Andy suggested, on
33 things that need to be done, will probably make more sense and
34 give everyone an idea of what--

35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And, Sarah, can you prepare a draft of that road
37 map? I'm kidding. Actually, I'm not. We can talk about it later
38 and see if we can do it. Yeah. Because I'm serious about it.

39
40 Bill Arnold used to prepare that with the Regional Office and the
41 Southeast Fisheries Science Center makes a lot of sense. And
42 people, we all know. When we started the Council, we called it a
43 horse blanket, and it was required by law to have the darn horse
44 blanket on my office, on Mark's office, so that people can see it.
45 So, María, did we finish the that part of the question?

46
47 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Thank you.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Do we need a quick break here? Because-- yeah.
2 Okay. How about seven minutes or five minutes? Yeah.

3
4 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Let's, finish up here. We still got some
7 more work to do. Okay. So, we're going to move on to Framework
8 Action 3, the Puerto Rico Fishery Management Plan. María?
9

10 **FRAMEWORK ACTION 3 UNDER THE PUERTO RICO FMP: MODIFICATION OF**
11 **STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA AND MANAGEMENT REFERENCE POINTS**
12 **FOR THE TRIGGERFISH STOCK**
13

14 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Carlos. This is Mario López with
15 NOAA Fisheries. So, this is Framework Action 3 under the Puerto
16 Rico fishery management plan, and this is the action that I spoke
17 about earlier that would modify the status determination criteria
18 and the reference points for the triggerfish stock complex based
19 on the outcomes from the SEDAR 80 assessment for Puerto Rico that
20 was, completed in 2022.
21

22 This is something I am not going to spend a lot of time on details.
23 Why? Because during the December meeting, we had a very thorough
24 presentation on what would the amendment include, and also what
25 were the outcomes of the SEDAR 80. So, in here, you have a document
26 that was included in the briefing book that was prepared by the
27 IPT. This is the draft document that includes an environmental
28 analysis of the effects of the alternatives that were considered.
29 Okay.
30

31 The triggerfish complex is included in the Puerto Rico Fishery
32 Management Plan. And queen triggerfish, is managed with the ocean
33 and the gray triggerfish. The queen triggerfish was selected in
34 the Puerto Rico FMP as the indicator stock for the complex. So,
35 that means that management measures and the monitoring of annual
36 catch limits are based on landings of the queen triggerfish only,
37 but it would apply to the entire complex.
38

39 Under the Puerto Rico FMP, the triggerfish stock complex was
40 classified in Tier 4a of the Council's acceptable biological catch
41 or ABC control rule. Tier 4a means that the species, the stock is
42 data limited. There's no accepted assessment available, and the
43 stock has a relatively low vulnerability to fishing pressure.
44

45 Providing some background here before we move on to the actions.
46 The SEDAR 80 for the Puerto Rico queen triggerfish was completed
47 in 2022. The assessment determined that the Puerto Rico queen
48 triggerfish is not undergoing overfishing, and the stock is not in

1 an overfished state. The Council's SSC reviewed the results from
2 SEDAR 80 at its November and December 2022 meetings, and supported
3 the stock assessment as providing the best scientific information
4 available and determined that the stock assessment was suitable
5 for short-term management advice, which means less than five years.
6

7 Continuing with the background, and, again, this is everything
8 that-- this is a summary of what you heard in December. The SSC in
9 consultation with NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Fisheries Science
10 Center, supported that queen triggerfish or, in this case, the
11 triggerfish stock complex be reclassified from a Tier 4a stock
12 complex to a Tier 3 stock complex, which is data limited and has
13 an accepted assessment available, under the ABC control rule that
14 is included in the Puerto Rico FMP. The SSC coordinated with the
15 Science Center to provide values for the OFL and ABCs for the
16 triggerfish stock complex for years 2024 to 2026. During the
17 December 2022 Council meeting, the SSC presented its
18 recommendations to the Council. There were values for both,
19 variable and constant catch OFLs and ABCs, with the ABCs across a
20 range of probabilities of overfishing to the Council.
21

22 So, these were the Council decisions. During the December 2022
23 Council meeting, the Council selected the approach that uses a
24 constant OFL--
25

26 Okay. We have some, technical issues. Give us a moment. Okay. This
27 is the slide. Yep. Number five. Thank you.
28

29 Okay. So, during the August 2023 meeting, the Council directed
30 staff to move forward with the framework action under the Puerto
31 Rico FMP. Now through this framework action and the document that
32 you have in your briefing books that was prepared by the IPT and
33 reviewed, the Council will then derive the ACL for each sector
34 from the total ABC, reduced by the Council's management uncertainty
35 buffer. So, when we were at the December Council meeting, the
36 Council discussed the action with different options to derive the
37 ACL, and those would include a 0%, a 5%, or a 10% reduction from
38 the SSC recommended ABC. And based on the discussions that were
39 done, there were preliminary indicating a preference for a 5%
40 reduction from the SSC to get to the total ACL. So, during this
41 meeting, as I mentioned earlier today, the Council will review the
42 document, select the preferred alternative, and can approve the
43 action for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. Okay.
44

45 These are the purpose and needs statements for the action that are
46 included in the document. The purpose is to update management
47 reference points for the triggerfish stock complex.
48

1 I apologize. This may be the way that I prepared the presentation.
2 It's running by itself, right? So, I apologize for that.

3
4 So, I will read the purpose and need. Okay? So, bear with me. The
5 purpose of this action is to update management reference points
6 for the Triggerfish stock complex under the Puerto Rico FMP to
7 account for the SEDAR 80 Puerto Rico Queen Triggerfish Stock
8 Assessment and application of the Council's ABC Control Rule. The
9 need for this action is to update management measures for the
10 Puerto Rico Triggerfish stock complex based on best scientific
11 information available to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum
12 yield, consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens
13 Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

14
15 I'm going to go to slide number 7. Okay. So, the action that is
16 included in the document, the Framework Action, would update the
17 maximum sustain yield or proxy, the maximum fishing mortality
18 threshold, and minimum size threshold, and these are things that
19 came from the assessment, from the models. Then we'd update the
20 OFL and the ABC for the triggerfish stock complex and set ACLs for
21 the triggerfish stock complex from the recommended ABC.

22
23 So, in this slide I included two tables from the document. One
24 table is the reference points, the values for the reference points
25 that came from the SEDAR 80 queen triggerfish stock assessment,
26 and this is something that was already discussed by the SSC, and
27 by the Science Center when they were discussing outcomes from the
28 SEDAR 80. So, this action would update those values, right? There
29 are no different decisions to make in here, because these are
30 values that were given by the assessment. Then we have the second
31 table that are included is the OFL and ABC, and they're going to
32 be in pounds of whole weight, for the complex for fishing years
33 2024 and 2026 and for the 3-year average. And that 3-year average
34 is what the Council, decided that wanted to use for the ABC and
35 the OFL, accepting those recommendations from the from the SSC.

36
37 These are the actions that are included in the amendment. So, we
38 have four actions four, I'm sorry, four alternatives. Update
39 reference points for the triggerfish stock complex under Puerto
40 Rico, and as a refresher from the December 23 presentation, there
41 were three alternatives that included different types of
42 uncertainty. For example, zero uncertainty, which is equating the
43 ABC to the ACL, is basically that reported catch represents true
44 harvest, that the catch isn't likely to exceed the ACL. We have 5%
45 of certainty, that means that the ACL is equal to 95% of the ABC.
46 So, that would assume a thorough but not complete understanding of
47 the factors influencing management decisions and the ability to
48 apply those decisions in a timely and effective manner. And then

1 the 10% uncertainty, which is Alternative 4, which is basically
2 more conservative since saying the ACL is equal to 90% of the ABC.
3 So, those are the four alternatives that are proposed.

4
5 The first alternative is the no action alternative, which means
6 that the triggerfish stock complex will remain as specified under
7 the Puerto Rico FMP, which means that there will be no changes.
8 However, we know that this is something that would not be counting
9 on the best available science, because the best available science,
10 the current best available science came from the stock assessment.

11
12 So, let's go to the-- so we can, talk a little bit about these
13 alternatives, let's go to the next slide. So, this is what the
14 numbers would look like, from under each one of the alternatives.
15 We have an ABC, a total ABC. We have a commercial ACL and
16 recreational ACL. This is for Puerto Rico, we have sector ACLs.
17 The numbers for the recreational and the commercial ACLs are going
18 to be using the same percentages, in terms of allocation, that
19 were used during the Puerto Rico FMP process to set the commercial
20 and recreational ACLs, because, as you know, we don't have
21 recreational information currently available that the Council
22 could use to make new estimates of what would that allocation be
23 for the recreational. So, it's impossible, for now, to change those
24 numbers right now. So, we will be using the same percentages that
25 were used before.

26
27 So, the commercial ACL currently is 91.77% of that total ACL, and
28 the recreational ACL is 8.23 percent of the total ACL. And this is
29 going to be applicable to all of the alternatives.

30
31 So, Alternative 1, as I mentioned, is the status quo, which means
32 this is the values that we have right now. We have an ABC of
33 95,318, and from that, there was a 5% applied to that ABC to get
34 to a total ACL of 90,552. So, Alternative 2, at 0% reduction means
35 that the ABC will equal the ACL. So, that ABC that was recommended
36 by the SSC, that we're going to be implementing in this action, is
37 91,810, so that Alternative 2 will be the same number. Alternative
38 3 proposes a 5% reduction, and this is what you discussed last
39 time as indicated some preference to choose last time, and that
40 will be a 5% reduction from the ABC. It's 87,220. And then lastly,
41 Alternative 4, which is more conservative, will be a 10% reduction
42 to, 82,629.

43
44 It's a little bit dense, but this is basically a summary of what
45 you have in your document. One of the things that we do is, for
46 purposes of doing an evaluation of the environmental effects of
47 the alternatives within the action, we compare the alternatives
48 among themselves. Right? So, we make comparisons among the

1 alternatives in terms of the effects, the biological/ecological
2 effects, social/economic effects. I'm sorry. I should have said
3 "economic" in there. Also, administrative and physical effects.

4
5 So, in this case, I'm focusing on biological/ecological, and
6 socioeconomic effects. So, as we, talked about earlier,
7 Alternative 1 is not based on the best scientific information,
8 right, because it's not based on the most current assessment, and
9 what it will mean, right, is there will be no changes to current
10 harvest levels. So, the biological effects would be expected to be
11 long-term negative effects because there will be an expected lack
12 of sustainability because, you know, of course, I mentioned, you
13 know, the stock assessment, we're trying to manage, to a
14 sustainable level with those new values.

15
16 So, the next, the socioeconomic that will occur with Alternative
17 1, no additional short-term effects, because there are no changes
18 to current levels. However, long-term negative effects could be
19 from decreased income and fishing opportunities for the species
20 from lack of sustainability. And this is assuming, right, that
21 fishermen would take advantage by harvesting to their total ACL.
22 Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4 will all be based
23 on the best scientific information. Alternative 2, as you saw from
24 the table before, increases the current ACL. Alternatives 3 and 4
25 has a slight decrease in the ACL.

26
27 So, for Alternative 2, assuming that fishermen take advantage of
28 the increased fishing opportunities and harvest the total ACL,
29 right? Because that's what we want, we want fishers to harvest
30 what is available for them to harvest. You could expect some short-
31 term negative effects from the increased removals under those
32 assumptions, but long-term positive effects from managing to the
33 maximum sustainable yield. Socioeconomic short-term positive
34 effects from increased revenues and fishing opportunities, and
35 long-term positive effect from sustainably managing the stock, but
36 more potential for negative effects in alternatives 3 and 4 on the
37 long term. Remember, this is a comparison of alternatives.

38
39 And then Alternative 3 and Alternative 4, their short-term positive
40 effects from decreased removals, right, assuming again that
41 fishers are fishing to the ACL and long-term positive effects from
42 managing to the maximum sustainable yield. Lastly, socioeconomic,
43 effects for these two alternatives, short-term negative effects
44 from reduced revenues and fishing opportunities, right, but long-
45 term positive effects from sustainably managing the stocks. Okay?

46
47 So, this is what we have. These are the alternatives that were
48 included in the in the document. Let's go to the last slide.

1
2 So, this is where we are in this action. The Council can select
3 their preferred alternative based on what the management
4 uncertainty that they want to add. The Council reviews the final
5 draft amendment, and depending on the alternative, they can review
6 draft codified text at this time. The Council will approve the
7 action for submission to the Secretary of Commerce, allowing staff
8 to make editorial edits, if that where you want to go. And then
9 May 2024, staff can make editorial edits and send to the Council
10 Chair for review, and then the Council submits the action to the
11 Secretary of Commerce. That part in May 24 is when, you know, the
12 NMFS process starts. And then June-July-- after May of 2024. And
13 then June-July 2024, in the summer, we can begin the rule making
14 process and request for public comments on the on the proposed
15 rule.

16
17 Okay. So, that's all I have. Thank you.

18
19
20

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, María. So, we need a motion to
22 approve the I guess, preferred.

23
24 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Sure. Nicole Angeli for the record. *I would*
25 *like to make a motion for the Council to approve Alternative 3 as*
26 *an update reference point for the triggerfish stock complex under*
27 *the Puerto Rico FMP.*

28
29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion? Hearing none-- oh, sorry. Andy.

32
33 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I'm supportive of the preferred. Couple
34 of points that I'd like to emphasize in looking at the new
35 reference points. One, there's a buffer between the overfishing
36 limit and the ABC that was specified by the SSC. But in reducing
37 the catch limit by 5%, although that's a small uncertainty, the
38 landings are still well below kind of where we're setting the catch
39 limit to begin with. Right? So, to me, it's appropriate given the
40 buffer between the OFL and ABC as well as where the landing stand
41 that 5% is a reasonable estimate for setting the catch level.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Andy. That's a good point. Graciela?
44 Or somebody on--

45
46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** No. Just wait for the motion to come up
47 on the screen.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, okay. Okay.
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Dr. Angeli, do you agree with the language?
4
5 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yes. That language looks correct on the screen.
6
7 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, if you want to vote, we are going to
8 show you the codified text after this.
9
10 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Mr. Chair, just one thing on the motion. I
11 think the word selected after Alternative 3 is not needed. Yeah.
12 Thank you.
13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? Hearing none, we'll do
15 a vote by roll call starting with, Kreglo.
16
17 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo. Yes.
18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli. Yes.
20
21 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López. Yes.
22
23 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez. Yes.
24
25 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck. Yes.
26
27 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater. Yes.
28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette. Yes.
30
31 *Motion carries unanimous. No nays and no abstention.* So, the motion
32 reads, "The Council moves to select Alternative 3 as a preferred
33 alternative under Framework Amendment 3 under the Puerto Rico
34 Fisheries Amendment Plan. Alternatives 3. Update reference points
35 for the triggerfish stock complex based on SEDAR 80 and set the
36 total ACL, which equals optimum yield, equal to 95% of ABC
37 recommended by the Council SSC."
38
39 Alrighty. So, next is the dolphin wahoo.
40
41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** No. Before you do that, there are two
42 more motions that you need to go through. One is to approve for
43 the edits, allow staff to do edits, and the second one has to do
44 with deeming the document ready for submittal to the secretary.
45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
47
48 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But you do have the codified text, which

1 includes the information that you just
2
3 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Point of information. Nicole Angeli, point of
4 information. So, could we make both of those two motions that you
5 just mentioned in one motion? Can we make okay. So, could we make
6 a motion that the staff
7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela?
9
10 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. Alright. I'll wait until you're ready.
11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Ready, Cristina?
13
14 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. So, can we make a motion, and it would be
15 helpful if you could assist a little bit with the specifics of
16 what you need in these motions. So, we're going to make one motion
17 that the staff go ahead and make the edits. Could you put that
18 back up, so we know what we need to say?
19
20 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Could you give us a second? Because we
21 do have people online working on the same documents. So, hold on
22 a second. For some reason, we cannot see the-- there we go. So,
23 this is the other motion that you need.
24
25 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. And this just for clarification. Okay.
26 So, I'm going to read this, and then if there's anything else we
27 need to add--
28
29 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Before you go forward, this is Kate Zamboni.
30 Maybe there should be a motion first that's-- because you've only
31 identified your preferred alternative. You haven't actually
32 approved this framework action or amendment yet. So, if you want
33 to combine that, but I'd kind of lead with approve the Framework
34 Amendment 3.
35
36 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. So, I would like to make a *motion that we*
37 *move to approve Framework Amendment 3 and ask the staff to make*
38 *editorial non-substantive changes to Framework Amendment 3 and*
39 *deem the regulations presented by staff as necessary and*
40 *appropriate for implementing Framework Amendment 3, this will give*
41 *the Council Chair authority to deem any modifications made to the*
42 *proposed rules as necessary and appropriate for implementing*
43 *Framework Amendment 3.*
44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Esta completo, Graciela? Nicole, is that
46 complete or--
47
48 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. That looks correct.

1
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, I would recommend, in the first
3 sentence "the Council moves to approve Framework Amendment 3 and
4 submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for a review."
5
6 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Could I reread this and make a few editorial
7 changes as we go?
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.
10
11 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. So, "The Council moves to approve
12 Framework Amendment 3 and submit the amendment to the Secretary of
13 Commerce for a review." Stop. Period. "We thereby allow staff to
14 make editorial non-substantive changes to the Framework Amendment
15 3."
16
17 This section here, "and to deem regulations by staff as necessary
18 and appropriate," I think that needs to be modified to be made
19 more understandable. Are we saying here, is the subject of this
20 next phrase, "and allow the staff to deem regulations presented as
21 necessary and appropriate for implementing the amendment"
22
23 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Can I answer that question, sir?
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes, please.
26
27 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, Kate Zamboni. So, we should be showing
28 you draft codified text. And basically, what that language says is
29 you would deem those regulations as necessary and appropriate, so
30 it's not just trusting staff, like, we're going to show you what
31 the language would be. And part of the editorial non-substantive
32 changes, if there's a need to make minor tweaks to the regulatory
33 text, that would be okay too. But the substance of it will go over
34 first, before you vote on this motion. Does that answer the
35 question in terms of what we mean by necessary and appropriate?
36
37 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, is it "we"? as in "we deem the regulations
38 presented by staff today as necessary and appropriate?"
39
40 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yeah. It's the Council.
41
42 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So okay. "We" is still-- so could we, instead
43 of having a run on sentence, could we just have, "we thereby allow
44 staff to make editorial non-substantive changes to the Framework
45 Amendment 3." Period. "We deem the regulations presented by staff
46 today" or "at this Council meeting as necessary and appropriate
47 for implementing the amendment." Period. "We give the Council Chair
48 the authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule

1 as necessary and appropriate for implementing Framework Amendment
2 3 prior to submission to the Secretary of Commerce." Period.
3
4 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** If I may comment on that last part. So,
5 usually, what happens during the rulemaking process, if there's a
6 need to make minor tweaks to that regulatory language, we discover
7 that after this has been --
8
9 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** During public comment.
10
11 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Well, no. Before the proposed rule is
12 published, oftentimes. But it does happen after the amendment's
13 been submitted to the Secretary of Commerce. And so, it's very
14 useful when, if there's a need to make those minor tweaks, that
15 staff can run them by the Council Chair and have him deem those
16 changes necessary and appropriate, as opposed to having brought it
17 back to a full Council meeting.
18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. Well, I'm glad we're doing this then.
20
21 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yes.
22
23 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, "prior to submission to the Secretary of
24 Commerce" and so could we add at the end of that "and any
25 modifications?"
26
27 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Well, I would rather it just not say "prior
28 to." Just put the period after Framework Amendment 3.
29
30 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** And we want to keep it vague in timeline?
31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The thing is once you approve it today and you
33 see the codi-- ¿tenemos el código listo? When you see that, what
34 you're saying is "Go ahead. This is approved by the Council." If
35 there's a minor tweaking to do that doesn't change the essence of
36 what you're saying, then they are allowed to do it and confer with
37 the Chair. That's why Kate said--
38
39 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Can you bring the Word document back up, please.
40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, el código. What you need is a code first.
42 Okay. ¿Graci, tienes el código listo? Okay.
43
44 What the hell is that? Well, that's how you translate. The action
45 that you have, this is the way you translate into a draft
46 regulation. That's what they call the code. But we need to go back
47 to--
48

1 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. But I'm asking for the language that we're
2 editing to come back up onto the screen.
3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Which one you need? Nicole, which one you need?
5 The motion?
6
7 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** The motion.
8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Puedes poner la moción?
10
11 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. So, we've been advised by legal counsel
12 to not put a timeline onto this and to give authority to the Chair
13 to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule at any time
14 after we vote today as necessary and appropriate for implementing
15 the Framework Amendment 3.
16
17 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yeah. Let me-- I now understand your
18 discomfort and let me give you comfort. So, earlier in the motion,
19 you're allowing staff to make editorial non-substantive changes.
20 So, after today, that's the scope of changes that can be made and
21 then later deemed appropriate by the Council Chair. If anything
22 goes beyond non-substantive editorial changes, that will require
23 it to come back to the full Council.
24
25 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay.
26
27 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, if you are uncomfortable with the way
28 it is worded, you're really uncomfortable with the second sentence
29 that, in terms of allowing staff to make editorial non-substantive
30 changes to the Framework Amendment 3, but those are the sort of
31 changes that would then go back to the Council Chair and deemed
32 appropriate and necessary.
33
34 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. So, go ahead and take-- you can take off
35 that last phrase then. Starting at "prior." Mhmm. There you go.
36
37 Okay. I'm making this motion. Any other comments?
38
39 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Should we go over? Is it now an appropriate
40 time to go over the codified text. So, should we get a second on
41 the motion before we do that?
42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. We need to have a second and a discussion.
44
45 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Alright, we need a second on the motion.
46
47 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Now we can go to the--
2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Discussion.
4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, vamos al código primero y después votamos
6 por la vaina esa.
7
8 If there is any question, then we can go with it. You're going to
9 read it.
10
11 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I'm not going to read it. I'm going to
12 describe it because I think-- Lead the discussion. I will do that.
13 Yes, sir.
14
15 So, just as a reminder, this is only changing the ACL under the
16 Puerto Rico FMP, and so those references to 622.440 are the
17 regulations specific to Puerto Rico. And if you went there in the
18 code of federal regulations, you would see three tables for reef
19 fish, setting forth ACLs. One table is specific to the commercial
20 ACL, one table is specific to the recreational ACL, and then you
21 have the third table, which is the total ACL combining those two.
22
23 So, what the codified text we'll do, there's this redesignation
24 language just to basically better label the tables. So, I'm going
25 to kind of skip over that because that's not substantive. But if
26 you scroll down to where you actually see an excerpt of the table.
27
28 So, the first table, again, that would be the commercial ACL. Table
29 2 is the recreational ACL, and then finally, Table 3. And these
30 numbers correspond with the now selected preferred Alternative 3.
31 Any questions?
32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No more discussion? Okay. So, we'll take it to
34 a vote. Does this require a roll call vote or-- Yeah. Okay. Roll
35 call vote. I'll start again with Kreglo.
36
37 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo. Yes.
38
39 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli. Yes.
40
41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López. Yes.
42
43 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez. Yes.
44
45 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck. Yes.
46
47 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater. Yes.
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette. Yes.

2
3 *No abstention. No nays. Motion carries.* Good? Dolphin Wahoo?

4
5 **SARAH STEPHENSON:** Hi. This is Sarah. Is it okay if I just get
6 started?

7
8 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes, please.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

11
12 **AMENDMENT 3 TO THE PUERTO RICO, ST. CROIX, AND ST. THOMAS/ST.**
13 **JOHN FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS: MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR DOLPHIN**
14 **AND WAHOO**

15
16 **SARAH STEPHENSON:** Okay. This is Sarah Stephenson with the
17 Southeast Regional Office, and I'm going to just, similarly, like,
18 to what María just did, just go through Amendment 3, the status of
19 it, the decisions that I've made, and kind of tell you the analysis
20 that was done from the last time you saw the amendment. And if
21 you're willing, we'll make a similar kind of motion as to what you
22 just did to submit this amendment as well.

23
24 There are several actions in the amendment, and that's due to the
25 nature of this is amending all three FMPs. But the breakdown of
26 what they're doing is establishing a minimum size limit for dolphin
27 in federal waters around each island management area, a minimum
28 size limit for wahoo in federal waters, and a recreational bag
29 limit for dolphin in federal waters and then a recreational bag
30 limit for wahoo in federal waters. And I've just chunked them here
31 to try to not have so much duplication.

32
33 The purpose and need in the amendment are to establish these new
34 management measures, the size limits and the recreational bag
35 limits to each management plan. And the need for that is to develop
36 conservation and management measures for these two species to
37 ensure that undersized individuals have enough time to mature and
38 reproduce, and to also take a precautionary approach to management
39 to protect against overfishing resources that have a limited
40 management structure.

41
42 Here's a high-level summary of the alternatives. For all three
43 islands, you selected the same alternative for the dolphin minimum
44 size limit, and that's 24-inches fork length. You pick the same
45 alternative for all three management areas for wahoo as well, and
46 that was a 32-inch fork length minimum. For the recreational bag
47 limit, for Puerto Rico, you picked Alternative 3, which sets a bag
48 limit of five dolphin per person per day not to exceed 15 per

1 vessel per day. And then for both Saint Croix and Saint Thomas and
2 Saint John, you picked, as the preferred alternative, Alternative
3 2, which sets, 10 dolphin per person per day not to exceed 32
4 dolphin per vessel per day. And that alternative for the U.S.V.I.
5 will be compatible with the regulations that the DPNR is going to
6 put into place or has already put into place.

7
8 And then for Wahoo recreational bag limit, for Puerto Rico, the
9 preferred alternative was number two, to establish a bag limit of
10 five wahoo per person to date, not to exceed 10 wahoo, and that
11 one is compatible with the current DNER regulations. And then for
12 both, again, Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John, you selected
13 Alternative 3, which is a bag limit of two wahoo per person today,
14 not to exceed 10. And that one's a little bit more conservative,
15 I believe, than the DPNR, regulations.

16
17 So, similar to what María did, we're going to look at the different
18 effects that the amendment considers. We don't want to just look
19 at one, we want to kind of compare all of them. So, this is now
20 going to be broken down slightly different. But for dolphin, for
21 the minimum size limits, the effects analysis would be the same
22 for Puerto Rico, for Saint Croix, and Saint Thomas, and Saint John
23 because the same alternative was selected as the preferred.

24
25 So, you can see here Alternative 1, which would be no size limit.
26 So, from a biological perspective, all sizes of fish that are
27 caught could be kept. So, you could therefore have those undersized
28 fish that we heard about in some of the discussions previously, at
29 previous meetings, those undersized fish being removed before
30 they've had a chance to spawn. So, Alternative 2 for all three
31 management areas were a slightly smaller fork length, and so that
32 would be more protective from a biological standpoint than
33 Alternative 1, but less so than Alternative 3, which is a little
34 bit larger fork length. The flip side is that there is the
35 potential for more discards with that Alternative 3, and the
36 amendment looked into that.

37
38 From a socioeconomic effect, it's almost the inverse where right
39 now with no size limit, there is no kind of constriction for
40 fishers, so that the commercial and recreational fishers can
41 continue to fish as usual, and so there's no real impacts to them.
42 Whereas for Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, that's going to impose
43 new regulations that they would have to comply with, and so you
44 would have some level of short-term cost to the fishers. But the
45 analysis in the amendment kind of considers that, through
46 protecting the stocks, you're going to have benefits, long-term
47 benefits through a more sustainable population, i.e., There would
48 be more dolphin or wahoo or dolphin in this instance around, for

1 future generations to catch.
2
3 And then administrative effects, if you don't do anything, there
4 are no new effects. The next two alternatives, the action
5 alternatives, if we put new regulations in place, they are they
6 are going to require rulemaking, and then there's going to be the
7 added time and labor that might be required for enforcement
8 officials and then for also outreach and education. So, number two
9 and number three there would basically be the same. And so, this
10 one, as I mentioned, applies to all three management areas.
11
12 Next slide is similar, and it's going to have a lot of the same
13 kind of effects because this one is looking at the wahoo minimum
14 size limit alternatives. And it, again, it's kind of doing the
15 same thing where you have no regulations, or then you have
16 regulations that are designed to kind of protect those smaller
17 sized fish. So, they're very similar.
18
19 The Council did select a more kind of moderate, if you will,
20 Alternative 2 there instead of the more conservative, the bigger
21 fish, and that was in part because of the analysis that was shown
22 at the last meeting about the impact to the commercial landings
23 and the amount of recreational fish that we did have landings for
24 and sizes for. So, you wanted to be a little bit more, kind of,
25 not as conservative from a biological standpoint because you wanted
26 the fishermen to still be able to catch some of the fish. And we
27 heard that a 40-inch fish, is very big and that wahoo generally
28 tend to swallow the whole gear whole, which is going to have,
29 therefore, more discards and dead discards, potentially. So, but,
30 otherwise, it's very similar kind of effects for wahoo for size
31 limit.
32
33 For the recreational bag limits, these are, kind of, divided into
34 Puerto Rico and then the two U.S.V.I. FMPs, and that's in part
35 because the alternatives were different. And then, of course, the
36 ones that selected were different. So, for Alternative 1, no bag
37 limit, the same thing. All fish that are caught could be kept. As
38 you move up to Alternative 2 where you have a 10 per day, 30 per
39 vessel. That would biologically allow more fish to stay in the
40 population, and so you'd have a greater chance of some of those
41 spawning. But the flip side, again, is that you may start having
42 discards, whereas you didn't before. And then, I believe the 10
43 and 30 would be compatible with the current DNER regulation, but
44 we heard at the last meeting that the DNER is maybe considering
45 changing their regulation. And if so, they would be interested in
46 having, what would be compatible now with what's going to be in
47 place in federal waters, which is that Alternative 3, five per
48 person, 15 per vessel. And so, again, as you move, that alternative

1 is going to, hopefully, retain more fish in the water. You would
2 have more discards, but, hopefully, due to the nature and maybe
3 outreach, we could reduce discard mortality.

4
5 Socioeconomic effects are also kind of similar to the size limits,
6 meaning that, right now, the recreational fishers can continue to
7 fish how they do, which is unlimited. And then as soon as you put
8 regulations in place, they are going to have impacts in the form
9 of costs. It's kind of hard to tell because we don't really have
10 a lot of data to go on for the recreational fishery, but you're
11 going to generally have short-term costs because they are going to
12 have to adapt and potentially catch less. But, again, long term
13 benefits through that more sustainable population. And then, of
14 course, Alternative 3, they're going to have even more short-term
15 cost because they can retain fewer fish than Alternative 2. But,
16 again, long-term benefits through the sustainable population.

17
18 For the administrative effects, Alternative 1, there's no effects.
19 Alternatives 2 and 3 are going to require regulations and
20 rulemaking. They're going to require potentially added time or
21 labor for the law enforcement officials and for outreach and
22 education efforts. And then there's also that, you know, the DNER
23 does have current regulations for bag limit for dolphin, so that
24 could add a complication in that this alternative that was selected
25 is currently not the same as what Puerto Rico has in place. So,
26 there might be some kind of compliance issues there for law
27 enforcement, as opposed to the one that was compatible with DNER
28 was selected.

29
30 Dolphin recreational bag limit for Saint Croix and Saint Thomas
31 and Saint John. It's very similar, except that Alternative 2, was
32 selected, and that allows more fish to be taken on a daily basis
33 compared to Alternative 3, which was more conservative. But the
34 same kind of analysis was provided. We just want to point out that
35 Alternative 2 here, as far as administrative, would potentially be
36 easier for the law enforcement because it will be compatible with
37 the bag limit that's put in place by DPNR. But, otherwise, same
38 impacts to the biological environment or/and to the fishers
39 themselves.

40
41 And then, there is that little footnote that, as of right now, as
42 far as we're aware, and so when this amendment was developed and
43 written and what you would potentially be submitting, those
44 regulations from the DPNR are not implemented at this time. They
45 are selected and they're going to be-- But, as far as-- and please,
46 J.P. or Nicole, feel free to correct me if that's not correct
47 anymore and we can update that.

48

1 Next slide is very similar. Now, we just switched to wahoo for the
2 bag limits. And so, I'm not going to go through all of these
3 because it's a very similar analysis, but I just want to point out
4 that Alternative 2 was selected for Puerto Rico, wahoo, and that
5 is be compatible with the current DNER limit. And then you're going
6 to have those same kinds of issues of protecting the population,
7 but potentially having more discards, short-term impacts to
8 recreational fishers, but hopefully long-term benefits through
9 more sustainable populations.

10
11 Next slide is the last one, for the kind of individual analysis,
12 and it's Wahoo for Saint Croix and Saint Thomas Saint John. And
13 you can see here that Alternative 3, which is the more conservative
14 bag limit, was selected. And the discussion at the time was, kind
15 of, for some of these was, let's select the more moderate size
16 limit, but have a more restrictive bag limit. And that's how the
17 Council chose to manage wahoo in the U.S.V.I. So, but, otherwise,
18 the effects analysis is similar to what we talked about. This one
19 is different. The one that was selected as a preferred would not
20 be compatible with that DPNR bag limit, but it would be more
21 conservative. So, hopefully, not too much of a challenge for law
22 enforcement.

23
24 But at least, we did, look at, based on testimony, that we wanted
25 to be kind of considerate that even though they are separate FMPs
26 and separate fishers, fishers from Saint Croix do fish in Saint
27 Thomas and kind of vice versa. So, what would be more difficult,
28 you know, having compatible regulations with the with DPNR versus
29 having incompatible regulations between, say, Saint Croix and
30 Saint Thomas/Saint John. So, the amendment did kind of consider
31 that too. I didn't put it on this slide, but it was in there based
32 on testimony.

33
34 And next slide, we just kind of wanted to point out that these two
35 management measures kind of are, additive, if you will. So, for
36 commercial fishers, you only have this new regulation for minimum
37 size for dolphin and wahoo, but that means that fishers that may
38 target other species, such as HMS, and then land dolphin and wahoo
39 as bycatch, are now going to have to be aware of these regulations
40 and comply with them as well. So, just kind of wanted to point
41 that out. And then for the recreational fishers, they would need
42 to comply with both, the minimum size limits and the daily bag
43 limits, for either species. So, we did realize and we kind of
44 analyzed that, you know, that additive effect of these two
45 management measures.

46
47 And then next slide, I believe, is the timeline of events for this
48 amendment and is very similar to what María just presented. You

1 can review it. You can make changes if you'd like. The draft
2 codified text for this one was also submitted, it's in the briefing
3 book, and we can look at that. And if you approve, we can do a
4 very similar motion to what you just did, to submit it and to allow
5 staff to make any kind of editorial edits those minor ones. And
6 so, the and the next step after that would be that we would make
7 those edits and send back to the Chair for review, and then the
8 Council would submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce.
9 And then, we would begin the rulemaking process, and this one is
10 going to have a couple instances for the public to have comment
11 and input on it during the amendment, the notice of availability
12 on the amendment, and then again on the proposed rule that would
13 implement the regulations that are outlined in the amendment.
14

15 So, with that, I'll stop. I'll take any questions if there are
16 any. And then, otherwise, we could do very, like I said, very
17 similar language in a motion, and we could also pull up those
18 codified texts. Thank you.
19

20 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sarah. So, any question for Sarah
23 before we go into the motions? Andy?
24

25 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks. I don't have a question for
26 Sarah. I have a question for Jean-Pierre. So, the regulations that
27 you're working on have not been implemented. Can you talk about
28 timing of that? I guess, I'm, in particular, interested in Wahoo,
29 because if we're going to recommend a two fish bag limit, are you
30 considering possible changes to that bag limit for territorial
31 waters?
32

33 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** So, I'll start, and I'll ask Nicole to
34 supplement. So, I mean, we did promulgate the rules and
35 regulations. Implementation, however, I know we usually give a
36 grace period. Nicole, I'll just ask you to supplement there for
37 me.
38

39 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. So, the rules and regulations for
40 recreational fishing are already promulgated. We are waiting until
41 we have a point-of-sale license vendor contracted before we
42 officially roll out those regulations to the public and enforce
43 them. So, those are currently implemented, and the compatibility
44 is as Sarah stated on the slides.
45

46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Graciela?
47

48 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, Nicole, if I may, a question. Would

1 you be, once the recreational fishing license is implemented, would
2 you also be collecting data on the species that you will be, well,
3 that you will be regulating?
4

5 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yes. That will be part of the program.
6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we need a motion. I guess we bring up
8 the preferred. That's not it. When it comes to editorial changes,
9 I guess we can use what Director Angeli had, and just cut and paste
10 when it comes to that portion. But right now, we need to select
11 the--
12

13 **SARAH STEPHENSON:** Really quick. Yeah. It be motion four there.
14 So, it's confusing, because the queen triggerfish one that Maria
15 presented was Framework Action 3, but this pelagic amendment is
16 actually Amendment 3. So, they're very similar in name.
17

18 What you'll see here that's not in this one is that we're not
19 asking to select preferred, because you've already done that. But
20 this language was all of the language that you had previously for
21 how, you need, you just wanted to combine it into one and submit
22 the amendment, allow staff to make changes, you know, editorial
23 changes. You deem the regulations, so we do kind of want to pull
24 up the codified text and look at that, and then give the Council
25 Chair. So, it's almost identical to what you just did, but we've
26 changed the name of the amendment to be Amendment 3, and this one
27 is to the three FMPs.
28

29 So, if we wanted, we could spell that out a little bit better, but
30 this is the action that you could start wordsmithing.
31

32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I got it. Okay. Yeah. So, we need somebody
33 to move this motion.
34

35 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo, I move that we, vote on this
36 motion.
37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Just go ahead and read it out. Read it out.
39

40 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Okay. *The Council moves to approve Amendment 3*
41 *to the FMPs and submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce*
42 *for review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-*
43 *substantive changes to the Amendment 3. We deem the regulations*
44 *presented by the staff at this Council meeting as necessary and*
45 *appropriate for the implementation of the amendment. We give the*
46 *Council Chair the authority to deem any modifications made to the*
47 *proposed rule as necessary and appropriate for implementing*
48 *Amendment 3.*

1
2 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramirez, second.
3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Kreglo, seconded by Vanessa.
5
6 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, you do have the codified text. Do we
7 proceed to--
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, do we need any discussion on this?
10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** In the codified text.
12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, is in the--
14
15 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** You get the codified text because you've
16 already included it in the--
17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gotcha. Okay. So, roll call motion. I'll start
19 with Kreglo. What?
20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. Codified text, then please allow Attorney
22 Zamboni to lead the discussion and then-- Similar to what we did
23 before.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kate?
26
27 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, as Sarah detailed, there's a number of
28 actions involved in this amendment and, therefore, there's quite
29 a bit more text, but I'll walk you through to explain what we're
30 doing.
31
32 So, it starts with the Puerto Rico FMP. And that section, it's in
33 bold, 622.441, are the size limits under the Puerto Rico FMP.
34 Currently, there are no size limits identified for any pelagic
35 species. And so, what this regulatory text would do is create a
36 sub-part b or sub-section b, which is currently reserved and
37 there's nothing there, and it would then, as shown here, have your-
38 - wait, where's the size?
39
40 Okay. Under 441, you'd have your size limit for dolphin at 24-
41 inches in wahoo. And so, this is implementing Action 1a and Action
42 2a with those size limits and corresponding with the preferred
43 alternatives. Still in the Puerto Rico FMP, you go down to section
44 622.444 bag and possession limits. Again, there currently is
45 nothing in sub-section b. It was reserved. So, this will now fill
46 that in with the bag and possession limits for pelagic fish, the
47 dolphin in wahoo, and this corresponds with Action 1b and Action
48 2b.

1
2 Moving on, now onto the page. So, now we move into the Saint Croix
3 FMP. Starting with that section 622.481, the size limit is similar
4 to the Puerto Rico FMP, that sub-section b is currently empty.
5 It's just reserved, and so it would be filled in with the pelagic
6 fish size limits, 24-inches for dolphin and 32-inches for wahoo.
7 This corresponds with Action 3a and 4a in the amendment and, I
8 believe, you know, it's, yeah, Alternative 2, for both. And then
9 below that, 622.484 is the bag limits under the Saint Croix FMP.
10 Same thing. That sub-section b is currently empty but reserved,
11 and so this regulation would fill it in with those bag limits
12 corresponding with your Action 3b and 4b.

13
14 Moving down, we move on to the Saint Thomas/Saint John FMP and,
15 622.516, that regulatory section are the size limits. And same,
16 that sub-section b is currently not filled in, and so this
17 regulatory text would provide the size limits for the pelagic fish,
18 dolphin, and wahoo, corresponding with Action 5a and 6a. And then
19 finally, section 622.519 provides the bag limits for the Saint
20 Thomas/Saint John FMP, and it would fill in that sub-section b,
21 again, currently reserved, and this would correspond with Action
22 5b and 6b providing the bag and possession limits for the dolphin
23 and wahoo. Yes, sir.

24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** It's a minor point, but a friend of mine is a
26 lawyer, and a recreational fisherman told me to tell the Council
27 that the dolphin should be dolphinfish in all documents, rather
28 than dolphin, not to be confused with Flipper.

29
30 So, we said pelagic fish and dolphin, we understand that it's
31 dolphinfish, but he offered that as a--

32
33 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I think that's a wonderful suggestion. I'm
34 not really responsible for that, but I think we can take that under
35 advisement and can we make sure--

36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Can we blame María or Graciela? So, please, as
38 much as you can, just use the dolphinfish rather than the dolphin.
39 Thank you.

40
41 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** And that would fall under the types of
42 editorial non-substantive changes that staff can make, and then
43 later approve. But we can sort of all know that we'll probably go
44 ahead and make that change. So.

45
46 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** But just to be clear, the other dolphins are
47 protected on the Marine Mammal Protection Act. And we would not
48 authorize the-- [laughter]

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Exactly.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any further discussion? We'll do a roll
5 call vote starting with Kreglo.

6
7 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo. Yes.

8
9 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Jean-Pierre Oriol. Yes.

10
11 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López. Yes.

12
13 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez. Yes.

14
15 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck. Yes.

16
17 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater. Yes.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

20
21 All in favor. I mean I'm sorry. *Motion carries. No nays and no*
22 *abstentions.*

23
24 Okay. Now if only the WECAFC region and Dominican Republic will
25 follow suit, we'd be good. Okay. Next is queen conch with Orian
26 Tzadik.

27
28 **QUEEN CONCH ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT FINAL LISTING**

29
30 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. I am sensitive to
31 the late hour and the freezing room. I'm sure we all want to get
32 moving here. I'll try and make this quick.

33
34 I think most of you have seen this already, so forgive me if I
35 kind of go a little-- What's happening? Okay. Alright.

36
37 Well, again, good afternoon. My name is Orian Tzadik from NOAA
38 Fisheries. I'm going to talk to you guys today about the queen
39 conch final listing under the endangered species act, and the next
40 steps.

41
42 Alright. So, I'm going to start this off just with a few key
43 messages upfront. What is this presentation all about? First thing
44 is that in February of this year, NOAA Fisheries published a final
45 listing determination to list queen conch as threatened under the
46 endangered species act. Next point is that a threatened listing
47 does not automatically assign protective regulations to the
48 species, but there are federal protections that are afforded under

1 section 7 of the ESA. These protections are that Federal agencies
2 must ensure that activities they carry out are not likely to
3 jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

4
5 So, the next steps in this process are going to be the designation
6 of critical habitat, the section 7 consultations, and the
7 initiation of recovery planning. And that, I'm going to go through.
8 The recovery planning is different than-- Gee, this is weird.
9 Sorry. --rebuilding planning, and I'll go through what those mean
10 at a future slide.

11
12 Okay. The recovery planning itself will include stakeholder
13 engagement and could include protective regulations under section
14 4(d) of the act, and I'll go through that in a minute. And
15 importantly, a threatened species does not automatically become an
16 endangered species over time. This is one assessment that was done
17 that listed the species as threatened. An endangered listing would
18 be a completely separate assessment that would require a completely
19 different process.

20
21 So how did we get here? How do species get listed under the
22 Endangered Species Act? There are five factors that could be
23 considered threats. And if any one of these or a combination of
24 these factors is present, then NOAA Fisheries will list a species
25 under the endangered species act. So, the ESA requires that the
26 listing determinations are based solely on the best scientific and
27 commercial information available. So economic impacts and
28 considerations cannot be considered in making species listing
29 determinations.

30
31 Now, I mentioned that the species was listed as threatened versus
32 endangered. The big difference there has to do with the timing.
33 So, an endangered species is one that is deemed to be presently at
34 risk of extinction, whereas a threatened species is one that is
35 not currently at risk of extinction but is likely to become so in
36 the foreseeable future. And, again, this was the determination
37 that was made. The species was put as threatened, and a threatened
38 designation does not automatically become endangered over time.
39 It's a further evaluation that would need to demonstrate that the
40 species is presently at risk of extinction to warrant an endangered
41 listing.

42
43 So, this is what the listing process looks like. On the right you
44 have a diagram of how these things typically go, and on the left,
45 you have a series of events that occurred that led to the listing
46 queen conch in particular. So, what normally happens is we will
47 receive a petition, and then we have a 90-day review period in
48 which we may find that the petition is either warranted, or we

1 will have a negative finding. If it's negative, then that petition
2 gets kicked out, as we discussed, I believe yesterday, with the
3 spotted eagle ray, that just happened and then that is off the
4 table.

5
6 If it's positive, then we solicit public comments, and we initiate
7 something called a status review, which is a peer reviewed document
8 that I will go into in a minute, and we have 12 months to produce
9 the status review. After the 12 months, we can put out a not
10 warranted finding on the 12 months, or we can say that the 12-
11 month finding is warranted and proceed with a proposed rule. And
12 you guys heard me present on that roughly about a year ago, after
13 which time we solicited more public comment. And then, at that
14 time, after considering the public comments, we have the option to
15 either withdraw the proposed rule or turn it into a final rule.
16 And in this case, we turned it into a final rule.

17
18 So, the little arrow says you are here, and what I'm here to
19 discuss today are these next steps. The next steps that are already
20 in action are the section 7 consultations. As I went through
21 before, these are consultations that federal agencies put out based
22 on their actions, and we want to make sure that their actions don't
23 jeopardize species that are on the endangered species list. We are
24 going to continue with the critical habitat determination, and we
25 will also initiate recovery planning. And that's a big part of
26 what I'm here to discuss today.

27
28 So, very briefly, the process that occurred with queen conch was
29 there on the left. We received the petition in 2012 originally,
30 and we deemed it not warranted. Or no. Sorry. Determined that the
31 petition may be warranted. And then, after the 12 months, we
32 determined that it was a not warranted 12-months finding. After
33 which time it was reinitiated, the petition was reinitiated by the
34 plaintiffs, and the court vacated our determination, and we had to
35 reevaluate. And in December of 2019, we put together a status
36 review team, which was finalized in May of 2022. And the proposed
37 rule was put out later in 2022. And here we are now, February 2024
38 with the final listing.

39
40 Alright. You heard me talk a lot about the status review and most
41 of this listing hinges on that status review. And so, the status
42 review team was made up of seven science and policy experts from
43 NOAA Fisheries and the review itself summarizes the best available
44 scientific and commercial information on the species and then
45 presents an evaluation of the queen conch status and extinction
46 risk. This is published as a NOAA Technical Memorandum. The status
47 review, there's a link to it there, and this review was peer
48 reviewed. And those peer reviews are also available if anybody's

1 interested.

2

3 Now what's important. The first bullet there is really what I want
4 to draw your attention to is that the status review considered
5 information for approximately 39 jurisdictions throughout the
6 wider Caribbean region. So, this is a listing determination that
7 was made on the entire range of the species. So, while we are here
8 today talking about things that we can do in the U.S. Caribbean,
9 this determination was made for the population of the species
10 throughout its range.

11

12 So, in the status review, we evaluated landings data from two
13 international databases. Considered the best available data on
14 reproduction, depensatory processes, and reproductive density
15 thresholds. We looked at the population connectivity models and
16 considered the best available information on existing regulatory
17 measures and other management.

18

19 Alright. The key findings from this status review were that the
20 largest threats to the species were over utilization. This is both
21 legal and illegal. The regulations throughout the range of the
22 species, there are significant issues with compliance and
23 morphometric regulations, enforcement, and IUU fishing.
24 Depensatory processes, the majority of the jurisdictions were
25 found to be below the minimum adult density threshold that supports
26 mate finding. We had broken connectivity. That was the population
27 connectivity model I mentioned earlier. And climate change was
28 viewed as a large threat as well.

29

30 So, the extinction risk analysis that was put out by our status
31 review team said that the species is at a moderate risk of
32 extinction if it is on a trajectory which puts it on a high level
33 of extinction risk in the foreseeable future. Foreseeable future
34 in this case, was 30 years and out to 21100 for that last factor
35 of climate change.

36

37 So, from status review to proposed rule to final rule. The key
38 findings from the status review were used to inform the proposed
39 rule and ultimately the final rule. The status review found that
40 the queen conch was at a moderate risk of extinction throughout
41 the range, and the public comments did not provide any new data
42 that was outside the range of the data that was considered in the
43 status review. So, the best available science indicates that queen
44 conch warrants listing as threatened species.

45

46 This is a big question. I've been asked quite a few times. So,
47 does the listing of queen conch under the ESA create new
48 prohibitions? So, there are prohibitions that are listed under

1 section 9 of the Endangered Species Act, and those are
2 automatically applied when a species is listed as endangered, but
3 they do not apply when a species is listed as threatened. So, those
4 prohibitions are listed here. So, the threatened species does not
5 automatically receive these protective regulations, and the
6 listing of queen conch as threatened does not therefore create any
7 additional or more specific prohibition on queen conch trade or
8 harvest.

9
10 Okay. So, with regards specifically to the U.S. Caribbean, we know
11 that Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have queen conch
12 fisheries in territorial waters, and there's also federal queen
13 conch fishery in Saint Croix, and the final rule does not establish
14 any new prohibitions on conch harvest for these or other
15 jurisdictions at this time. We do, however, intend to develop
16 protective regulations that are deemed necessary and advisable for
17 the conservation of threatened species under section 4(d). 4(d)
18 rules allow us to customize prohibitions and regulate activities
19 to provide for the conservation of the threatened species. These
20 customized regulations can prohibit any or all acts that are
21 prohibited in section 9. So, the slide we saw earlier, we can use
22 any of those tools in section 4, but we don't have to use any of
23 them.

24
25 And we are actively seeking input from stakeholders as to what
26 would be effective. And that's a really important part that I want
27 to drive home here, is that we're really looking to our
28 constituents for this, and we want to, when we discuss recovery of
29 this species, we want to discuss it in a way that makes sense and
30 that people will get behind, and ultimately, what is best for the
31 species. So, that stat on the bottom, between our own domestic
32 harvest and the imports into the United States in 2022 represented
33 roughly 76% of the global total. We feel that the United States
34 has a major role to play in the recovery of this species.

35
36 Alright. So, what's next? As I mentioned already, there are section
37 7 consultations already in place, and so the queen conch will now
38 be considered in all section 7 consultations that are pertinent.
39 And then important, that second bullet is recovery planning, and
40 any protective regulations would have to be done under 4(d). So,
41 in order to inform our consideration of appropriate protective
42 regulations for the species, we are seeking information from the
43 public on possible measures for their conservation.

44
45 Now, it's important to remember we're not just talking about the
46 recovery of this species in the U.S. Caribbean. The U.S. Caribbean
47 contains 0.36 of the estimated range wide adult population and
48 3.69% of the available habitat. However, it does provide important

1 links and connectivity between the Eastern and Western Caribbean.
2 So, when we talk about recovery, we're more interested in wider
3 scale, you know, actions that we can take, and what makes sense
4 across the range of the species. And just by virtue of the last
5 slide I put up, when we looked at it, we see that we have a huge
6 impact on our imports. And so, maybe that something that I have
7 heard from fishermen, directly, as something that we could do,
8 immediately, to help contribute to the recovery of the species.

9
10 In order to hear from more constituents, we have eight in-person
11 workshops planned. Well four are currently planned, four are in
12 the planning process. And we will continue and operate several
13 virtual workshops as well. And these workshops will be used to
14 solicit stakeholder input and suggestions towards effective
15 management and recovery actions. And again, to promote the range-
16 wide recovery of the species. We have already, we'll put it up in
17 a second, but we do have two workshops already planned in Puerto
18 Rico on May 7th and May 9th. We have a third one coming into form
19 in Florida in, later in May. And we've been in conversations in
20 the back of the room. Hopefully, Saint Croix, we're looking at May
21 30th to get that workshop together. And that's a real opportunity
22 for stakeholders to sit down with us and for us to all kind of get
23 on the same page. We want to be very transparent in this whole
24 process and we want to be working together and we want to be trying
25 to, you know, move towards actions that we feel make the most
26 sense. And then there's critical habitat, which we're also
27 information on any physical or biological features that may support
28 the designation of critical habitat within U.S. jurisdictions.

29
30 I also have listed here, the science projects that are currently
31 underway. As we mentioned earlier today, we are very interested to
32 get a better handle on a lot of this stuff, including population
33 densities, actual populations in the U.S. Caribbean, these sorts
34 of things. All of those sorts of information, all of the
35 information listed here is all geared towards a better
36 understanding of the species and ultimately be used to inform
37 recovery planning. And one thing to note is at the bottom there
38 I've got section 6 opportunities. So, section 6 of the endangered
39 species act allows states or territories to apply for funding for
40 scientific research on any species that's listed under the act.

41
42 Alright. So, as I alluded to earlier, I had a quick slide on this.
43 Recovery versus rebuilding. So, rebuilding plan you may have heard,
44 the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires overfished stock to have
45 rebuilding plans. These plans are designed to increase the stock
46 size to a sustainable level. So, I heard it described actually
47 earlier today in a really nice way and like to share that with
48 you, so the rebuilding plan is an action taken by NOAA Fisheries

1 for these purposes, right, to rebuild the stock. However, it is
2 still an action that is taken by a federal agency, and so it's
3 subject to section 7 consultation. And so, that's how the
4 rebuilding plan then differs from the recovery plan, which is a
5 plan under, the Endangered Species Act, and so section 4(f) of the
6 Endangered Species Act directs NOAA Fisheries to develop and
7 implement recovery plans.

8
9 So, and then at the bottom there, the goal of the recovery plan is
10 to establish criteria for delisting the species by identifying
11 actions and strategies to better understand population
12 demographics, while reducing or eliminating threats. And I think
13 that's really important to emphasize here is that first line there,
14 the goal of the recovery plan is to establish criteria for
15 delisting the species. So, we are in the process of developing a
16 plan to delist the species, not to go from threatened to endanger.
17 We're trying to go back the other way, to get it back into these
18 discussions with just normal stock assessments and sustainable
19 fisheries.

20
21 Alright. So, for those of you that are a little bit more visual,
22 we have a road to recovery as we see it. And these are the things
23 that I've been mentioning and going on about in this presentation.
24 We have stops along the way for this road, include section 7
25 consultations, critical habitat designation, and any regulations
26 that we decide to put into it. The recovery plan development is
27 going to include recovery status review, the recovery plan itself,
28 and then the implementation strategy. And all of these things are
29 going to be used, theoretically, towards a road to recovery. And
30 this is what's going to get us there. We've got the ongoing science
31 and these stakeholder workshops. And so, we're very interested
32 again in informing these yellow boxes with better science and more
33 input from stakeholders so that we can do this, we can do it well,
34 and we can do it right. And we can figure out a way that we can
35 all get to where we want to go, which is a healthy queen conch
36 population throughout the range.

37
38 Alright, so these are some flyers that were put out. You may have
39 seen the ones on the left. These are for the recovery workshops
40 that I've been talking about. The two in Puerto Rico are set. We
41 have dates. We have locations. The one in Virgin Islands is to be
42 determined, but I was working a lot today and we're thinking most
43 likely May 30th it'll be in Saint Croix, and venue TBD but we'll
44 get there.

45
46 So, that was what I had for you guys today, and if there are any
47 questions on the presentation itself, I'm happy to take those. If
48 there are comments that people would like to make to the Council,

1 I think we have time for that afterwards.
2
3 But maybe first, we can focus on questions, if there are any.
4

5 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel and then, Graciela.
8

9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Orian, can we go back to I love the recovery
10 road. Tomorrow, we are going to, I was talking to the Council
11 Chair, we're going to start at 8:45. We would like to have a
12 presentation, brief presentation of what is it that we call Section
13 7 consultation. So, that will be addressed tomorrow, and you will
14 be informed of what is the first stop here.
15

16 The other question I have, Orian, is you don't have to answer it
17 now, but what is the Council supposed to do for the recovery plan
18 under the management of Magnuson and Stevens?
19

20 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah.
21

22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** What are the steps the Council should do?
23

24 **ORIAN TZADIK:** So, the rebuilding plan is under Magnuson and then
25 the recovery plan is under the ESA. So, that's a great point. Thank
26 you for bringing it up, Miguel.
27

28 I should have mentioned, I was really happy with the new the new
29 explanation that I had heard. But what I'd wanted to mention was
30 that we should, I mean, you know, we should be having similar goals
31 for those two plans. And we will. And we have already. We've
32 already had discussions with the team in charge of the rebuilding
33 plan.
34

35 And so, yeah. I mean, it doesn't make sense for you guys to put
36 out a plan and then for it to, you know, be in complete opposition
37 to the recovery plan kind of thing. So, the idea is to get those
38 two very much in line with each other, and then, it'll be a lot
39 easier to kind of implement one with the other.
40

41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Discussing this with fishers and other people,
42 as of now, in the case of Puerto Rico, what the government could
43 do at that time was to close the entire EEZ to all fishing of queen
44 conch. The rationale for that was because Puerto Rico at that time
45 was not ready to implement a regulation that will prohibit landing
46 just the meat of the queen conch because we wanted to have
47 morphometrics and all that. And because of that, then it was
48 decided to close the entire EEZ. So, the fishers are worried that

1 if the recovery plan follows the EEZ recommendation, the entire
2 thing will be closed. And the answer to that is not necessarily.

3
4 But that's one question that they asked me to ask you so we can
5 put it on the record.

6
7 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah. I mean, like I said, you know, we have a whole
8 bunch of tools we can use. Those the section 9 prohibitions are
9 kind of the overall toolbox, but we can customize any one of those
10 or all of them or whatever. We can change them because we have
11 more leeway with this species. This is not something where it's
12 being listed and then that's it. We've have got to close the
13 fishery. It's something that's being listed, and it is new
14 territory for us, obviously, because this is of how highly, you
15 know, it's one of the most landed species in the region.

16
17 We've dealt with other species that were fished, but never this
18 high of one of the fisheries. Never, you know, this impactful. So,
19 and we are definitely cognizant of that, and the recovery plan can
20 have economic considerations. And so, I had mentioned earlier the
21 listing process cannot think about social economic considerations,
22 but these plans can. And we will I mean, you know, again, this is
23 why I'm saying so much that we want to speak with you guys. We
24 don't want to come in and just say, you know, we recognize a lot
25 of these issues have to do with enforcement and that sort of thing.
26 And so, we don't think that would be a very effective solution to
27 just say, "well, it's all closed now." I think that we would think
28 that we would rather work with people to try and get a solution
29 that works for everybody and ultimately recover the species.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

32
33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thanks. So, the 330,000 pounds of
34 domestic harvest is Puerto Rico State Water is in Saint Croix and
35 Saint Thomas. Right? Yeah. Basically.

36
37 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Basically.

38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, that's great to hear. The other
40 thing is that, in terms of the social economic factors and one
41 thing that the Council had moved forward with the spiny lobster,
42 for example, was that size limit on the on the imports. Right? So,
43 you know, we do have size limits in the federal waters that are
44 open. So, putting that onto the imports that are being brought in
45 might be one way of, both, dealing with the socioeconomic aspects
46 fishery and protecting our own.

47
48 And the last thing that I wanted-- two other things. One, the

1 section 6 funding, I mean, are we already working on that with the
2 States to have research done to see if we come back, when the queen
3 conch comes back, and what's happening with the invasion of the
4 Unomia and the and the colonization of the seagrasses, which are
5 so essential for the queen conch juvenile recruitment habitat?
6

7 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah. First off yeah. I'd you listed a lot of things
8 there, but what I will say is that I've heard the similar types of
9 suggestions to the import, you know, the import suggestion that
10 you made. I think that's a great suggestion, and I'm looking
11 forward to hearing a lot more of those types of suggestions. You
12 know, I've heard several variations of what could be done with
13 regards to imports.
14

15 And then with regards to the section six stuff, absolutely. I mean,
16 those are great questions and those are things we'd love to know,
17 and we'd love to partner with you guys and, you know, whoever wants
18 to be applying for these things, absolutely. Happy to be a resource
19 and help out.
20

21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** If I may but does it have to be the state
22 or can it be, I mean, can the Council through a contractor, for
23 example, apply for those fundings for specific research that needs
24 to be done in the EEZ, for example, in those areas that are closed?
25

26 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah. You'd have to I my understanding and maybe
27 Kate can help me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is that you'd
28 have to at least partner with the state. Is that right? Yeah. Okay.
29

30 Or the state-- or in this case, obviously, Puerto Rico and the
31 Virgin Islands.
32

33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. If I may. The action has to start with the
34 states. And then if they ask for our help, then we-- but it has to
35 come from the shoreline to each other. So.
36

37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, one last question. How about
38 recreational fishing? Because I don't think that in the domestic
39 harvest, we include any of that and that's one of the big chunks
40 of data that we're missing.
41

42 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah. I need to caveat those data. Those did not
43 include recreational catch, but, yeah, I don't have the information
44 as you point out. Right.
45

46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Commissioner?
47

48 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Thanks. So, I had one quick question just

1 as PRD is doing its evaluations, particularly on the critical
2 habitat side, for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, what is
3 the data set that you guys are using for benthic habitat maps?
4

5 **ORIAN TZADIK:** For queen conch or for everything?
6

7 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Just, I mean, whatever is the most updated.
8 And the reason why I asked that question is because, back in 2009
9 after the acropora had been listed, the only available dataset for
10 understanding critical habitat was on 1999 data set that had the
11 minimum map unit as one square kilometer. So, when you talk about
12 the Virgin Islands, that goes from the eastern most point of our
13 local waters all the way up to Anegada, basically.
14

15 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Right.
16

17 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** And so that means that everything within
18 our local waters was listed as critical habitat. Yeah. And that
19 has an impact. And I'm speaking about this not from my fisheries
20 side today, but more in general as to functions within the
21 territory and anything that's supposed to take place within the
22 waters of the U.S.V.I.
23

24 And so, if we don't have good up to date accurate information on
25 the actual location and presence of the habitat that's going to be
26 designated as critical, then that has an impact on the territory.
27 And NOAA BioGeo has spent a number of years with their submersibles
28 going back and forth between all the islands including Puerto Rico,
29 but they've only used it to have bathymetry at this time. And they
30 haven't been converted into maps, at least not to my knowledge. I
31 haven't seen anything updated since 2004. And so, what 2004
32 shouldn't be what we're using in 2024 if we're looking at
33 identifying properly location for critical habitat.
34

35 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah.
36

37 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** So, I'm hoping that through this process to
38 get where you put that, you know, best available science, thing on
39 one of the slides that we're making sure that we're identifying or
40 using the most best available science for those determining
41 factors, because the critical habitat designation did have an
42 impact on Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands for a number of
43 reasons.
44

45 And then the second part about that, and this goes more towards
46 when you do have a section 6 I mean, I'm sorry, a section 7
47 consultation, is the fact that there are no timelines on when that
48 consultation, at least from a private application, that there's no

1 associated timeline with how quickly that has to be reviewed or
2 turned around versus if it's another agency that's requesting
3 section 7. I know it has to be completed, I believe, within 180
4 days or something like that. But we have had projects that have
5 been waiting for section 7 consultation for years. And so, again,
6 we already have a few listed species on the coral side to add more
7 in there now. I'm just throwing out what all of the management
8 things that come up or have come up in the last several years. But
9 none of those things are factors when we're looking at whether or
10 not to list.

11
12 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah. No. I appreciate your comments. And, you know,
13 with regards-- I'll start with the critical habitat. You know,
14 we've only just begun looking at it at this point. Looking at just,
15 kind of, a benthic map and pointing to where they'll be is, I would
16 say, more challenging with conch than most other species. So, we
17 definitely understand those challenges, and we do strive to use
18 the best available maps that are available. I wasn't a part of the
19 acropora thing in 2008, but I, you know, yeah, we will use what's
20 available as best possible, but I'm definitely sensitive to that
21 statement, because we've seen it. We've seen these large-scale
22 coral reef mapping projects. And, yeah, like you said, I mean, an
23 island like Saint Thomas can just get lost in that. So, like I
24 said, we're just starting with all of that.

25
26 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Commissioner, just in response to your
27 statement about timelines under section 7. There are timelines,
28 and they apply, you know, and section 7 itself only applies when
29 there is a federal nexus. So, I'm assuming the situation that
30 you're talking about, where something's been languishing, there
31 might be a private applicant, but there must be some sort of
32 federal action involved in order for it to come under section 7.
33 It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the deadlines have
34 been blown, and that's a problem for sure. But, you know, your
35 comment seems to be very much focused on critical habitat
36 designation. And I'll just note that, you know, usually the
37 incremental effect of critical habitat is small, because the
38 section 7 consultation requirement is usually triggered just
39 through the presence of the species itself.

40
41 So, if there's already a need to consult under section 7, due to
42 the presence of queen conch, and that same section 7 consultation
43 now has to also consider critical habitat, it's usually a very
44 small additional administrative burden. But, you know, those
45 timelines should be abided by, and, you know, I don't know what
46 the specifics are of that. But, anyway, I just wanted to clarify
47 that.

48

1 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Just one comment. The point that the
2 commissioner brought up is very significant, and the main issue
3 when you declare an area as a critical habitat is not that
4 different from an essential fish habitat. They cover very ample
5 areas. For example, their critical habitat for the acroporidae is
6 anywhere from the sublittoral zone down to about 30 meters of all
7 shelf area. U.S. Virgin Island, Puerto Rico, Culebra, Culebrita,
8 Mona, Monito, you mentioned it.

9
10 But if you read, the agencies were forced to say, "okay, there
11 must be something particular about that extensive critical
12 habitat," and that's where the suitable habitat issue came in. In
13 other words, you know, a suitable habitat is a type of substrate
14 which is adequate for the settlement of the planula polyps for
15 their development and growth, etcetera. So, the same thing with
16 essential fish habitat. It means everything. I mean, everything
17 from a block you drop in the water, you know, to artificial
18 whatever.

19
20 So, what NOAA did is say, "Okay. Well, there are different
21 categories. Habitat of particular concern and this area." So, you
22 know, it started narrowing down. But the point is well taken
23 because, normally, when you first designate a critical habit or an
24 essential fish habit that is just too ample to manage or even to
25 protect. So, every permit has to be done individually, okay? And
26 evaluated by the agencies individually, and that's where some
27 justice comes up. Anyhow, that was my point. And I think I stole
28 Julian's turn, but he allowed me.

29
30 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Can I just quickly respond to J.P.? One last thing
31 is that more section 7 coming tomorrow. There's going to be plenty
32 of this to talk about for tomorrow. So, I didn't want you to think
33 that, yeah. What Kate said and then there's going to be a lot more
34 tomorrow.

35
36 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, we've had a lot of discussions off the record
37 about this whole process. And, you know, it's a very touchy
38 situation when we talk about conch. The threatened rule was put in
39 place, and you guys can only manage the U.S. Caribbean.

40
41 Where you look at the Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands
42 harvest of conch, maybe less than 1% of what's being harvest. And
43 that's very important for us to understand when we are doing a
44 rebuilding plan for the U.S., especially under the Caribbean
45 Fishery Management Plan for where it manages Puerto Rico and the
46 U.S. Virgin Islands. We have already put some drastic measures in
47 place for the conch with the closing of the federal waters in the
48 west of Puerto Rico, the Saint Thomas/Saint John shelf. And then

1 for Saint Croix, they have a 7-month closure and a 5-month closure,
2 and they have reduced the harvest amount.

3
4 So, with all of that said, we haven't done any studies in all the
5 areas that have been closed. And this goes all the way back the
6 same issue that I always have from the SFA. This month makes 20
7 years, and we still haven't done stock assessments and seasonal
8 closures that were put in place. We don't know what they're doing,
9 if they're doing good or if they're doing more harm than good. And
10 the same thing lies for the conch.

11
12 So, as we are going through this rebuilding process and we are
13 planning to include the stakeholders in the process, while that is
14 being done, we need to ensure that the studies are being done in
15 all the different areas, not just the areas where we see the conch,
16 like what was said by Dr. Habtes earlier in a day to day. Do all
17 the different areas, but let's collect that information. Let's
18 list all the different closures, both territorial and federal, all
19 the different regulations, and take all of that into consideration.

20
21 It's so amazing that since the conch has been listed threatened,
22 that in the Saint Thomas/Saint John district, I'm going to speak
23 for that because that's where I represent, the imports have
24 tripled, coming in to the point where the little bit of conch we
25 do get from the Saint Croix fishers, because we don't harvest conch
26 in Saint Thomas, very little, we have a problem selling it. It's
27 just so amazing that every time a rule is put in place, that
28 specie, whatever it is, fish, conch, lobster, ends up flooding our
29 market. And that's a very big issue. I think that when the rules
30 are set in place, we need to do something with the imports. Since
31 we can't directly go and manage another country because they are
32 not U.S., if you do put restrictions on your imports coming in,
33 that's like putting a management rebuilding in place for that
34 country.

35
36 So, I like the public hearings that are coming up. I think they're
37 very, very important. I think one of the key messages, like I said
38 earlier, I'm putting it on the record. I told you guys; we need to
39 break this down into fishermen language, where they understand
40 what's going on. It's very, very critical. Especially when we have
41 the meeting in Saint Croix, that is broken down where they can
42 understand it. Because all they are hearing right now is their
43 fishery is going to be closed down and they are ready for a fight.
44 And we don't want to, that's not what we are trying to do.

45
46 What we are trying to do is figure out a plan with little impact
47 to our commercial fishers, because of the good management that
48 they have put in place. They can't even meet the ACLs due to the

1 fact because of the amount of imports coming in. They don't export
2 the conch. The only place that conch comes from Saint Croix is to
3 Saint Thomas. We sell the Saint Croix conch that they can't sell.
4

5 So, all I'm asking for is that we involve the stakeholders in this
6 entire process. We do the studies that are deemed necessary for us
7 to see the true picture of what this stock is doing and move
8 forward from there. Thank you.
9

10 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa-- oh, do you want to answer that?
13

14 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Yeah. Just to say that, you know, thank you for
15 those comments. As Julian mentioned, he has already talked to me
16 offline with a lot of those suggestions, but I've also heard those
17 suggestions from a lot of, not those particular, but similar
18 suggestions, from a lot of people as well. And that's why, as
19 Julian pointed out, these stakeholder workshops are so important,
20 and for us all to get on the same page because this is a real, I
21 think, this is a real complicated species.
22

23 I think we can all acknowledge that this is not, you know, just
24 like another reef fish that we can sample in the same way we've
25 been sampling forever. We have nuances to this species that we
26 don't have with other species, and it's going to take you guys
27 helping us out, us helping you out, and all of us thinking about
28 this together in order to develop an effective recovery plan that
29 is, as you pointed out, for the range of the species. Right? And
30 so, while we do our own thing, which is the rebuilding plan. Right?
31 The rebuilding plan focuses on U.S. jurisdiction, and then the
32 recovery plan is kind of this larger focus of not only that, but
33 we also need to be thinking about the scope of the entire species.
34

35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa and then Andy.
36

37 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramirez for the
38 record. I just want to say and demonstrate my support, for the
39 record, for the comments that Julian brings to the table. The same
40 situation that we are having here in Puerto Rico and especially as
41 a commercial fisherman, we have to deal every day with this
42 situation. We have no harvest as we used to have because we have
43 no sales. So, this is very important that we can connect those
44 fishermen to understand, in a better language, the situation that
45 we are going to present, especially in the nine, in the west side
46 and of course we're always trying to help and to support all the
47 decisions that have to be made, but we need to hear them.
48

1 We need to be sure that all these recovery plans that are made
2 have the better science information and from what I read there are
3 no reports since 2019, the last one, and after the hurricanes, all
4 the west platform changed a lot. So, we need to start those studies
5 as soon as possible. Thanks.

6
7 **ORIAN TZADIK:** Just to respond quickly, thank you for the comments.
8 But with regards to the last part, the woman who presented earlier,
9 Jennifer Dorr, on the Saint Thomas population assessment, is in
10 the process. She will be doing Saint Croix this year and then
11 Puerto Rico next year. So, there is a plan, right now, in place,
12 to survey all of Puerto Rico in addition to SEAMAP, if we can get
13 that working too. Andy?

14
15 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I really appreciate the comments and, I
16 guess, I wanted to emphasize a couple of things. One is fully
17 agreed, communication is going to be critical here, right? So,
18 fishermen are already spun up. They're confused. They're uncertain
19 about what the future is going to bring. And we're trying to be
20 openly transparent, communicative about what does this mean, what
21 does it not mean, what are we doing going forward. Right? So,
22 certainly looking for help and assistance as we work to communicate
23 with fishers.

24
25 I think most importantly right now, what can help with us is we,
26 the fishery service, are not telling people we're going to go
27 prohibit you from harvesting queen conch, right? I want to make
28 that clear. We, at this point, have listed queen conch as
29 threatened, and we are beginning the recovery planning process
30 that's going to involve stakeholder engagement. That's going to
31 take the better part of the next year or more. Right?

32
33 After that process is likely when any sort of regulations might
34 start being developed. And I don't know at this point what those
35 regulations will look like. Right? And so, I don't want to
36 speculate. I don't have any ideas at this point. It will depend on
37 the recovery plan, the threats to the species, what we're already
38 doing well in the Caribbean to manage and conserve queen conch.

39
40 So, I think the emphasis right now is, hopefully, that you can
41 communicate to the fishers that there's still a lot of things that
42 are going to have to happen in the future, and that we want them
43 to be involved in this process going forward and looked forward to
44 working with them.

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?

47
48 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Miguel, you have to say something quick

1 because my letter is kind of long. Go ahead. Okay.

2
3 Good evening, everybody. Thank you, Chair, for this opportunity.
4 As you guys have been hearing tonight, there's a lot of concern in
5 the fishing community, especially, those dive fishermen in the
6 Virgin Islands.

7
8 For many years, the Virgin Islands have been regulating the species
9 of queen conch, I would say, harshly. I don't want to read all of
10 this because I'm going to bore you guys, but I can give you guys
11 copies later on.

12
13 What I want to say tonight is that we have done our homework in
14 protecting our resource. We have harshly hurt the pockets of a lot
15 of fishermen by reducing our catch effort, and as Mr. Magras said
16 earlier, we have a 5-month closure, and we can only catch 200 conch
17 per boat, before it used to be per person. You guys know the
18 regulation by heart.

19
20 The future of this industry in the Virgin Island, and I can stand
21 corrected if I'm wrong, is in jeopardy not by this regulation. Our
22 actual regulation given by the FAC, which I'm a member, Fisheries
23 Advisory Committee who advised our commissioner here, have put
24 into place a regulation that new permits that are being given out
25 are only for line fishermen. So, my generation is the last
26 generation that can be able to fish for queen conch in the island
27 of Saint Croix. We have been protecting the species, and we have
28 seen that that protection is working.

29
30 And I'm asking today, I don't have to read all this letter, that
31 you guys consider what we have done and maybe even do an exemption
32 on our island due to what we have done to protect the resource
33 that we are now enjoying. And then also, use our regulations, which
34 are very strict, but we still survive. We still get our income
35 every day by doing other fisheries mixed with this catch. I know
36 it's going to work for other places, but we have to work proactive,
37 and we have to work together in a way that we don't hurt fishermen
38 and push them into hitting other resources, then then we're going
39 to have to come back here and also do strict regulation and maybe
40 shut down those fisheries.

41
42 I hope that we don't reach to that point where our fisheries shut
43 down. I hope that when you guys do these studies in the Virgin
44 Islands, you see that what we have been doing to protect that
45 resource, that species, is working and can work for other places.
46 If you guys want, maybe I can ask Diana later on to make copies of
47 my notes, and you guys can hold them. If you have any questions,
48 you have you guys have my contact information.

1
2 I thank you all for this opportunity to relay the concerns of our
3 fishermen in the Virgin Islands. And as I said before, we are the
4 next endangered species. We, according to our strict regulation,
5 we have been doing something to protect our resource for the next,
6 I don't know how long I'm going to live. I tell my wife I want to
7 live a 154. I don't know how crippled I will be then.

8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Or she will tell you before--

10
11 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** But in the next 25 to 30 years, nobody in the
12 Virgin Island will be diving for a queen conch. It's going to be
13 there for our generations to see. Thank you.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That letter needs to go on the record when you
16 get a chance, Gerson. And also, in the workshop for Saint Croix,
17 it'll be good for you to present that letter.

18
19 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. I read it then. It's very long. I've been
20 working on it the whole day, believe me.

21
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay, Mr. Chairman. I guess I will jump into--
23 Mr. Chairman, I guess I will jump into the public comment period
24 probably. We can ask anybody else if they have comments just like
25 that and address them.

26
27 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson.

30
31 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you allow me, I want to
32 read some comments that came from conversation from conch fishers
33 that I had during the past weeks.

34
35 Conch in the American Caribbean is the second most important
36 commercial species. The frustration of the fishing community is
37 evident. Here, we all know that we are a data pure region and
38 making a decision of such magnitude without having data to support,
39 in my opinion, is an act of discrimination and racism for the
40 fishing communities in the U.S. Caribbean that in the future could
41 greatly affected by removing them from the water because this is
42 their main source of income.

43
44 I understand that for the moment, nothing is going to happen. But
45 this is the first step to take countless fishermen out of the water
46 in the future and affect the way they make a living. This fishery
47 has been done for centuries, since the time of our ancestors, in
48 local waters. An additional alternative should be explored to

1 protect it, such as reevaluating the way conch is landed to ensure
2 it is of legal size before taking a step of such magnitude.

3
4 It is very easy to rule against the fishermen and not address the
5 issue that really affect this fishery. It would be naive to think
6 that listing the conch as a threatened species can control runoff,
7 agricultural discharge, coastal erosion, among other factors that
8 do affect the marine ecosystem and the juvenile conch habitat. On
9 the contrary, this action only affects the socioeconomics of the
10 commercial fishermen. And I wonder if anyone here has studied the
11 existing conch population in federal water that have been
12 prohibited from fishing for many years.

13
14 Do you consult with the scientific community like Dr. Appeldoorn,
15 who is an eminent on this matter? Are you planning to do something
16 about imports? Because they will sure increase, and one might
17 wonder if this type of action benefits a particular importer. I
18 consider myself a conservationist fisherman. I am the first one
19 who, if I sees that something is wrong, I take a step forward to
20 try to protect the resource, such as the irresponsible use that is
21 given to the trammel net in lobster fishing that no one has wanted
22 to work on it.

23
24 By classifying the conch as threatened species without the
25 pertinent studies, is in a certain way, irresponsible. When you
26 decide that to please reach NGO's group, you are going to send
27 into the welfare system more than 400 Puerto Rican families who
28 have, for decades, taken care of the resource, you really lost
29 your north. What is more, you have lost your moral values and
30 unveiled yourself as nothing less than a racist organization.

31
32 The National Marine Fisheries Service, once again, failed the
33 American fishermen. So, congratulation, you did it again. I know
34 that this classification is not only for the Caribbean Fishery
35 Council jurisdiction and the U.S. Water, and that is why, at least,
36 I can ask to not include the U.S. Caribbean until the necessary
37 studies are carry out on the matter. Thank you.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Is there any other public comment?

40
41 **RAIMUNDO ESPINOZA:** For the public comment. Thank you, Council.
42 Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Raimundo Espinoza. I'm the
43 director for Conservación ConCiencia. We're one of the folks that
44 are leading the Naguabo Aquaculture Center with the queen conch
45 Aquaculture in Naguabo.

46
47 The reason I'm here today is because a lot of fishers have asked
48 me to come and then say a few words, specifically on making sure

1 that everybody knows, folks from NOAA, that we're available to
2 really facilitate the conversation.

3
4 One of the things that I heard earlier today was that-- one of the
5 words you said earlier was how NOAA hasn't said anything about
6 what it's going to do. That's important and it's great that we
7 hear that again. But one thing that needs to be understood is that,
8 in Puerto Rico it also needs to be understood the colonial presence
9 that we have. We have a control fiscal board that, with our own
10 taxes, they tell us what to do. So, there is something that, even
11 though a federal agency says, "You're not going to do it," it's
12 already stepping into a larger picture. So, NOAA doesn't exist in
13 a vacuum. It's the entire relationship that's in question.

14
15 And so, I'm here really saying let's talk about it. Let's reach
16 out to the fishers. Let's talk to the communities, because there
17 has been a pattern, not just from NOAA, but from the federal
18 government to impose regulations and actions that are not
19 consistent with the local reality.

20
21 So, one of the things that we saw is since 2012, I believe, the
22 landings haven't dipped below 300,000 pounds. I think in 2016,
23 they went up to over 350,000 pounds. So, if we actually see the
24 data of the local landings, we see how consistent they've been.
25 And so, I think, Orian mentioned that the average is 330,000 pounds
26 for both the U.S. Caribbean. And of course, we have to factor the
27 under reporting and the correction factor. We can see how much
28 more actual landings of conch there actually are.

29
30 There is so much more that we are unaware about conch, especially
31 when we're talking about critical habitat. Where they're
32 reproducing. How many we need for them to reproduce. In the
33 scientific literature, you can't find when, throughout the year,
34 conchs are consistently reproducing. We've already found out that
35 we see them laying eggs through every month of the year. So,
36 there's a lot of things that we're consistently learning everyday
37 by collaborating.

38
39 So, when I come here, I really want to ask everybody from NOAA to
40 really make sure you make the effort, to really collaborate on the
41 ground, because we like to hear the EEJ strategies and the
42 collaborative efforts, but a lot of the times they do sound empty.
43 Not because of your individual efforts, or even individual efforts
44 as an agency, but what has happened historically. And so, that's
45 one of the things I really want to make sure that when you hear
46 the other side, it's not something that is personal, it's not an
47 individual, it's not an agency level. It's just on the historical
48 context of where we are today.

1
2 And so, I want to say one of the things that, Julian mentioned as
3 well, was that on the regulations that would come with 4(d) rules,
4 also is important, like Orian mentioned, the amount of the
5 population that is responsible, in the U.S. Caribbean and the
6 habitat and also, how much is fished. So, that the burden of
7 management shouldn't only be placed in Puerto Rico and U.S.V.I.
8 for the entire region. So, even though the entire region is
9 classified as friend, it's not because of the U.S. Caribbean. So,
10 all those burdens shouldn't be placed on us.

11
12 And one last thing. One of the things, the reason why a lot of the
13 fishing sector, I have to remember what they told me. One of the
14 reasons why the fishing sector is very nervous is because, when we
15 speak about conch measures to occur because of the threatened
16 listing, many times we hear folks as if there's nothing in place
17 already. So, there is many things in place already. We have limits.
18 We have closures. There are bans in federal waters. And so, when
19 we speak about what can we do, without mentioning what has been
20 done, it feels as if something new is coming that hasn't been
21 considered.

22
23 So, those are the things that, I want folks to take into
24 consideration for the public comments. And in the workshops, we
25 look forward to providing a lot more information to making sure
26 that the efforts that NOAA is doing has a lot more information
27 just because there's a lot of data, a lot of information, nursery
28 grounds that aren't in the scientific literature, but are in the
29 communities and we have them. So, that's more things that we want
30 to make sure we put out there, and that's it. Thank you very much.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Kreglo?

33
34 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** I just have something to say about this. I think
35 it's important. I was a member of the Saint Thomas/Saint John FAC
36 back in 1990s. And the commercial fishermen came to the Virgin
37 Island government, and they said, "We would like you to do a study
38 of the conch. We would like to have a moratorium for five years."
39 Now, this is a commercial fisherman that came to the V.I.
40 Government, and they said, "We really want this, and we want you
41 to study the conch." At the end of five years, commercial fishermen
42 and government got back together and the government hadn't done a
43 study on the conch. And everybody said, "what are we going to do?"
44 And the commercial fishermen said, "Look, we will give you one
45 more year. Please study the conch. We've given you five years."

46
47 So, it was commercial fishermen that came up with a moratorium and
48 were willing to go six years without fishing for conch at all so

1 we could have good data, so we can make good resource decisions.
2 Thank you.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I'm going to make a couple of comments,
5 and it's really referencing rebuilding. So, we have a 50,000-pound
6 ACL. We have the Buck Island Reef National Monument, which expanded
7 from 850 acres of a limited take, because, in case nobody didn't
8 know, in Buck Island you were allowed five conch and two lobsters
9 years ago. Now it's a 19,000 acre total no take, which has one of
10 the largest conch habitats on Saint Croix.

11
12 And then, we have the East End Marine Park that covers net 17 miles
13 of no take, including the inner bays because you cannot fish, dive,
14 except for rod and reel from shore. And there's five conch
15 habitats, that I know of, inside the East End Marine Park, and
16 that's all protected. We have the Homeland Security Zone on the
17 south shore from Port Authority to the refinery that extends out
18 to three miles, and there's no fishing allowed, which I have to
19 err on Gerson because he dives that area, whether or not there are
20 conch habitats in that area there. And then we also have, in the
21 U.S. Virgin Islands, 33 marine protected areas, which that also
22 benefits the population of conch. That's what I got. Miguel?

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. It's late and we've beat the hell out of
25 this one. But the next step would be for the Council to start
26 working on a rebuilding plan. And with that rebuilding plan, we
27 need to contact with your office, the staff, the fishers, the
28 Chairs that we have here. And then that is how we need to look at
29 what we have that can be included in the rebuilding plan and what
30 we need. And all this data collection and everything will be
31 included there.

32
33 We also need to develop some of the timeline so people can
34 understand. The first part is something like Andy mentioned before.
35 This this first part is to communicate to the public what are all
36 the concepts involved in the listing of the queen conch. Then the
37 Council can work parallel with that, within the timeline, to start
38 working on the rebuilding plan. The comments that we receive are
39 going to be part of these minutes. I will send it to you, of
40 course. And then we would receive comment, it could be an official
41 comment, but there would be comments at the workshops that would
42 serve the purpose of canalizing our efforts regarding the
43 rebuilding plan of the queen conch.

44
45 It is important that we have rebuilding plan, because if we don't
46 have rebuilding plan then we will have a recovery plan. And those
47 of you who have been working on these two, we have an examples of
48 the two of them. And the important thing is that we all have the

1 same goal, recovery plan or rebuilding plan, we want to help that
2 species come out of the listing, as it happened with the bald eagle
3 and other species that we have here, until we get sued again and
4 then we go back to square one.

5
6 Regarding the international community. The international community
7 opposed the listing of queen conch the first time, because the
8 major buyer of queen conch is the United States. So, if we close
9 the fishing, if we close the import, we hurt a lot of people, that
10 by the way, they don't have a way to go to the government for food
11 stamps or anything. They go hungry. And we're talking about 5,000
12 Indians in one country, Miskitos and everything.

13
14 So, it is important for the Council to, or not that Council, but
15 the general group, to have that timeline. So, I propose, Mr.
16 Chairman, to allow, Graciela and I will work together, look up
17 maybe a line of the things that we could do to start a rebuilding
18 plan, parallel to-- by the way, we are coordinating with Orian's
19 office for these workshops, because the venues, the Council can
20 pay for the venues and everything. Diana just found one for Saint
21 Croix. But it's important to go to all the places that is required
22 to have these workshops. Probably we will do that throughout 2024.
23 In the meantime, we'll start the rebuilding plan, the outline of
24 the rebuilding plan. So, at the end of this year, the beginning of
25 the next one, we will have a lot of input from the fishers, the
26 communities, the scientists regarding the ideas that can come up
27 with this.

28
29 The other issue is that the recovery plan, and Orian mentioned
30 this, takes into consideration the socio-economy of the fishery,
31 because that's a mandate under the management of Magnuson and
32 Steven's Act. But the recovery plan, when you have an endangered
33 species, they have other authorizations-- they have other
34 mandates, not authorizations, but mandates and sometimes they can
35 be more restrictive than others. But the two of them have the same
36 goal.

37
38 So, Mr. Chairman, I believe we don't need a motion for this. It's
39 just that we will go ahead and work with Orian's office, Graciela
40 and María's office and the Center and come back to you, probably,
41 by August or by December, probably December, with a good outline
42 of what is it that we are going to do to start working on the
43 rebuilding plan.

44
45 We are going to have-- Martha the beginning of 2025; the queen
46 conch working group is going to meet? WECAFC? So, the WECAFC
47 working group, that encompasses all the representation from the
48 Caribbean, are going to meet to discuss the queen conch. Actually,

1 María is one of the delegates representing the United States, NOAA
2 Fisheries. So, we will be able to inform back, at the meeting in
3 April 2025, of the outcome of the meetings with the queen conch
4 and the recommendations that we have. I understand, Orian, that
5 you will have also the workshops in other countries explaining the
6 ramifications. So, by that time, we'll be able to have a better
7 picture of what is needed and what is not.

8
9 The other component I was going to mention is that the outreach on
10 education is key. So, I talked to our Dr. Alida Ortiz, that she's
11 the Chair of the Outreach and Education Program, and we will talk
12 to you, in the workshop, to see what we can help you with. Any
13 material that you would need for outreach and education in Spanish
14 and English so we can comply with the EEJ, can be put together in
15 layman terms so people will be able to understand what this process
16 is all about.

17
18 So that's it, Mr. Chairman. And then tomorrow, we are going to
19 discuss the ESA Section 7, so we have more information about the
20 topic. It doesn't mean that we are going to jump and go like crazy
21 writing stuff. It's just that we'll be able to have a timeline of
22 what we can do between 2024, 2025, maybe '26 regarding the issue
23 of the queen conch.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Miguel. So, tomorrow, we'd
26 like to start at 8:45 because we have a 5-minute descending device
27 video, and then we're going to go with ESA presentation on section
28 7 by Jennifer. So right now-- María?

29
30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I mean, I can make a comment tomorrow. I
31 wanted to maybe clarify a couple of things about the rebuilding
32 schedule for the queen conch.

33
34 So, as you know, in 2005, the species was determined to be
35 overfished throughout the U.S. Caribbean, and that's why, when
36 it's overfished, we are required to set a rebuilding strategy or
37 rebuilding plan, as we call it, with a schedule, right, for the
38 whole Caribbean. And then, all of those regulations that we
39 currently have in place, which is, you know, the prohibition of
40 fishing in Puerto Rico on federal water, and this is only for
41 federal waters, of course, because that's what the MSA can do.
42 Saint Thomas, you know, the regulations, the size, minimum sizes,
43 again, all of that is part of that rebuilding plan.

44
45 Now, that rebuilding plan was supposed to have ended in 2020. Okay?
46 So, that means that right now, we are on year 19 of the 15-year
47 plan. So, how this works is that NMFS has to make a stock status
48 determination of the queen conch. Right now, the species continues

1 to be under the status of overfished because we have not made a
2 new determination. And for us to be able to make a new
3 determination as to whether the species is rebuilt or it continues
4 to be overfished or is unknown, we have to do an evaluation. Right?
5

6 And this is where we kind of connect with the recovery plan,
7 because if the information that is being collected is going to be
8 collected as part of that recovery plan, it will be useful for us
9 to evaluate the stock status on each one of the islands, which is
10 something else that we have to do. Because before the overfished
11 determination was done throughout the whole U.S. Caribbean. So,
12 now we are managing on an island-based level. So, there are many
13 things to do. Right? And that's why we need to get a little bit
14 creative. Because, as you all know, the way to determine the status
15 of a stock is through a stock assessment, and we do not have that
16 information right now to do that.
17

18 So, as we learn more, right, we need to discuss what are the
19 consequences of the findings, right, of the evaluations that we
20 are doing. And then, in regards of is the status is unknown, if
21 it's rebuilt, or if it continues to be overfished. Right? And then
22 after that, we need to consider the basis for continuing or
23 removing those harvest prohibitions or continuing those.
24

25 So, this is a process. Right? And this is a process that we're
26 going to be working with the Science Center and with the Council
27 to see how we are able to make those determinations. Now if there's
28 a determination that the stock is not rebuilt, then we have to do
29 an amendment to do a new rebuilding plan. Okay? So, right now we
30 are operating under the assumption that the species overfished
31 under the continuation of the rebuilding plan that is in place,
32 which is all those management measures that we have in place, until
33 the stock is evaluated again. Thank you.
34

35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Commissioner.
36

37 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Thank you, María. And I agree a 100% with
38 what you just said and laid out for us. The biggest thing though,
39 for the threatened determination is the fact that the biological
40 assessment unit was the entire Caribbean basin and that, now, you
41 have-- so we're dealing with recovery plans for where we're talking
42 about 1% to 2% extraction. Right? Like, how exactly, if we're going
43 to list this threat under the ESA, and we used all of the data
44 that we collected about the Caribbean basin to make the
45 determination that the species was threatened, from a, I guess,
46 political standpoint, how is NOAA in its international programs,
47 dealing with the other entities that are contributing to the
48 species being threatened.

1
2 Because we can design recovery plans, do habitat restoration, those
3 types of things, set quotas for the U.S. Caribbean because that's
4 within our parameters. But it seems to me that the amount of catch
5 that is taking place was outside of those areas that contributed
6 largely to the designation. How do we control that portion? Because
7 they're having a larger impact than I believe we are, particularly
8 the U.S. Virgin Islands that doesn't export a thing. 50,000 pounds
9 is what we're collecting, of that 331 that we showed up there.

10
11 So, like, exactly how does that go? Because the last time I saw
12 it, too, like, you know, you guys, it's great, you put out section
13 6 money for restoration and those types of things. Unfortunately,
14 that pot isn't getting bigger. It's just getting cut up into more
15 pieces for species that are getting listed to try and recover.
16 It's not like there's a huge allotment going to the section 6
17 portion.

18
19 So, I'm just curious how we're going to be telling, you know,
20 Barbados, Saint Kitts, Grenada, all of them, "how are y'all dealing
21 with conch down there?"

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. That's the point I was trying to make.
24 Listen, guys. I personally believe that we shouldn't have put the
25 darn thing into the Endangered Species Act, but sometimes I'm
26 wrong, so I stick to the process. And the process ends up in court
27 and ends up with what we have here. There's no way you're going to
28 erase that from the record. There's no way you're going to erase
29 that under the Magnuson and Stevens Act or the ESA. But under the
30 Magnuson-Stevens Act, what we can do is to examine exactly what
31 María was telling you about. Because when I talk about the
32 rebuilding plan, I am talking about the MSA and what can we do.

33
34 Even though we can be working on a rebuilding plan, ESA can come
35 up with a recovery plan that could be different. But, hopefully,
36 that will not happen. So, in this case, what the Council needs to
37 do first is to see what we have now. The only tool that we have is
38 the rebuilding plan that we put together, that María was mentioning
39 before.

40
41 Let's put it bluntly. We don't have to do a lot of things that are
42 no different from what we are doing now. If we look at that plan,
43 everything that we have to do is already included in that plan one
44 way or the other. What we need to do is to identify what else do
45 we need, what information that we need. Even the scientists are in
46 agreement with the density variable. By the way, we were discussing
47 here whether a random study is better than a non-random study. I
48 just went through standards and everything. If you have a random

1 study, usually you underestimate or overestimate the population.
2 So, but the process is identified and all that.

3
4 So, Mr. Chairman, I believe that, probably, what we should do is
5 allow Graciela, Orian and María, I will be there also, to work
6 together on a timeline. What is what do we have for the sustainable
7 management plan? We already have one. And then, what do we need to
8 do to modify it, to accommodate the needs that we have now? To
9 answer those questions.

10
11 The study that was mentioned before, if we are going to do
12 something honest about this, we should wait until we have the
13 densities studies finished under the Magnuson Act. But if I get
14 sued tomorrow, I'd tell you that we cannot come up with a
15 rationale, in court, that will satisfy the judge. Well, it's late,
16 I can say it, we're going to get screwed.

17
18 So, Mr. Chairman, I don't think that we had too much time. Probably
19 in 2024, we should look at what we have and then we can come back
20 to the Council, "Okay. This is where we are, this is what we need
21 to consult." In the meantime, you will have working, los talleres,
22 the workshops with the fishers. So, we can come back, probably at
23 the end of the year, and say "This is the rebuilding plan that we
24 have, this is what we need to do." And once we have that, we can
25 look at 2025 and the realities of life. Actually, if we only have
26 1%, we are not doing anything for the queen conch, we're just
27 killing ourselves over here.

28
29 But the principle and the loss are what counts. And you're right.
30 There's no way you can go and tell Saint Kitts and Nevis and any
31 other country to do different from what they're doing now. That's
32 why we have WECAFC. And still, WECAFC is a voluntary organization.
33 We have the-- well, anyway, we have other international bodies
34 working with this. The only species that have been assessed by
35 twice, which is a big, big thing to do, is the queen conch. They
36 did it once, and they were asked to do it again. And they were so
37 furious that they had to do it again.

38
39 The reason for that was that all the countries that had the first-
40 - the way that the FAO operates, we had the same thing that we're
41 talking about. The status of the fishery. This is it. And we had
42 everybody and his brother working, scientists from Europe,
43 scientists from here working on that. And this is documented.
44 You're supposed to work as a country to make sure that what that
45 status tells you to do, is what you are going to do to have a
46 sustainable fishery of the queen conch.

47
48 So, the years went by and after a couple of decades we found out,

1 nobody did anything, and that the queen conch was still going down.
2 So, they were forced to do another assessment of the queen conch
3 at an international level.

4
5 So, and the other thing about the queen conch, they don't care
6 about the books. It reproduces sometime when they are little
7 population in a hectare, and sometimes it doesn't reproduce when
8 we have hundreds of thousands of them in one area. So, it's very
9 difficult. It's a very elusive animal. So, anyway, Mr. Chairman,
10 can we close until tomorrow and have the close session?

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think-- Andy.

13
14 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I just wanted to make a couple of closing
15 comments. One, I really do appreciate the conversation today, the
16 public input. I'm a little concerned, right, that we're rehashing
17 the decision to list this as threatened. Right? So, that decision
18 has been made, and I appreciate that people don't necessarily agree
19 with that decision. Right? But that decision's been made, and we
20 have to now move forward as an agency to recover the population.

21
22 Jean-Pierre, your comment about, you know, what do we do? We only
23 have 1% of the population essentially, point well taken. Right?
24 That is the challenge of the day, and we obviously need to work
25 with countries internationally to help recover this fishery. We
26 will have potential options on the table with the 4(d) rule, and
27 what that looks like, to be determined. But I will go back to a
28 very wise woman who was my mom who said, you can only control, you
29 know, the things that are within your control. Right? And so, I do
30 want to emphasize that that 1% is ours. That's what we manage. And
31 we need to focus on how do we sustainably manage that, and we may
32 determine that we're doing that, and we're doing it well right
33 now. Right?

34
35 Or we may determine it's still overfished, and we need to rebuild
36 it. The rebuilding plan, right now, we can't really assess whether
37 we've accomplished it or not. But I feel like the surveys that the
38 Science Center is doing gives us now that new information that
39 will help us and that once that's completed, and I agree with
40 Miguel, we can kind of put together a path forward, in terms of if
41 that's sufficient to be able to tell us the status and health of
42 the populations. You know, if rebuilding is still needed, what
43 would the revisions be? What would that look like? And what's in
44 our control to implement? So, appreciate the comments today.

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Andy. So, we are going to go on to
47 recess until tomorrow morning at 8:45, but the voting members need
48 to remain here because we have a closed session. Only voting

1 member.

2
3 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for the day on April 23, 2022.)

4
5 - - -

6
7 APRIL 24, 2024

8
9 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

10
11 - - -

12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Good morning, everyone. We're going to start in
13 about a few seconds here, so please, have a seat.

14
15 So, good morning, everyone. Welcome to the continuation of the
16 184th Caribbean Council meeting. We're going to start with roll
17 call. I'll start on my right this time. Alright. Jennifer.

18
19 **JENNIFER LEE:** Jennifer Lee, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional
20 Office.

21
22 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Council Member.

23
24 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, NOAA Office of General
25 Counsel.

26
27 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, Regional Administrator, NOAA
28 Fisheries.

29
30 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** Diana Martino, Council Staff.

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.

35
36 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramirez, Vice-Chair.

37
38 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, Puerto Rico DNR.

39
40 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Good morning. Jean-Pierre Oriol, Virgin
41 Islands, DPNR.

42
43 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Good morning. James Kreglo, Council member of
44 Saint Thomas.

45
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Buenos días. María López, NOAA Fisheries.

47
48 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Buenos días. Graciela García-Moliner,

1 Council Staff.
2
3 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Liajay Rivera García, Council
4 Staff.
5
6 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Cristina Olán, Council Staff.
7
8 **ANA SALCEDA:** Good morning. Ana Salcedo of Big Fish Initiative.
9
10 **VANCE VICENTE:** Good morning, all. Vance Vicente, SSC Chair.
11
12 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning. Julian Magras, Chair, DAP, Saint
13 Thomas/Saint John.
14
15 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair,
16 Puerto Rico.
17
18 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días, todos. Gerson Martínez, DAP Chair,
19 Saint Croix.
20
21 **MARTHA PRADA:** Good morning. Martha Prada, Council's Scientific
22 Liaison.
23
24 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Buenos días. María Irizarry, Council
25 Staff.
26
27 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos-Caraballo,
28 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
29
30 **LEIGH FLETCHER:** Good morning. Leigh Fletcher, Bioimpact.
31
32 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ:** Buenos días. Liandry De La Cruz, Port
33 Sampler and Fisheries Liaison Fish and Wildlife.
34
35 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico
36 Fisheries Liaison.
37
38 **KIARA M. MATÍAS ROJAS:** Buenos días. Kiara Matías, Council Staff.
39
40 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries
41 Science Center.
42
43 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Good morning, Miguel Borges, NOAA Office of Law
44 Enforcement.
45
46 **PATRICK P. O'SHAUGHNESSY:** Good morning. Pat O'Shaughnessy, NOAA's
47 Office of Law Enforcement.
48

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** Good morning. Sennai Habtes, V.I. DPNR and EBFM
2 TAP Chair.

3

4 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Jannette Ramos-García,
5 Outreach and Education Panel.

6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. And online?

8

9 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** In Zoom we have Alida Ortiz Sotomayor,
10 Elizabeth Van Deren, Jack McGovern, Yashira Torres, Marcos Hanke,
11 Nicole Greaux, Nikhil Mehta, Rachel O'Malley, Raul Ortiz, Refik
12 Orhun, Richard Appeldoorn, Virginia Shervette, and Anthony Elizo.

13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Cristina. So, before we get started
15 on the agenda, we have a couple of things happening here. We're
16 going to have Marcos Hanke talking to us about descending devices,
17 while he's out at sea onboard his vessel. And then, we'll have
18 Jennifer talk about section 7. We will do a video first. And then
19 we're going to have a closed session for voting members only from
20 1:00 to 1:30.

21

22 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. We are ready with the video,
23 but, Marcos, are you going to share something before or not? No?
24 Okay. Thanks.

25

26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You got the video, then Marcos can-- He's in a
27 better place. He's in his boat. Not dead, just in a boat.

28

29

DESCENDING DEVICES- MARCOS HANKE

30

31 (Whereupon, a video was presented and not transcribed.)

32

33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Now, Mr. Chairman, we would like to allow the
34 star of the show, Marcos Hanke, to say some words. Marcos?

35

36 **MARCOS HANKE:** Can you hear me, guys?

37

38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes.

39

40 **MARCOS HANKE:** Hello, everyone. I'm here fishing today, with my
41 descending device on hand, ready to go. And thank you so much for
42 the opportunity to present this video for pursuing the idea of
43 using and showing our device on our species, the red hind, the
44 yellowtail, all the ones that have regulations or are going to
45 have a regulatory release. The nassau groupers and all of them,
46 it's applied to many of the species that we care so much about.

47

48 Thank you for the opportunity. I hope you enjoyed the video. I

1 hope you keep moving forward with educational tools and tools that
2 are handy for the fishermen, made for fishermen, by fishermen in
3 the U.S. Caribbean. Thank you so much, guys. [applause]

4
5 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
6

7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Very quick. This video was put together by
8 Marcos, Cristina and Dr. Michelle Schärer, she was in charge. It
9 will be used by liaison officers in a program that we are going to
10 start this year. Russell Dunn is an official of the National Marine
11 Fisheries Service with Carlos and Marcos some time ago. He was the
12 one who produced the mini grant for the Council to acquire the
13 descending devices.

14
15 We are going through the liaison officers and the three Chairs of
16 the DAPs and anybody who can collaborate, meet in Saint Thomas,
17 Saint John, Saint Croix, and Puerto Rico with fishers to show them
18 the video. By the way, the video will be available in our web page.
19 Ana is crazy about the video, and she is going to be distributing
20 the video across the Caribbean, because in many other countries
21 they have the need for this type of device.

22
23 So, we would like to thank Russel Dunn for his effort. And rest
24 assured we're going to have to give him a report of what we have
25 done with the grant that he gave us from NOAA Fisheries. Thank
26 you, Mr. Chairman.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. And Cristina?

29
30 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** I also want to mention that the team
31 wanted to share that the target audience of this video is fishers
32 from 20 to 60 years that do mostly vertical jigging in the
33 Caribbean. Also, that the name Salvapeje came out of a survey that
34 we conducted in an informal way during an MREP. They proposed
35 several names and Salvapeje is the name that was preferred by the
36 fishers that were participating in the workshop. Also, again, to
37 say thank you, thank you, thank you to Dr. Mitchell Schärer for
38 this idea and this wonderful team of, Pichón, Elizo, and Marcos.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Kevin.

41
42 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fishery Science
43 Center. Marcos, I don't know if you're still online, but I'd like
44 to, recognize that you've come up with the best way to attend this
45 meeting, or any meeting, from the boat. But thanks for the great
46 work.

47
48 Really, really excellent video. Great ideas. I knew you wouldn't

1 stay away for long. So, thanks for still participating, Marcos.
2 And I hope you don't have a charter out there with you. But if you
3 do, good fishing either way. I hope it goes well today.

4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Marcos. Good to see you again,
6 and I'm putting in my order for a wahoo.

7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chair, we have Jennifer. We are going to
9 have a presentation on Section 7. Remember, we started talking
10 about ESA yesterday, so this is an opportunity to get more
11 information and to understand what section 7 means.

12
13 **SECTION 7 OF THE ESA - JENNIFER LEE**

14
15 **JENNIFER LEE:** Thank you very much. And I do have a presentation,
16 which I believe they are getting up now. But I can just start by
17 saying, I'm Jennifer Lee. I work in NOAA Fisheries. I've worked
18 there now for 20 years in Protected Resources Division. And so,
19 I'm here for you anytime you have protected resources questions.
20 I can always be your point of contact to help you navigate through
21 whatever you need. And so, yes.

22
23 So, yesterday, Ori, you know, mentioned section 7 consultations as
24 a next step when a species has been listed. Some of you may not
25 really be familiar what that means, so I'm here just to share a
26 little bit about the section 7 consultation process, and really
27 specific to you guys here and the Council members and fishermen
28 and what you need to know about it. So, we'll get started. So, My
29 slide, I will say, is not plain language, but I am going to describe
30 this in plain language for you.

31
32 So, in Endangered Species Act, section 7 consultation is a process
33 with substantive procedural and timing requirements that each
34 federal agency, anytime they have a federal action that they
35 authorize, fund, or carry out, they must consult with NOAA
36 Fisheries or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, depending on the
37 species that may be affected, to ensure that their action, in the
38 context of everything else going on, is not likely to make things,
39 essentially, I'll just say, worse off for the listed species or
40 the critical habitat, so the habitat that's essential for their
41 conservation. And so, this process is a way to step through and
42 determine whether or not that action is going to have adverse
43 effects that are going to impact the species as a whole.

44
45 The process is initiated, really, with the federal action agency
46 coming to NOAA Fisheries or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
47 sharing information about their action and where it's occurring
48 and its potential impacts. So, they're taking the first look in

1 preliminary determining what they think the impacts are going to
2 be, and then NOAA Fisheries Service then is either concurring that
3 their action is not likely to adversely affect listed species or
4 critical habitat, so not even really at an individual level. Or,
5 if there are adverse effects, NOAA Fisheries is issuing a
6 biological opinion, which looks at that action and whether or not
7 they are ensuring that no jeopardy standard and destruction or
8 adverse modification.

9
10 So, in terms of what you need to know about section 7 consultations
11 for our federally managed fisheries. So, the fact that NOAA
12 Fisheries authorizes fisheries through the approval of FMPs and
13 our regulations, implementing those FMPs, that's a federal action
14 that's subject to that section 7 consultation requirements under
15 the Endangered Species Act. How we satisfy that is we maintain
16 consultations that comprehensively address the effects of the
17 fishery management regime. So, again, the FMP and all its
18 regulations and amendments, on any ESA listed species that may be
19 affected. So, "may be affected" is the trigger for consultation.
20 If there is overlap and we think there's potential effects, then
21 that's when that consultation process kicks in.

22
23 And then in this case, we are both the federal agency that is
24 taking the actions, so we're the federal action agency, but we're
25 also, because we administer the ESA, we're also the consulting
26 agency. A biological opinion, just so if you're not familiar what
27 that is really the end product of a formal consultation, so one of
28 the ones where we think there are adverse effects. And it really
29 just provides that record for the effects of the federal agency
30 action, and whether or not it's meeting that standard that I just
31 said as far as we are really making sure things aren't worse off
32 for those species or critical habitat.

33
34 So, where do you come in here as Council members? You know, as I
35 said, this is a federal action agency process, but we do recognize,
36 of course, that while you're not a federal agency, you have a
37 really unique role in, of course, as being our partner in
38 developing these fishery management actions that we then must
39 comply with section seven on. So, we actually do have a policy
40 directive that basically outlines how we integrate complying with
41 section 7 consultations with our Magnuson and Stevens Act
42 processes. And we really do this through front loading, through
43 coming to you just as I am today, just as Ori did yesterday,
44 providing that initial information about our species and how they
45 may be impacted, giving you that information to then when you're
46 doing your fishery management, you can think about them and try to
47 make sure that you are ensuring that you are not likely to
48 jeopardize and doing what's needed to try to protect that species.

1 And so, this policy, it is under revision to really strengthen
2 that early engagement cooperation, and you know, Miguel will be
3 discussing it at the-- and Andy at the May Council coordination
4 committee meeting.

5
6 And so, as far as these biological opinions, once we get them done,
7 it's not just the end, right, because you are, of course, you know,
8 federal fisheries management is not static or, you know, it's
9 always changing. Right? You're always doing things here. So, we
10 need to make sure that as your fishery changes and as your
11 management changes, that the standard is still being met. So,
12 anytime a new action is going to modify this regime of fishery
13 management in a way that is going to cause effects that we didn't
14 consider in the biological opinion for a formal consultation. So,
15 if something you are doing makes that biological opinion no longer
16 right, then we basically need to reinitiate. That's not the only
17 reason why we reinitiate.

18
19 So, in addition, there's three other reasons why we might
20 reinitiate on a biological opinion. We can have the extent of the
21 impacts, so the incidental take statements can be exceeded, in
22 which case, we have to reinitiate. We can have new information,
23 maybe your fishery hasn't changed, or your fishery management
24 hasn't really changed, but something that we've learned about the
25 species suddenly makes it worse off for those listed species, well,
26 then we still need to reinitiate because our BIOp again isn't
27 really correct. Right? We need to look at whatever it is that we
28 now know. And then, that last reinitiation trigger is if we have
29 a new species that's listed or a critical habitat that's designated
30 that may be affected by the action. And I bolded it here because,
31 obviously, that's part of why we're here today. Right? We're
32 talking about that we have some new listed species that may be
33 affected. And so, that's why it's important that we share and make
34 sure you understand what this process is and what we're doing.

35
36 So actually, in August I came-- or actually I didn't come. I really
37 wish I came. In August I was painfully on the phone, trying to
38 present to you about the last completed biological opinion, last
39 completed section 7 consultation that comprehensively looked at
40 your new FMPs, and so I shared a lot of information about that,
41 and I'm not get into it today other than to remind you that if you
42 have questions about what we have out there now, look back at
43 August. I do have a link for the biological opinion, but I
44 summarized its findings and the incidental take statement, all
45 back in August for you.

46
47 And so, we are here today because we do have some new species in
48 critical habitat, either proposed for listing or designation or

1 final that have been issued since September 2020. And what I mean
2 by that is that when we did that biological opinion, we didn't
3 consider these species because they weren't listed yet. So, again,
4 in the interest of trying to share information with you, also in
5 August, you got some presentations that tried to catch you up on
6 some of these new proposals, and listings. So, the critical habitat
7 for the five Caribbean corals, that's now final, as of August 2023.
8 Our nassau grouper critical habitat, that finalized in January of
9 this year. The queen conch, which you just heard about, finalized
10 in February. And then we do still have a couple proposals out
11 there. We have a proposal for pillar coral to be uplisted from
12 threatened to endanger. This is not out yet. And then the green
13 sea turtle critical habitat proposal that came out in July, and
14 again, it's not out there yet. So, these are all things that the
15 BIOp didn't look at.

16
17 So, what are we doing to prepare for reinitiating section 7
18 consultation on any of these new listed species, or critical
19 habitat that may be affected? I mentioned how we are both sides in
20 terms of we are the action agency and the consulting agency. So,
21 sustainable fisheries serve in that role of being the action
22 agency, and they get together with the protected resources division
23 of SERO, serving as that consulting agency role, and we've been
24 working together to kind of get ahead and plan for any reinitiation
25 needs. And there's actually a process called a conference, which
26 is kind of like a consultation before a species is listed, so that
27 you can prepare. But essentially, it's just thinking about these
28 proposals and what may be the effects and what we might need to
29 do.

30
31 So, in talking, based on our preliminary discussions for nassau
32 grouper critical habitat, and then if finalized, the pillar coral
33 uplisting, same thing, also the green sea turtle critical habitat,
34 if that's finalized. We think those particular species are not
35 likely to be adversely affected by any of your island-based FMPs.
36 So, that would mean that we would just do an informal consultation
37 and document our concurrence with that finding, and we shouldn't
38 have to actually do a full biological analysis on those, or a
39 biological opinion.

40
41 For a critical habitat for the five Caribbean corals and queen
42 conch, we do think those are likely to be adversely affected by
43 one or more of the island-based FMPs, and so those will require
44 formal consultation or reinitiation of that biological opinion we
45 already have, to go ahead and add those new analysis to that
46 biological opinion and amend it.

47
48 And so again, you know, we've started these conversations. We're

1 starting to think about things. Our sustainable fisheries back in
2 December, they did go ahead and request, to protect the resources
3 division, that we reinitiate to address those five Caribbean coral
4 species critical habitat, which may be adversely affected. So,
5 that one we've acknowledged they've requested the consultation.

6
7 The Sustainable Fisheries Office are also working on requesting
8 that the scope of the new consultation be expanded to address queen
9 conch, and also nassau grouper critical habitat. And I know I
10 mentioned that sustainable fisheries believe it's just not likely
11 to adversely affect, but it would still be, again, where we were
12 talking about wanting to have that comprehensive record.

13
14 And then, SFD has already worked on preparing a biological
15 assessment for queen conch. I highlighted that word because you
16 might be wondering what that is, I don't want you to confuse it,
17 but it's basically that initial assessment where the action agency
18 role of SERO is looking at their action and the potential effects
19 and what they preliminarily think in terms of whether or not it's
20 likely to jeopardize or result in that destruction or adverse
21 modification. Oh, sorry, this is queen conch, so we're just talking
22 the species right now. I jumped the gun there. But anyways, they
23 did prepare that biological assessment.

24
25 And then SFD is also working with PRD to assemble information
26 needed to conduct the consultation on the other species. And so
27 really, like I said, initially it's up to the action agency to try
28 to get that information together, that's the best available
29 information out there, so that we then can use that information to
30 conduct that consultation. And PRD has already assigned, an
31 internal team that's going to be conducting that consultation once
32 we have the information that we need, and so we're just really in
33 that prep stage trying to make sure that we have, you know, all
34 our ducks in order to kick this off and work with you.

35
36 And, at this time, the 2020 biological opinion that I mentioned,
37 you know, we envision that, basically, we're going to amend that
38 biological opinion to address these new listed species in critical
39 habitat, and that's just because we think the existing analyses on
40 the other species that we've already consulted on, at this point,
41 we think those will remain unchanged unless a new reinitiation
42 trigger has been met. But right now, you know, we don't have
43 evidence that we've exceeded that take or that you're doing
44 something that's different from the BOp.

45
46 And that's really about what I have, but I really encourage you
47 to-- yeah, ask any questions now or later.

48

1
2
3 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I told you I was going to be the idiot for this
5 meeting. The consultation process for the queen conch, can you
6 explain a little bit more of what is that process? Do we have
7 public hearings? Is it a process within the agency? How is the
8 process done when we have this requirement?

9 **JENNIFER LEE:** Sure. I'd be happy to do that. So, there are no
10 public meetings. It's not a rule making. It's a process by which
11 we look at the potential impacts and, basically, you know, you
12 consider the status of the species and what other things are
13 happening in an action area. And so Sustainable Fisheries,
14 initially, like I said, for queen conch they've prepared a
15 biological assessment, which is their thoughts on, "Okay. Let's
16 look at this. Where is the overlap? How much conch do we land?"
17 and things like that, and they're stepping through.

18
19 So, that's kind of the first part of it. SF is working on that
20 information. In terms of the how to get engaged in the process,
21 even though it's a federal process, that's where I mentioned how
22 we do bring information right here, to your Council meetings, and
23 share a little bit about what we think the impacts are, and so
24 we're able to provide you information as we go through the process
25 and updates and things like that.

26
27 Ultimately, then the consulting agency side is going to be writing
28 that biological opinion, making the determination of whether or
29 not it's likely to jeopardize or not. We will then be thinking,
30 basically, to figure out how much of queen conch will be impacted,
31 and then we also look at how we can potentially minimize that
32 amount. So, really, you know-- let's see. I'm trying to think of
33 any way I can say it better. Does that answer it for you?

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The other thing is that, for the benefit of the
36 Council, we have to advertise our meetings 30 days before the
37 meeting. So, if you have anything that the Council should hear,
38 regarding especially the queen conch, when you're ready, then the
39 door is open for you to give the presentation. The deadline for
40 the August meeting is July 11th. For the December meeting is
41 November 5th. If not, it could be done next year. So, that way, all
42 the Council members will be abreast of the status of the process
43 regarding section 7 for the queen conch and the other species that
44 you mentioned.

45
46 **JENNIFER LEE:** I love that, and we'll definitely provide you
47 updates. And, you know, again, the reason why it's important that
48 we're coordinating is that that biological opinion is looking at

1 the how the fishery is managed, so we also are tracking what you're
2 doing here. So, as you're working through, for example, your
3 rebuilding plan, that's something that we are evaluating under
4 section 7. And so, yeah. So, it'll be sort of a, you know, it's
5 going to take a little bit to make sure that we have that proposed
6 action defined and that we're consulting on, sort of, your plans
7 for moving forward.

8

9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you very much.

10

11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

12

13 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López, NOAA Fisheries. Thank you, Jenny,
14 for the information. We just want to say that we work very closely
15 with protected resources and Jenny and her team. If you look at
16 the amendments, the draft amendments, in the part of the
17 description of the environment of each one of the islands, the
18 biological environment, we also include, in all the amendments,
19 information about all the listed species, the critical habitat,
20 where we are in the process in terms of if they have been in an
21 assessment or a biological opinion or consultation, informal
22 consultations. All of that. Every time that we prepare an action,
23 like, a Council prepares an action, in that part, we include all
24 of that information.

25

26 And when the effects of the actions are analyzed, we always include
27 how the action would affect or would not affect an ESA listed
28 species or critical habitat, the same as essential fish habitat,
29 based on those consultations that we have had with protected
30 resources. So, that's also a very good way of knowing what's been
31 done and what are the effects. Are we expecting any effects? Or
32 where we are in terms of the process of consultation. Because it's
33 something that, as Jenny mentioned, we have to do for all of the
34 actions and see how our actions would affect the listed species or
35 the critical habitat.

36

37 So, we also do the same for habitat, for essential fish habitat.
38 So, that's part of the things that we have to do. Thank you.

39

40 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, following up on essential fish
41 habitat. You know, when people send all this information for things
42 that they want to do, do we have a mapper where we keep all these
43 in a GIS type of format? I mean, I know we have all the paperwork
44 and when people are submitting their papers to do something. But
45 do we have actually the maps that they provide in shapefiles or
46 are they supplied as a PDF type of thing. And I'm thinking in terms
47 of the cumulative impacts for descriptions of habitat, etcetera,
48 on the fishery side?

1
2 **JENNIFER LEE:** Yeah. Well, I can share some websites. I mean, what
3 we do have is that we try to provide our federal Action Agencies
4 information on how to step through the process. So, we have some
5 really good information out there on where our species occur and
6 potential roots of effect. There is something called the section
7 7 mapper where you can look and if your project is in a particular
8 area, you can see what listed species are there and what may need
9 to consult on.

10
11 So, there are tools available, and I'd be happy to talk
12 specifically with you. Obviously, in the case of the consultations
13 that we do on your fisheries, you know, the scope is broad. You
14 know, your FMPs are island-based. Right? So, it's a large area,
15 but--

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María.

18
19 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** And not related to protected resources, and
20 I know I brought it up, it is essential fish habitat, which is
21 habitat in another division and another thing that we had to do.
22 With respect to that, there is a mapper, Graciela, right here.
23 NOAA Fisheries has a resource in it, an EFH mapper tool that is
24 available to see that.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Commissioner?

27
28 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Morning. So, I actually have a non-
29 fisheries related question to the section 7 process. Does NMFS
30 consult with the Corps during the conference or biological opinion
31 process. The reason why I'm asking that is because, particularly
32 for the listed species, going back to the acroporids, like, there
33 was the opportunity, in my opinion, my opinion, to at least have
34 initial consultation for the nationwide activities, which are
35 deemed by the Corps of Engineers who also issues the 404 permits,
36 I think, for waters and harbors. Like, the those lists of
37 nationwide permits are considered minor activities. But yet when
38 the acroporids were being listed, there was no consultation in
39 advance on, let's say, almost treating it like a general permit
40 and getting some opinion on there. Is that being considered for
41 the new species that are being listed right now at all?

42
43 **JENNIFER LEE:** Yeah. So, I did share, again, that the section 7
44 consultation responsibility is for all federal agencies. So, Army
45 Corps just like NOAA Fisheries, you know, every federal agency has
46 to comply with section 7 on their activities. In terms of the scope
47 of how we consult on different activities, we have been making a
48 lot of progress on doing more programmatic consultations for larger

1 activities, so, you know, it's to our benefit, too, to look at
2 things at a bigger scope and not be doing all these tiny little
3 consultations everywhere.

4
5 So, we do do programmatic consultations on federal agency
6 activities. And yeah, NOAA Fisheries, just as I'm sharing
7 information with you about these new listed species and potential
8 effects and the need to consult, we have a whole branch in
9 protected resources that does interagency consultations, and they,
10 too, are preparing other federal agencies on how they'll need to
11 conduct these consultations.

12
13 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** So, I guess is that branch then doing that
14 specific, like, looking at a programmatic? The last I heard about
15 a programmatic was trying to get a programmatic permit for all the
16 coral outplantings and, you know, coral nurseries, trees that are
17 being outplanted, they have structure with them. So, they
18 technically need a Corps of Engineers permit and trying to work
19 through that. But again, the reason why I bring it up is because
20 we've had, over the last 15 years, several species of coral listed
21 in the U.S. Caribbean, even more listed in the Pacific. But there
22 are these minor activities that aren't part of that programmatic
23 discussion. Particularly nearshore, inshore activities as it
24 relates to harbors, like harbor dredging, where there isn't really
25 any of the resources themselves, because that would enable the
26 states and territories not to have to do a separate consultation
27 for each individual project.

28
29 **JENNIFER LEE:** I will be happy to follow-up and get the answer to
30 your question. I can hook you up with, you know, with our lead on
31 those interagency consultations that would know best the answer to
32 your question. I don't want to off the cuff just take a stab
33 because I just don't know exactly where we are with programmatic
34 in that particular case. I do know in general, you know, that
35 that's definitely the way we've been moving, more programmatic to
36 help streamline for Action Agencies and ourselves these
37 consultations. And I yeah. I'd be happy to look that up for you.

38
39 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Thank you.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian.

42
43 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Good morning. Julian Magras for the record.
44 I'm going to go back to the conch. I'm here sitting, and a million
45 things are running through my mind. You know, you're listing it
46 threatened for everyone. When this rebuilding plan is written, are
47 different rules of the plan going to be for the different sectors?
48 In other words, we have the Caribbean Fishery Management here,

1 which manages Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I. From the numbers I've
2 been looking at throughout the Caribbean, it's showing that, in
3 this section, we are harvesting less than 1% of the conch. So,
4 when setting rules and regulations, because we know they come in
5 some way somehow, would that be taken into consideration?

6
7 And I'll draw an example. Right now, when the fishers overrun an
8 ACL, accountability measures kick in. So, we have got to scale
9 back the fishing here in order to make up for that overrun. So, I
10 want to know if some kind of equation is going to be used for each
11 different area. Let's use Belize as an example. They harvest--
12 they export 880,000 pounds of conch annually. That's just exported.
13 That's not what's kept on the island. So, let's say it's over
14 1,000,000 pounds. Between Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I., we average
15 somewhere around 300,000 to 350,000 pounds. And that's just Belize
16 alone.

17
18 So, if we take all the different Caribbean Islands, which is not
19 managed under the U.S., how does this equation fit in? I know the
20 threatened listing is for everyone, and you guys only have
21 jurisdiction over the U.S. territories. How is that going to be
22 taken into consideration for each sector if that question can be
23 answered?

24
25 I think that's the biggest question out there right now. Is
26 everyone going to be treated the same way and you can't touch these
27 other islands unless their governments decide to touch it, or the
28 imports are limited coming into the U.S. If I could get a little
29 clarification on that, it would be great.

30
31 **JENNIFER LEE:** Sure. And this this may also help to sort of solidify
32 some of what Ori was saying yesterday. So, we have different
33 processes and tools, really, to work once the species has been
34 listed. Right? So, you mentioned the rebuilding plans. The
35 rebuilding plan is a requirement under Magnuson-Stevens Act. When
36 you do a rebuilding plan, it's a federal action, then we're looking
37 at it, like we said, under section 7 consultation.

38
39 Recovery plans are different. They're a nonregulatory. They are
40 plans for how you are going to recover a species throughout how
41 you've listed it. So, when we're looking at evaluating what we can
42 do outside of the U.S., you know, that's one of the things that is
43 a big part of the rebuilding plan, looking at what actions we can
44 do with our partners to recover the species.

45
46 And then, the other tool Ori mentioned was the section 4(d) rule
47 and we talked about how that, for example, we can have regulations
48 specific to imports. So, that's something that we can do under

1 that rule. So, when a species is listed and we do a recovery plan
2 we're not just looking at our piece here in the U.S., we're looking
3 at how we can recover that species as a whole and what actions
4 need to be taken to recover that species.

5
6 So, I think, you know, just in terms of your concern that when a
7 species is listed, all the impacts of that are only on the U.S.
8 And, you know, you fishermen, you know, that's not the case and
9 there's a much bigger picture.

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

12
13 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, I think couple of things. Word of
14 caution. Right? I don't want us to get into hypotheticals and
15 speculative discussion at this point. Right? And I hear, obviously,
16 the concerns, Julian, that you're sharing, and others expressed
17 and appreciate those, right?

18
19 I think the other thing that Jenny just made clear, right, is that
20 we can't recover queen conch just simply working in the U.S.
21 Caribbean. Right? That's not going to recover this entire queen
22 conch population, the connectivity that happens throughout the
23 entire Caribbean. So, we will have to look at a recovery plan that
24 involves recovery actions throughout the entire Caribbean, not
25 just the U.S. portion.

26
27 And then in terms of the regulatory requirements restrictions,
28 right, that is to be determined. Right? But to the extent that we
29 can evaluate the U.S. Caribbean and determine how it's performing
30 relative to the recovery goals and threats and actions, that will
31 then dictate whether or not regulatory changes are needed or not
32 to help with recovery. Right? And that'll be all part of this
33 process and ultimately emerge from the recovery planning and any
34 sort of rulemaking that would follow that.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Any more questions, comments
37 for Jennifer? Hearing none. Thank you so much, Jennifer.

38
39 **JENNIFER LEE:** Thank you. Yeah. Like I said, reach out anytime and
40 I'm happy to have a one-on-one with you and work through some of
41 the information.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, going back to the agenda now, we have
44 Martha Prada, Building Successful Linkages in Support of the Queen
45 Conch and Fish Spawning Aggregation Regional Sustainability.

46
47 **BUILDING SUCCESSFUL LINKAGES IN SUPPORT OF THE QUEEN CONCH AND**
48 **FISH SPAWNING AGGREGATION REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

1
2 **MARTHA PRADA:** Yes. Thank you, and good morning to everyone here
3 and online. I'm Martha Prada. I'm the Councils Scientific Liaison
4 with the WECAFC. Particularly for the works related to the queen
5 conch and fish spawning aggregations. So, I'm here to present and
6 share with you how we have been making what I consider may be
7 significant progress in the coordination and development of
8 regional actions towards the sustainability of the fishery of both
9 of the species, the grouper species, the queen conch and the fish
10 spawning aggregations.

11
12 Okay. Now we have the presentation. So, I appreciate the invitation
13 that Miguel gave me for sharing the results with you.

14
15 When I refer to the Regional Fisheries Management, we do actually
16 mean the wider Caribbean region. Understanding this region as one
17 that is very complex, because of the biological and cultural
18 perspectives, as well as the amount of a large number of people
19 living in coastal environments.

20
21 It's difficult to estimate how big is the population inhabiting
22 these coastal areas, but at a minimum more than 130,000,000 peoples
23 are located throughout the region using these marine resources.
24 These marine resources are highly connected, and in complex ways
25 and in complex management regimes, too. So, we need to deal with
26 processes at different scales.

27
28 In the last report made by the FAO 2023, the fisheries of queen
29 conch, spiny lobster, and some groups of deepwater snappers,
30 despite not having very good landing statistics, because the global
31 databases are made from voluntary reports by different countries,
32 with different frameworks, there is an indication of these
33 fisheries having been the subject to intense fishing pressure
34 throughout the region. Some of them are at the maximum level of
35 production and some others are starting to show declining trends.

36
37 So, what these graphs indicate is that the fishing pressure is one
38 factor, but these resources are also subjected to additional
39 pressure factors. Those includes habitat degradation, increasing
40 in pollution, increasing in IUU fishing, intensification of
41 climate change impacts, a higher frequency of natural disasters,
42 so that at the end it will result in a temporary disruption in
43 many species, more in the longer term for other species due to
44 disruptions on the ecosystem functioning and the local economies
45 associated with the exploitation of these resources.

46
47 As such, the FAO WECAFC has established eleven different regional
48 working groups to address concerns from different fisheries. So,

1 I'm here today showing those eleven working groups to mention a
2 little bit of the work that has been done on queen conch and fish
3 spawning aggregations. When I say fish spawning aggregations, we
4 particularly focus on the nassau grouper and mutton snapper as
5 representative of the snapper grouper complex fisheries.

6
7 I have mentioned that the fishery governance in the region is
8 complex. It's complex because there is a multicultural
9 environment. There are multicultural species being exploited at
10 the same time, there are different interests, different
11 jurisdictions, different legal frameworks, and on top of that, all
12 of those species are considered transboundary.

13
14 So as Julian was saying, while it's happening in one place, it
15 could certainly have impacts on other regions, on other places
16 throughout the region, because the Caribbean is like an enclosed
17 ocean. So, what happens in one place definitely affects what
18 happens in other places. The fisheries management associated with
19 that have to deal with processes and management regimes acting at
20 the global regional level, at the subregional level, and at a
21 national level, and not necessarily the fisheries governance are
22 being coordinated, are planning accordingly or allowing the flow
23 of processes and decisions toward the sustainability of the
24 abundance of the species.

25
26 But slowly, the region has been able to generate four Regional
27 Fisheries Management Plans. The first one was the queen conch that
28 was completed back in 2017. The next one was the Regional Fisheries
29 Management Plan for spiny lobster. The next one is for
30 counteracting illegal fishing and the latest is about to be
31 published, I will say, in a couple of months, in three languages,
32 for the fish spawning aggregations. The formal adoptions of these
33 fisheries management plan require a long process. It requires
34 intervention of the scientific perspective, but it's also being
35 consulted through different stakeholders throughout the region and
36 then it has to follow the legal processes within FAO. The WECAFC
37 commission in particular, which is the Western Caribbean Atlantic
38 region, is the one of concern to us. Additional Regional Fisheries
39 Management Plans are being done right away, but none of those are
40 formally completed.

41
42 But then we have this new fisheries management plan and let's talk
43 about the implementation. So, under this complexity and
44 recognizing that they are voluntary compromises that countries are
45 making to the FAO. Each country, to FAO in particular. Also,
46 different fisheries organizations have expressed limited
47 resources. Human resources, financial resources, technological
48 resources that need to be available for progressive implementation

1 of this regional management plan. Still, the reversal of the
2 negative trend is yet to be experienced. So, in the process, I'm
3 trying to facilitate this regional management plan implementation,
4 the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, and the FAO WECAFC has
5 been developing tight relationships in order to advance and to
6 improve the governance of these regional compromises.

7
8 And for that, two task forces have been created in the past five
9 years. One, regarding the queen conch and another for the fish
10 spawning aggregation. So, what are the task forces for each of
11 these focus species. So, it's comprised by a small number of people
12 representing different organizations, regional organizations. I am
13 acting as the coordinator for these task forces. We conduct regular
14 meetings trying to coordinate and respond to countries requests,
15 express concerns and trying to come up with an agreed decision on
16 progressively moving towards implementing the Regional Fisheries
17 Management Plan.

18
19 In particular, what has been the results for the queen conch? The
20 first of those task force. The Statistical, Scientific, and
21 Technical Advisory Group was established. This is a very important
22 forum. It is comprised various number of experts throughout the
23 region. It varies depending on the on the aspect. Countries have
24 requested scientific advice, and we have been doing a lot of work
25 that I'm going to discuss and present to you after this slide.

26
27 But also, we are trying to figure out contracting limitation on
28 budgets, and so we have been writing proposals and trying to reach
29 regional organizations so they can have some allocation for
30 important work. As such, like, for spawning aggregations,
31 approximately, SPAW RAC in conjunction with the Caribbean Fishery
32 Management Council has supported the development of radio kits
33 initiative, but also, a pilot project to improve the collection of
34 landings data in the queen conch fishery.

35
36 You wouldn't believe that with the importance of the fishery, with
37 certain degree of reliability, nobody knows exactly how much the
38 region is producing on queen conch meat. So, that is a complex
39 issue because of different parameters and factors, but certainly
40 nobody knows. We're trying to make approximations. We don't know
41 exactly. Data is not as scientifically reliable as we expected,
42 and we need to make significant improvements in the way the
43 landings of the queen conch fishery is being collected.

44
45 Also, we have a liaison with CITES because CITES is governing the
46 exports of queen conch products. To make an export, we would need,
47 each country, in particular, each export, has to generate non-
48 detriment findings. And so, they are working in collaboration with

1 CITES. The group of queen conch experts has produced the first
2 draft of guidance, for countries, on how to conduct these non-
3 detriment findings. This year, we are expecting to test the
4 application of that guidance.

5
6 So, this slide summarizes some of the results achieved from the
7 Queen Conch Scientific Advisory Group. The group has met three
8 times since 2019, and we are expected to meet again next week in
9 Miami. The purpose of that meeting is to plan for training and
10 education on particular issues that are concerning the queen conch
11 fishery and gathering the better quality of data and developing
12 more collaborative relationships among different stakeholders at
13 the national level. But I'm not going to read everything, but the
14 group has always provided scientific recommendations for the
15 Regional Working Group. Generally speaking, these recommendations
16 are being considered when these regional organizations are trying
17 to search for funding.

18
19 For the spawning aggregation, we started late. Later than we did
20 for queen conch. Actually, the first meeting of an additional kind
21 of scientific advisory group is in the way of being established.
22 It has not been formally established by any means, but we have
23 started this conversation. We have started to identify the key
24 messages and keywords and analyzing why previous initiatives have
25 not resulted in the expected results.

26
27 So, we have been working a lot with different aspects, including,
28 not just, the scientific issues, but also the communication. And
29 for that, after my presentation here, we have Ana Salceda. We will
30 present you with what the region has done about the communication
31 and the education campaign, which is called the big fish.

32
33 So, I'm not going to spend any time on this, but I wanted to close
34 my presentation summarizing the positive and negative lessons we
35 have learned in the past five years. So, we have been able to
36 better understand the complexity around not just the biology and
37 ecology and trade of these fisheries, but also the complexity
38 around fisheries management and trying to deal and move forward.

39
40 We have improved, significantly, the communication and
41 coordination with the functioning and operation of the task force.
42 We have exchanged literature, ideas, initiatives, to come up with
43 additional sources of funding. One of the most important results
44 is that we have been building trust. Trust is essential, and it's
45 not an easy thing to achieve. It's a process, and we are on that
46 process, I guess, moving forward.

47
48 But we had some negative lessons too. Countries in general are

1 responding slowly. That is due to different reasons. Most of them
2 is because they don't have the enough personnel, they have a lot
3 of responsibilities, and they don't finish one assignment when the
4 next one or two or three are coming in. So, it's difficult to
5 consult with them and then get their positives and quick feedback
6 as we expected. We also need to do everything in at least three
7 languages with delays and difficult communication. Communication
8 is essential. Education is essential. And I guess without having
9 a successful communication and education, the fishery management
10 in the region is going to continue moving slow.

11
12 Sometimes the time difference. Because, like, for some oversea
13 territories in the Caribbean their fisheries managers are in
14 Europe. So, we need to consult with them too, and it's difficult
15 just to get agreements on timelines and everything.

16
17 So, that's all that I have to share with you today. Open for
18 questions or comments, recommendations.

19

20 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

21

22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Martha. Any questions? Miguel?

23

24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a comment, but just to let you know why we
25 are involved in this. Since the get go, the Caribbean Council
26 recognized, and after it was recognized by NOAA and the Department
27 of State, that all these resources that we manage in the U.S.
28 Caribbean are interconnected. So, we were authorized to promote
29 pan-Caribbean management of the species. It's a nice phrase, but
30 it's nothing but trying to participate at the national, regional
31 levels with other countries, scientists, managers, etcetera, to
32 see how we can exchange information that would benefit the
33 management of the species. One thing that we learned from the
34 beginning, because we have a tendency to go to these countries
35 thinking that we know all, and we are going to teach them. Well,
36 I have met a lot of people who know more about fisher than anybody
37 around the table, and they also have better management strategies
38 that we copy from one country to another.

39

40 So, to establish these connections, to keep working with this
41 organization is paramount for the benefit of the Gulf Council area,
42 South Atlantic area, and, of course, the Caribbean. That's why we
43 are involved in these actions. And we have been working and still
44 work with the Department of State. By the way, the Department of
45 State is a member of the Council. It's a non-voting member of the
46 Council. And the NOAA Fisheries International Affairs, Trade and
47 Commerce Office. For example, that office is the head of the
48 delegation of this working group if the Department of State is not

1 present. If they are present, then it's Department of State. This
2 is important to mention because in all the actions that we have to
3 present a support to support our budget, and we have to present
4 what we do with the monies that we receive.

5
6 So, right now, we're engaged with NOAA Fisheries, Washington
7 office, and other organization to implement the management plan.
8 Those four management plans that you have seen in the presentation,
9 two of them are key to this fishery, the queen conch, [inaudible]
10 and the lobster. But now we are trying to promote plan area
11 management of the species that aggregate to spawn. And the idea is
12 that you will not be able to patrol on these waters. You will not
13 be able to enforce all these laws and regulations that are
14 required, that look so good on paper, but it doesn't work in real
15 life, until you convince the people, the fishers, the communities,
16 that's a good way to go.

17
18 And I tell you, I have learned more talking to the fisher than
19 talking to the scientists. I have a lady that I admire. She's from
20 Guatemala, our friend from Guatemala. She said, if you fish the
21 way our fishing is, bread for today, hunger for tomorrow. I just
22 want-- she's one of the fishers supporting what you are going to
23 hear now with Ana Salceda. Martha, are you finished?

24
25 **MARTHA PRADA:** Unless there are other questions or comments.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

28
29 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Martha, is there any consideration of
30 all the issues that we're having with variability in climate and
31 the changes in or potential changes in currents in the Caribbean
32 regarding the connectivity for these species, especially, you
33 know, in light of the queen conch being listed.

34
35 **MARTHA PRADA:** Yes. On the queen conch, particularly, there is an
36 ongoing project on the genetics. The high-resolution genetic
37 techniques are being used for trying to create a genetic library.
38 And with that, being able to establish a connectivity pattern and
39 perhaps going a step forward to provide tools for supporting
40 countering of illegal fishing.

41
42 Connective the expert group on the queen conch are identifying
43 priority research. And within those priority research, aspects of
44 climate change impacts, particularly on the reproduction of the
45 queen conch is key. So, the study of the reproduction of the queen
46 conch is key research that needs to be done across the region, and
47 we are just about to meet next week to try to find ways to conduct
48 these studies which have not yet started.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Follow-up?
3
4 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Follow-up? Yes. So, that's the
5 reproductive aspect of the population. How about the recruitment
6 aspect, especially under the invasion of unomia and things like
7 that, you know, that are colonizing the major recruitment nursery
8 areas of seagrass beds?
9
10 **MARTHA PRADA:** Not particularly under the unomia or other invasive
11 species in the region. But, understanding the recruitment patterns
12 of the queen conch is one of the proposals that the Caribbean
13 Fishery Management Council is expected to be funded through the
14 IRA initiative because we recognize that there are certain
15 processes that can escape the fishery life stage but are essential
16 in maintaining the sustainability of the fishery.
17
18 So, both, reproduction and recruitment, are essential, and both
19 are potentially impacted by climate change. We are hoping to
20 conduct this kind of study, at least for the U.S. Caribbean,
21 perhaps being able to extend this kind of work at the regional
22 level.
23
24 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** I have a hand up. Michelle Schärer.
25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Michelle, go ahead.
27
28 **MICHELLE SCHÄRER-UMPIERRE:** Hi. Good morning. Can you hear me?
29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.
31
32 **MICHELLE SCHÄRER-UMPIERRE:** Hi there. Thank you, Martha, for the
33 presentation. Since you brought up that these recommendations in
34 both plans are voluntary, right, and we have to sort of coordinate
35 to better implement, what would be the steps to address the
36 jurisdictions that are sitting at this Council table to adopt
37 changes that would be more related to the region. And, you know,
38 what can you speak to that?
39
40 **MARTHA PRADA:** Each country can raise any issue at the WECAFC.
41 Regularly the WECAFC working group meetings discuss this kind of
42 initiatives. So, if the U. S. Caribbean, in particular, is
43 conducting a particular work or decides to expand the
44 collaboration, or is it need of identifying a particular issue,
45 perhaps you can express that to the WECAFC and then we can move
46 forward.
47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. No. No. That's not the way it works. You and

1 I know how it works, but we have to clarify for the record, the
2 U.S. Caribbean has to go to the Department of State. This Council
3 or anybody, any person in the institution has to go to the
4 Department of State and state the issue. Then the Department of
5 State confers with the International Affairs, Trade and Commerce
6 Office, and then they decide, "okay, this is what we're going to
7 present at the next meeting with the delegation." In other words,
8 we cannot, in this case, the U.S. Caribbean cannot add on its own,
9 with any of this initiative. And that's very important to make it
10 clear for the country.

11
12 **MARTHA PRADA:** Yeah. That's an important clarification. I was
13 referring at the country level but recognizing that Puerto Rico
14 and the U.S. Virgin Islands are considered U.S. territory, not
15 particularly, a country by itself.

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And I would like, Mr. Chairman, to take one
18 second to thank Martha for all the work she has done through all
19 these years. This is very difficult to do, and you have to have
20 the background. You have to have the experience to interact with
21 all the scientists, all the managers that we have here. And for
22 that we are very grateful, Martha.

23
24 **MARTHA PRADA:** Thank you, Miguel.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Martha. Any further questions for
27 Martha? Thank you again, Martha.

28
29 **MARTHA PRADA:** Okay. Appreciate it.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Go ahead.

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, we all know Ana
34 Salceda. She's a professional producer. She has a great experience
35 working with natural resources and presenting throughout the
36 world, actually, this initiative of outreach and education. We
37 developed with her-- consulting with her, we developed a strategy
38 for outreach and education to promote pan-Caribbean management of
39 the species that aggregate to spawn, grouper and snappers and
40 others.

41
42 We are going to present today-- and she has already presented to
43 the Council before. But today, Ana is going to give you an update
44 of the status of the campaign, the success stories that we have.
45 The information that she's going to give us today will talk to
46 those points. In addition, she's going to talk about what we need
47 to continue this big fish campaign throughout 2024 and years to
48 come. Ana?

BIG FISH CAMPAIGN

1
2
3 **ANA SALCEDA:** Thank you very much and thank you for the opportunity
4 to give this report on the campaign. As Miguel just introduced,
5 this is the first phase of implementation of that communication
6 strategy. It's an impact campaign called the Big Fish Initiative
7 by the WECAFC Spawning Aggregation Working Group.
8

9 As Miguel said, many of you already know this campaign, so we are
10 going-- this is just a refreshment. We are not going to explain.
11 It's basically self-explanatory. So, we are going to just refresh
12 the fundamentals of the campaign, but we're going to be focused on
13 this presentation on the first results.
14

15 As you know, the Big Fish Initiative is the communication component
16 of the Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Management Plan, and as
17 such we need to serve the plan and the different countries that
18 are part of the initiative and their goals when it comes to
19 sustainable management and protection of the species that
20 aggregate to spawn in the Caribbean, specifically the snapper
21 grouper complex.
22

23 This is a brief summary of some of the products of the campaign
24 and activities that we are doing and have been doing. Some of you
25 received the newsletter and have seen the short films, but please
26 feel free to reach out to Cristina Olán, or Miguel Rolón, or myself
27 for any of these products if you are interested. And, of course,
28 you would be very welcome to become part of our social media and
29 the hub, the Big Fish Hub.
30

31 So, the premiere of the 1-hour film for broadcast, "Treasure of
32 the Caribbean" of Nature/PBS and Europe, marked the soft launch of
33 the Big Fish Initiative in mid 2023.
34

35 The laurels that you see on these posters correspond to the
36 nomination and awards received by the film. It has been nominated
37 in many prestigious festivals and received awards in the U.S.,
38 Italy, Germany, and global festivals such as Impact DOCS and the
39 Feedback Film Festival. You can see a complete list of submissions
40 on the screen. Since its release, the film has reached millions of
41 people around the world, garnering critical praise and film
42 festival awards and in collaboration with Nature/PBS, Terra Mater,
43 and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a huge supporter of not
44 only the film, but the Big Fish Campaign. We are submitting the
45 film to the Emmy's in three categories. Best research, best sound.
46 Michelle Schärer is the champion of that content.
47

48 The audiences that we have shared the film with are really

1 mesmerized by the underwater sound that they heard for the first
2 time in their lives. Right? Beyond whales and dolphins. Right?
3 People are discovering, with this film, the different sounds of a
4 healthy reef, etcetera. I hope you can see it soon because it's
5 coming here.

6
7 So, beyond TV, beyond the places that are not part of our region,
8 and beyond the festivals, we have raised money of the Howard Hughes
9 Medical Institute has given us extra money to organize screenings
10 in the country. We have also produced, thanks to HHMI, the Spanish
11 version of the film. And these events are-- it's not just a
12 screening. Right? The film is more of an excuse. Right? These
13 events are an opportunity to bringing the different countries, the
14 different stakeholders together, fishers, lawmakers, fisheries
15 managers, and enforcement officials, and, of course, fishing
16 communities. It's an excuse to bring them together, enjoy the fun,
17 but also, more importantly, discuss the importance of protecting
18 the critical habitat of these species, the vital need to protect
19 the aggregations, and the connectivity, as Miguel said, that makes
20 the regional protection necessary to actually recover big fish.

21
22 And in these events, we promote the initiative and the Regional
23 Fish Spawning Aggregations Management Plan and its agenda. Not
24 only in the screening but also in the local media, because it's
25 part of the-- every time that we go to a different country, we
26 organize the media plan, and we are in the media, radio, TV. Thus
27 far, we have presented the film at GCFI last year. We have been to
28 the Bahamas, Belize, Honduras. In Belize's case, is a fascinating
29 case, and it has been extremely successful and fruitful.

30
31 So, this is what's coming. We just got information that we are
32 receiving additional funding to continue these screenings in the
33 Caribbean, and the first step is the U.S. Caribbean. So, we are in
34 the process-- this is new. We don't have much more than this. We
35 are in the process of organizing them, and these events are very
36 different in the different countries depending on the types of
37 aggregations that they have there, different status of the
38 aggregations, the different actors. So, it's all a draft, and we
39 will work specifically on each event.

40
41 So, the first one is in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. In
42 Puerto Rico, we are planning to have one in San Juan, one in
43 Mayagüez, and also in Vieques. if we have money, and two in the
44 Virgin Islands. We usually partner with fishing associations,
45 governments, co-managers of protected areas where the aggregations
46 are. Again, each country is different. Right? The next countries
47 where we are going to be, in addition to the U.S. Caribbean, is
48 Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama.

1
2 The momentum created by the film's premier, and promotion was
3 crucial for the launch of our digital campaign in September last
4 year. Our, social media and digital platforms went live from the
5 Jackson Wild Film Festival followed by the publication of the Hub
6 in November.

7
8 Since then, the digital part of our organic campaign, organic
9 because we are not investing any money to boost content. We are
10 relying on our on our massive network. It has grown 2,000%. Right?
11 Our monthly growth is 35%, and if you compare that to an average
12 campaign of the same type, the average growth is 2.2. So, our 35%
13 is outstanding.

14
15 In terms of reach, in addition to the millions of people that we
16 are reaching with the long form film, the film for broadcast, we
17 have reached, directly, more than 200,000 accounts in the short
18 life of this campaign. That includes individuals, but a lot of
19 organizations and groups. And it's thanks to the solid community
20 that has been built by the Spawning Aggregation Working Group, and
21 media partners who have been resharing and reposting our content
22 consistently.

23
24 Special thanks to Cristina Olán and the Caribbean Fishery
25 Management Council and the Puerto Rican community, including the
26 fishers who have been incredibly active and engaged in this
27 campaign.

28
29 Here's the graphic. You can see the graphic that represents the
30 countries, not all of them, just the ones where we have the most
31 followers. And as you see, Puerto Rico is a winner. They are very
32 active. Based on the metrics, analytics, and partners' feedback,
33 the main reasons for our growth during the first months of our
34 initiative have to do with a strategic approach, high production
35 value of original content, scientific accuracy of our content, and
36 the ecosystem approach, inclusiveness of the content, which has
37 attracted many fishers and organizations beyond our regional
38 network, and the loyalty of our partners.

39
40 We're going to go through this very quickly. This is to explain
41 that we have been-- always the key are partnerships, right? In
42 each country, at the regional level. So, that's what we have been
43 doing. Collaborative posting, highlighting and putting the
44 spotlight of our scientists, our fishers, the organizations doing
45 amazing work in the different countries. And we recently have
46 established partnerships with other initiatives that allied with
47 our campaign such as the Environmental Defense Fund, smaller scale
48 fisheries programs, the IUCN "Reverse the Red" campaign.

1
2 In fact, I will be making, along with our convener, a presentation
3 at the IUCN World Species Congress on May 15th. And the Big Fish
4 Hub will be the home for the toolkit of the upcoming global
5 workshop of spawning aggregations by the IUCN's snappers'
6 specialist group.

7
8 You can see a little bit of the content there. The philosophy is
9 reflected in the content that we publish and share. So, of course,
10 two focal species, we have been really, really emphasizing and
11 publishing stuff about nassau grouper from December to March, now
12 we started with mutton snapper.

13
14 And we have a series. Right? As a result of the screenings that we
15 mentioned before, things really started moving and revitalizing
16 the different countries. So, we have created a series. It's called
17 "Enforcement Successes" and it highlights actions taken by the
18 enforcement officials in the different countries because they
19 actually report to us sometimes. So, we publish everything, and we
20 repost what our partners do, too. "Report from the Fields." We
21 have been working with the scientists doing monitoring of the
22 aggregations in the different countries and reporting to the rest
23 of the region. "Fisher Heroes," of course, because we work with
24 GCFI, GMA ambassadors, and they keep doing amazing work, and more
25 and more heroes are coming out to the light, so we want to highlight
26 that. And you can see a little bit of what we are doing in terms
27 of content.

28
29 This is news from two days ago. PBS and the Howard Hughes Medical
30 Institute, despite of how young our campaign is, are submitting
31 our campaign to these two competitions that, actually, the first
32 one is the most important in the world.

33
34 Next Steps. So, the Big Fish initiative has rapidly begun to
35 achieve the two main goals of the communication strategy that we
36 show at the beginning, to informing and engage our audiences to
37 protect fish spawning aggregations and the species that aggregate
38 to spawn with emphasis in our flag species. Two, to unify. This is
39 really, really important. Unify our disperse audiences and
40 colleagues, bringing everybody together from the entire region.
41 Remember the importance of connectivity, and that helps to
42 strengthen the work to protect fish spawning aggregations in the
43 region.

44
45 Then, in 2024 we are focused on what follows. Geographically
46 speaking, we will intensify our focus on the U.S. Caribbean with
47 the life events that I just mentioned. The screening of the
48 screenings and meetings around the film in Puerto Rico and Virgin

1 Islands. We are developing a short film about the ongoing recovery
2 of the aggregation on Grammanik Bank. I think Rick Nemeth made a
3 presentation in a previous meeting of the Caribbean Fishery
4 Management Council. That is great news, which is what we always
5 emphasize, recovery, good news, solutions. We are a very proactive
6 and a positive campaign. And of course, the consequences for the
7 U. S, Caribbean and beyond of this recovery.

8
9 We are integrating even more of the communication component with
10 the Regional Spawning Aggregation Management Plan. Continuous
11 implementation beyond Cuba, Belize and the Bahamas. Growing and
12 strengthen community. And an advocacy campaign that has branches
13 for the three target audiences and general calls to action. Next
14 and final.

15
16 So from 2019, to now, we have raised more than \$1,000,000 to
17 produce the long form film, the outreach of the film, the Spanish
18 version of the film, and additional funds to produce the radio kit
19 from SPAW, set up the hub from the European Union. The Caribbean
20 Fishery Management Council and NOAA have been incredibly
21 supportive with the hub and personal compensation and other
22 materials for the campaign, like, the posters produced by the
23 Caribbean Fishery Management Council on those two species, and the
24 short films, for example.

25
26 In March, we started to raise funds for 2025 and on. All these
27 proposals that we are submitting include three components,
28 capacity building for fishers, science and monitoring, spawning
29 aggregations, and the communication component, of course, to make
30 sure that they can continue that 10-year strategy beyond next year.
31 We submitted a grant to Ocean Community Grant. We received news
32 yesterday that we passed the first phase, and we are submitted two
33 more grants in August and September, and we are in conversations
34 with private donors and foundations such as Oceans5.

35
36 And for now, in order to finish the year, from May to the end of
37 this year until we get funding all these efforts, we are requesting
38 \$50,000 now to be able to cover our expenses for the rest of the
39 year. And that's it. Thank you very much.

40 41 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Ana. Any questions for Ana? Yeah.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a question, but we are working with NOAA
46 Fisheries regarding the 2024 to secure the funds that we need.
47 I'll be in conversation with Laura Cimo, and pretty soon, we're
48 going to be talking about it. And then we will try to secure the

1 monies to finish 2024. I need to recognize that Ana Salceda, she
2 keeps working more. She's working more for free than the money
3 that she gets from us or anybody. And that's something that she's
4 crazy about it, but she does it. This type of campaign needs to
5 have professionals like her working. Actually, she had been the
6 key in convincing these other countries to engage. That is very
7 difficult, to engage in active fishery management actions.

8
9 In the case of Belize, that is very important. Those of you who
10 have been in Belize know the fishery, know the difficulty that the
11 fishers have there, and the difference that they have between the
12 fishers, the managers, and other people. They have a whole industry
13 there. So, for all of these groups to come together, watch the
14 screen, discuss it, and commit themselves to move forward, for the
15 benefit of the fishery, for the protection of the fishery, with
16 the assistance of the of the fishers, fishing communities,
17 enforcement agencies, and the managers is important.

18
19 In the case, if you are not familiar with it, in some of these
20 countries, the minister is sitting there, next to the fishery
21 official. So, whatever the minister says, you go ahead and do it.
22 In the States, you know how it is. It's very cumbersome. It's a
23 large country, but still we have we managed to-- with these
24 Councils and NOAA Fisheries, we managed to move forward with this.

25
26 But the point is that you go from one stream to the other, and the
27 only way that we have identified, at the FAO level, by the way,
28 and the Department of State, is to put more emphasis in
29 communication rather than put money into clobbering people on the
30 head to the people are not doing what they're supposed to do to
31 protect the aggregation.

32
33 So, I'm really personally thank you, Ana, for the work. And the
34 Chair and myself, we work with Laura Cimo and the head of
35 International Affairs and Trade Commission to see if we can secure
36 those funds to finish 2024. Then in 2025, if we get the grants, if
37 get our people we would like to continue. The strategy is for ten
38 years. We are just beginning with it.

39
40 The idea is that once Ana and us get to do something different
41 with our life, the strategy will remain there and will be followed
42 by other people. So, they will have the mechanism to continue this
43 campaign. The fishers of almost all the countries are asking us,
44 personally or in writing, to continue with this type of campaigns.
45 We have the Bahamas. We have the GCFI. We have an impromptu meeting
46 with fisher organizations. An idiot that didn't know that Ana knew
47 about this. He thought that we-- remember that guy?

48

1 But anyway, the fishers from different countries asked us to
2 continue and even to go to their countries, especially Barbados,
3 and Montserrat, and help them promote pan-Caribbean-- not pan-
4 Caribbean, but management of the species in their own country with
5 efforts that they already have going on, but they wanted to have
6 more support from outside.

7
8 Remember, the definition of an expert is an SOB from outside. So,
9 they told us, "Miguel, you have to come to our country. Send
10 somebody that can convince my people that what we're doing is
11 right, and that what the fishers are proposing is right. The way
12 to go with the protection of the spawning aggression." So, I think
13 that we have done quite a lot in a very small period of time, and
14 we will try to continue to do it, Mr. Chairman.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Cristina, Hand up.

17
18 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Michelle Schärer.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Michelle?

21
22 **MICHELLE SCHÄRER-UMPIERRE:** Hi. Thank you again. I want to
23 congratulate Ana because I know this work has been very frustrating
24 at times. I would like to maybe propose that we focus this capacity
25 building for fishers to actually involve them in the science and
26 monitoring. So, linking one and two. Sort of the model that
27 [cobia?] has in Mexico.

28
29 I would like to know what feedback you've received from law
30 enforcement, because of the very specific risk of these
31 aggregations in time and space and all the limitations that we
32 know about, even in our own backyard. What do you think is the way
33 forward to address the enforcement and compliance issues?

34
35 **ANA SALCEDA:** Thank you, Michelle. Just a note, yeah. We have
36 worked really hard, but nothing like this would have been possible
37 without the daily support of the members of the Spawning
38 Aggregation Working Group. For example, Michelle that is right
39 there, always, to respond to my scientific questions and with
40 really active support.

41
42 We were talking about the screenings, and to answer your question,
43 you also mentioned [cobia?] in Mexico. As you know, our region is
44 really diverse. I mean, the different countries, everything is
45 different, including the enforcement.

46
47 I would like to focus on Belize because we have been there. We
48 were there in February. We organized three special screenings. One

1 for decision makers at very high leveling. Actually, we got strong
2 commitments from the government. And then, we have one for the
3 community and then we have one 2-day screening, a 2-day meeting,
4 for enforcement officials, fishers' leadership, and the co-
5 managers, and the fisheries department. We went to an island so
6 nobody could leave and around the screening of the film, we had
7 presentations by the different stakeholders that attended the
8 meeting. And it's incredible when they are all together, how the
9 interactions are really fruitful. It's a great opportunity for the
10 fishers to make public what they need, even their frustration. The
11 reaction for them from the enforcement was incredible.

12
13 Out of that screening, the 2-day meeting, the enforcement was
14 reactivated up to today, not the next week or anything. And then
15 the government made a bigger commitment to provide everything that
16 the enforcement officers needed, including boats, including gas,
17 everything that-- including training. The result of that meeting
18 was the full protection and commitment from the fishers to protect
19 several aggregations in the Sapodilla Cays as long as the
20 enforcement did their job of protecting these resources from the
21 neighboring countries. That doesn't stay in the meeting. I mean,
22 these conversations have continued, and we are getting reports
23 from our partners in Belize with tangible results. So, that is one
24 way to do it.

25
26 In Mexico with [cobia?], the fishers are part of the entire process
27 and decision making, and they are being trained to do the
28 monitoring of the aggregations. And when the enforcement fails,
29 the fishers are so empowered that they are the ones that actually
30 protect their own aggregations. So, again, every country is
31 different, but the empowerment of fishers that take control of
32 their resource and protect them is very important when enforcement
33 is not completely there.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Following on Michelle's line of
38 thinking. Are any of these proposals being submitted considering
39 technology? Like, for example, ROVs and AUVs that can be handled
40 by the fishers and then they become part of that monitoring effort?

41
42 **ANA SALCEDA:** Every proposal, depending on our NGO partner, or as
43 you know, the grants are different. For example, we just submitted
44 one in Belize with TASA and included it. Yes, technology is
45 supposed to be one of them. For ocean, it was especially important.
46 So, what we did was that we included acoustics, a lot of acoustics.
47 So, in this one, not that type of technology, but we are planning
48 to do it with an organization in Honduras that, because the

1 government just started to use those systems, we want to include
2 that part in one of our proposals. So, yes, that's the plan as
3 long as the guidelines of the grants allow it.

4
5 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Follow-up? You know, we do have
6 technology of GoPro cameras that you don't even have to go to an
7 ROV type of thing. And those are things that can be deployed and
8 dragged, you know, by the fishers on the side of the boat and
9 things like that. So, you know, we might be thinking in terms of
10 cooperative research and that type of thing that we can do locally
11 that can engage the fishers in monitoring those aggregations
12 without having to go through fishing and tagging and things like
13 that.

14
15 So, for our own backyard, you know, we should be considering that
16 type of CRP.

17
18 **ANA SALCEDA:** In some places, we are using Cyclops that include
19 not only sound recorders but also video.

20
21 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ana, so a lot of the outreach
22 and education aspects of the project that you're doing, your
23 reporting, but I would highly encourage you to, as you're
24 developing more grants, try to capture the information in a way
25 that you are looking at the specific interventions that are being
26 made in the public, and record data on either perception changes
27 or ways that it improves the effectiveness of outreach. I mean,
28 it's extremely critical as we are developing more and more
29 programs, we understand how these programs work well or don't work
30 well. And if you're not collecting data from a socioeconomic or
31 even just an outreach and education perspective, looking at changes
32 in knowledge and perception before and after implementation of,
33 say, the video or these programs, looking at strategies and how
34 they are effective working with fishers, then we're not broadly
35 distributing the benefits of developing these programs.

36
37 So, I would highly encourage you to incorporate that and when you
38 come to the Council, as you guys are learning more and more about
39 that, present that kind of information to us so we can effectively
40 use it across other programs that we're doing.

41
42 **ANA SALCEDA:** Yeah. So, this is a full-time job for one person.
43 So, with the support of the Spawning Aggregation Working Group,
44 there are two people running this campaign, including the
45 screenings. Two people. Everything. Two people. Right?

46
47 So, what we do is that when we started this effort, we created
48 something called the communication subcommittee within the

1 Spawning Aggregation Working Group because they are the best
2 source. Of course, these communications of community includes
3 fishers, recreational fishers, commercial fishers, scientists, and
4 just a little bit of everything. Right? So, what we do is during
5 the process of developing a film, right, we consult with them.
6 Right? When we have the first draft or the rough cut or whatever
7 it is, we consult with them again. We get their comments. The same
8 thing we did for the Hub. Now we are upgrading the Hub as a result
9 of that consultation, and after presentations, we receive
10 feedback, and we incorporate it.

11
12 So, we are constantly asking for feedback. Sometimes we delay the
13 process so much-- You can ask Miguel. But, yeah, we do that all
14 the time as much as we can in terms of capacity, right, personnel.

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The idea is not to tell you how to do the work,
17 but I believe that Dr. Habtes mentioning it is important to present
18 to the Council when we have the metrics and the things, so people
19 know that this is a continue and other participants are always
20 taken into consideration.

21
22 **ANA SALCEDA:** Yeah. We have all the metrics we can access. So, you
23 can access them if you are interested.

24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You don't have to tell me. But, anyway, the other
26 two things that are important for continuing in the future is the
27 capacity building. We took note of that. Also, Michelle Schärer's
28 intervention is very important. We will keep that in mind, what
29 she's mentioning it.

30
31 Part of the campaign is to exchange best practices among countries.
32 In Mexico, for example, we have a couple of organizations run by
33 fishers only, and they manage their own fishery. They have been
34 more successful than anybody I know in managing their fishery. No
35 intervention from the government except for scientists who come to
36 their places. Well, they have a way of enforcing that. If a
37 fisherman is caught removing the eggs of a lobster, he will be
38 dealt with. It's interesting. They are the most successful
39 community of fishers in the peninsula of Yucatan, regarding the
40 protection of the lobster. The same holds true for other species.

41
42 But I believe that Dr. Habtes' comment, will be included in our
43 discussions this year and in future years of our presentation.
44 That's all we have, Mr. Chairman, at this time. Thank you very
45 much again, Ana.

46
47 **ANA SALCEDA:** Thank you.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Ana. Next on the agenda will be Alida
2 Ortiz with Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Report.

3
4 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Good morning.

5
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Hey. Alida, are you ready?

7
8 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Yes. I am.

9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Quick, because people want to go to break.

11
12 **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION**
13 **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL REPORT**

14
15 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** My presentation, Cristina has it. Great.
16 Here we are.

17
18 So, good morning to everyone. I'm glad to be here, and I will make
19 a very short presentation on what we have been doing with outreach
20 and education since our last meeting, our last presentation in
21 December. Please, notice that in the first slide we put 2023, but
22 it's 2024 and I'm still here.

23
24 We are still following, as we will all the time, the basic concept
25 of the 5-year strategic plan of the Council, basic concepts of
26 Ecosystem-Based Management; Island-Based Fishery Management Plans
27 for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, Saint Jonas, Saint Croix;
28 Sustainable Fish and Seafood consumption; Marine Protected Areas
29 in Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix. So, these
30 will be like that, you know, for the rest of history, our goals
31 for outreach and education.

32
33 Next one, please. No. You have to go two back. Okay. Right now,
34 what's happening? Why does it change so fast? That's the one I
35 want. Yes.

36
37 At this moment, we will be concentrating our efforts of outreach
38 and education in the understanding of climate change and its impact
39 on the fisher ecosystem and the fisher's community in the U.S.
40 Caribbean. This is to develop outreach and education materials and
41 training session for fishers and the fisher's community-- not only
42 the fishers, but the people that work in the market, their
43 families, the schools. --and its impact on the fishery ecosystem.
44 It complies with the strategy, the five years strategic plan that
45 we already presented.

46
47 So, we will integrate the fisheries and communities to understand
48 and apply the climate-related fisheries management planning

1 actions proposed by the Council. Including them as an important
2 social and economic component of the fisheries management actions,
3 complies with equity and environmental justice strategy followed
4 by NOAA. And with this, we will try to enrich the fisher's
5 ecological knowledge of the climate change impact on the marine
6 fisheries ecosystem and stimulate their participation in the
7 Council's management initiatives.

8
9 This will be part of a proposal that was submitted to the NOAA
10 IRA, and as I have more information from Miguel-- that should be
11 beginning in something, like, June, July of this year with
12 workshops and different activities that includes not only the
13 fishers in Puerto Rico, but in other areas, in Saint Thomas/Saint
14 John, and in Saint Croix. In different areas as well, but also the
15 schools and the community sectors within the fisheries area.

16
17 We are working and will be finished. This time, I will really have
18 it. The two outreach products that we have been working on are the
19 "Climate Change and Marine Fisheries in the Caribbean," and, also,
20 "What Does It Mean?" for the fishers and the communities.

21
22 Also, the catalog of species for the Island-Based Fishery
23 Management Plans in each one of the islands. The artist for this
24 is Paco López, and we have been working on this. I really think
25 that we will have it completed for your review and for any changes
26 that have to be made by the end of June, if I don't have any more
27 health problems. And then, we will have it distributed to the
28 islands for people to use it in their fishing communities, in the
29 schools, anywhere they want to use it.

30
31 For 2024-2025, we will have our next OEAP meeting in June 27 in
32 San Juan, and there we will review all the information that we
33 have done for this year since January until June so that we can
34 give you a new report in the next Council meeting. We have to
35 produce outreach material to conduct a workshop with fishers and
36 their communities on the issues of climate change. We want to
37 produce a fish identification booklet for children, so that,
38 especially in the in the schools, in the fishing communities, they
39 get to learn about the marine ecosystem, the species that are
40 there, and the importance of knowing about that.

41
42 We will integrate the fishery ecosystem in the U.S. Caribbean in
43 the regular education curriculum. If we check our curricula, even
44 U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico, there's usually nothing in the area of
45 marine ecology that has to do with fisheries as an activity.

46
47 The other products that we will be working with, are those
48 materials that we've been asked for by the fishers on

1 snapper/grouper deepwater fishing. They have given us ideas for
2 those fact sheets. Understanding a stock assessment, not only
3 fishers, but all stakeholders, because that is the information
4 that we get from every report from the Council, and every report
5 from the Department of Natural Resources. But how did they get
6 there? What contribution do fishers do to that information? And
7 understanding this management technology of optimum yield, ACL,
8 ABC, and all the other words that we use, but we have very little
9 explanation about what it means.

10
11 We have been working on getting information on Baja de Sico and
12 the fishery management regulations on the area. This year, we will
13 work on the workshops on fishery management regulation for new DAP
14 members, something very similar to what the Department of Natural
15 Resources has for PEPCO or include that information very consistent
16 from the Council into the PEPCO workshop.

17
18 This is what we have been doing. Any recommendations, any question
19 that you have, I will be very happy to answer them. I was very
20 happy yesterday to hear, in almost all the presentations, the need
21 for these direct outreach and education activities that we are
22 having in the program. Any questions? Yeah.

23 24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Alida. Any questions for Alida?
27 Vanessa?

28
29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Alida. Vanessa Ramirez for the record.
30 As always, I want to thank you and your staff for all the materials
31 that you're always providing us at the village. The commercial
32 fishermen are very grateful for the materials and the new ones
33 that you are developing for easy understanding for them, and of
34 course, for the activities that we all have been doing. I want to
35 thank, also, Wilson and Cristina and Jannette for their support.
36 Thanks.

37
38 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Thank you, Vanessa. I'm glad for that.

39
40 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Thank you. Liajay for that record. Alida,
41 thank you for the presentation. I have a question regarding the
42 DAP workshops. I know that the Council members, once they are new,
43 they get some training. But I was wondering if that will be a
44 possible way for the DAPs to also get that kind of training on
45 their duties. I know that the MREP provides a very brief--

46
47 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Yes. Sometimes we have, you know, produced
48 materials and presented them in MREP. But this time, we have

1 specific workshops that we will take to the communities where the
2 basic thing that will be discussed are these issues of climate
3 change and how their community, not only where they fish, but where
4 they live, where they were born, are going to be affected by
5 changes in the coast, by changes in the species that they might be
6 fishing. That will be part of the proposal that was approved, and
7 probably Miguel can give us more information about that.

8
9 But that will have workshops around Puerto Rico, north, South,
10 East, West. East, including Vieques and Culebra, and then in Saint
11 Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix. Because the information is
12 not one for all of them. It's very different from each one of the
13 islands and those. But we will be working with that Liajay.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Alida, we are going to-- the proposal has
16 not been approved yet. They told us that it has a great percentage
17 of being approved, and they will start in the summer. But this
18 type of workshop is different from what we're discussing here. We
19 will inform you about it in the August meeting, what's going on.

20
21 The other thing that we have is-- there is nothing else for Alida.
22 No vamos a hablar de eso ahora. Vamos a tomar un coffee break
23 ahora.

24
25 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** I didn't hear you well, Miguel. Please.

26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We're going to have a coffee break, and
28 that will be followed by Cristina's presentation. But I want to
29 thank Alida Ortiz. She's a brave woman, but people don't know it.
30 She's going through chemotherapy as she speak. And she asked me,
31 "Miguel, can I go there or can I--" I said, "well, it's up to you?"
32 And she said, "well, let me see what I can do." And she had been
33 with us, at home. So, we wish you the best in your treatment.
34 Hopefully, we will see you at the next meeting. In person.
35 [applause]

36
37 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Thank you. Yeah. I'm dying to give you a
38 big, big, big hug.

39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

41
42 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** So, I'll do it.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gracias, Alida. So, we're going to take a break,
45 but I think I know where Liajay is coming from with training for
46 DAP members as to their role as DAPs. We'll discuss that. Thank
47 you.

48

1 Okay. So, we'll take a 10-minute break.

2
3 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have got to go on again. Okay. We're going
6 to continue on because we're a little behind on the schedule. So,
7 Jannette, it's all yours.

8
9 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Where is all the people here?

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** The important ones are here. Jannette, go ahead.

12
13 **IS THAT FISH EDIBLE? EAT LIONFISH AND DIAMONDBACK SQUID!**
14 **FESTIVAL**

15
16 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Okay. Cristina, next slide, please.

17
18 Okay. On March 10, 2025, at the Plaza del Pescador in Guayanilla,
19 Puerto Rico, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and Puerto
20 Rico Sea Grant Program with the collaboration of the municipality
21 of Guayanilla, EcoElécretica, and HJR Reefscaping, was celebrated
22 there "Is That Fish Edible? Eat Lionfish, and Diamondback Squid!
23 Festival." The festival had five components, educational,
24 scientific, gastronomical, cultural, and homage. This festival is
25 a part of the Sustainable and Seafood Consumption Campaign.

26
27 Why do we celebrate the festival? Well, as part of the outreach
28 and education panel, we recognize persistent misinformation about
29 lionfish despite efforts to educate consumers, fishers, and
30 restaurant owners. There are still people who believe that if you
31 they prick or swallow a lionfish spine, the poison will kill them.

32
33 The festival aims to spread accurate information about lionfish
34 and introduce the diamondback squid as a new culinary option. It
35 also celebrated our culture with music and promoted the consumption
36 of both species, particularly emphasizing in diamondback squid,
37 and lionfish as alternatives when conch is in close season.
38 Additionally, the event brought together a diverse group of sea
39 dependent individuals, including scientists, fishers, and marine
40 science students and also chefs.

41
42 In the scientific and collaborative realm, a group of students
43 from, UPR Humacao along with HJR Reefscaping staff and four
44 commercial fishers went out to fish for lionfish under the
45 EcoElécretica Pier. Seeing the interaction between fishermen from
46 Puerto Rico in Puerto Real in Cabo Rojo, scientist and marine
47 science students while fishing for lions was an example that
48 collaborations can be established when the right environment

1 exists. I feel very grateful to have had all of them working
2 together. Here, we can see some of the people who went fishing for
3 lionfish.

4
5 The education section was divided into informative booths with the
6 collaboration of various entities and groups. Additionally, there
7 was a demonstration of the venomous spines of the lionfish and its
8 stomach contents. We had tables from Isla Mar Research, HJR
9 Reefscaping, Department of Natural and Environmental Resources for
10 Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico Sea Grant, Little Women, Big Sharks, and
11 of course, Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

12
13 Here you can see the little kids. They had a blast and enjoyed and
14 learned a lot on those tables. There a lot of people went around
15 asking questions, and it was it was a very nice environment. I
16 think that the people enjoy and, all the activities that we had.

17
18 In the component of gastronomy, renowned chef, Giovanna Huyke,
19 delighted the audience with a demonstration on how to cook
20 diamondback squid and lionfish. Likewise, chef Hiram Monteverde
21 spoke to the audience about the experience preparing squid and
22 lionfish ceviche and served it to the audience. We also had the
23 presence of chef Wanda Pantojas, longtime collaborator in Council
24 activities including the Fish Fry and event of NOAA.

25
26 Here you can see the people around the chefs. And also, we have
27 the presence of different fishers from around the island in the
28 festival. Many people came and enjoyed the ceviche. They were
29 excellent. All of them.

30
31 We also had project Proyecto Vereda with agroecological products,
32 and to a large extent, its presence served as a reminder that what
33 is done in the mountains reaches the sea and affects its
34 ecosystems. Alana And Omar practice agroecology. They do not use
35 chemical fertilizers. They plow the land using oxen. They do not
36 spray herbicides, and to a large extent, they're concern, apart
37 from producing healthy food, is protecting our land and marine
38 resources. That's why they were there. And also, because Alana is
39 my daughter, I have to say.

40
41 In the cultural component, we had a group of artists and exhibited
42 and sold their creations inspired in the marine ecosystem. Of
43 course, we had lionfish. There was a squid there. There was another
44 one who made earrings using Mario. He uses-- how do you say
45 "escamas" in English? Scales! Thank you. Using scales.

46
47 In the cultural, we also had music. We don't have sound, Cristina?
48 The music that distinguishes our people, bomba, plena and jibaro

1 music. The one that you're going to hear is a plena dedicated to
2 the lionfish and the diamondback squid consumption. We had a
3 lionfish, a live lionfish for the public to enjoy and, recognize
4 the spines. A lot of people went around that aquarium to see them.
5 They were fished that day. The Puerto Real fisherman took them and
6 put them in the aquarium for the people to see.

7
8 And last but not least, we made homage, on the Outreach and
9 Education Panel, to Dr. Alida Ortiz Sotomayor who has been the
10 driving force behind all the strategies. She's wise, eloquent,
11 always given to teaching and sharing her knowledge. Our beloved
12 Alida deserves all the possible recognition, and this year, we
13 dedicated the festival to her. Alida, you know that you are the
14 best, and everybody here loves you.

15
16 I have to recognize our sponsors, Caribbean Fishery Management
17 Council, Gobierno Municipal de Guayanilla, HJR Reefscaping,
18 EcoEléctrica, Arte y Cultura de Guayanilla, and, of course, Sea
19 Grant Programs.

20
21 I have to give special thanks to Miguel Rolón. Mr. Miguel Rolón,
22 CFMC Executive Director who has always trusted our work and to all
23 the CFMC staff for their support. Thanks to Mrs. Lesbia Montero,
24 former Puerto Rico Sea Grant Education and Biologist, for providing
25 me with the photos of Alida that were used in her tribute. Infinite
26 thanks to Dr. Héctor Ruiz who, since the celebration of the first
27 festival held in La Parguera, has given all kinds of support. And
28 finally, I want to thank my dear Square, and she knows why I call
29 her "Square," Cristina Olán Martínez, who always, without fail,
30 has great ideas. She took wonderful photos and videos at the
31 festival, collaborated with the lionfish and squid tasting
32 activity, and keeps me organized and focused. And believe me, I'm
33 always very grateful for that, Cristina. Thank you. I love you.
34 You know that. [applause]

35
36 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Tú sabes que yo también te amo. Y se fue
37 por YouTube y por Zoom y está en récord.

38
39 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Gracias, Cristina. Next slide. Thank you.

40
41 Two of the kids that enjoy the festival were the one was Ita from
42 "Cocinando con Ita y Ta" and Andres Antonio, my granddaughter and
43 my grandsons. They were there with, "Little Women, Big Sharks"
44 Wandita and Adriana. Thank you all.

45
46 I have another presentation. It's very little. Do you have any
47 questions?

48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Sobre qué es la otra, Jannette?
2

3 **CONTINUING CHEF EDUCATION COURSES: EXPLORING UNDERUTILIZED**
4 **SPECIES**
5

6 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** The update on Continuing Chef's Education
7 Courses: Exploring Underutilized Species.
8

9 The renowned chef Carlos Portela already has a date set for the
10 education course for chefs and underutilized species. He said,
11 "Finalist of Best Chef's: South at the James Beard Awards in 2024.
12 Only two Puerto Ricans are in this list." It will take place during
13 the week of July 8th and 9th, 2024, at DeRaíz Restaurant at the
14 municipality of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. 15 to 20 chefs and cooks
15 from across the island will be selected. The courses will be
16 combined efforts from the Council and the Puerto Rico Sea Grant
17 program.
18

19 Six species were selected for the courses. Blue runner, white
20 grunt, diamondback squid, queen triggerfish, little tunny, and
21 porgy.
22

23 The objectives of the course is that it will be through and as a
24 result of the course's activities, chef will know at least five to
25 six underutilized and little-known species in the gastronomic
26 sector; understand the characteristic of meat and ways to add value
27 to the whole piece; identified by their common names, describe,
28 and explain the biology and traditional use of each species; know
29 the areas where they are caught and sourced, and the seasons for
30 each species; understand the processing, cleaning, and usage
31 methods; design and create dishes using these species; and
32 understand key points for marketing them, chefs, waitstaff, and
33 restaurant owners.
34

35 Last one. Thanks to all. That would be all. Any question?
36

37 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
38

39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a question, Jannette, but part of the efforts
40 that we have on the IRA is to extend this type of activities
41 throughout the U. S. Caribbean. So, the question is, Jannette, do
42 you have any plans or is there any possibility of coordinating
43 with the liaison officer of Saint Thomas, Saint Croix and started
44 same activities in both areas?
45

46 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** I'll be delighted to do that. And also in
47 Humacao, they asked for another festival there. So, we had a lot
48 of work.

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We have some experience in Saint Croix. They
3 have their agriculture festival. We participated there in the past,
4 but this is a good opportunity to coordinate with the liaison
5 officers the fishers, especially Gerson. He's the Chair of the DAP
6 in Saint Croix. He can help. Carlos. In Saint Thomas, we have
7 Julian, Ruth Gomez, and others that can help you.
8
9 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** If they want to have me there, I will be
10 there working with them. Okay.
11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Thank you very much.
13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?
15
16 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, Jannette, this might not be a
17 question for you, but a comment on the underutilized species. So,
18 from the scientific and the FMP point of view, you know, we need
19 information in the future as we develop these fisheries. You know,
20 the life history of the species, the landings, the information
21 that it's required for stock assessments, etcetera. And we just
22 saw that some species are not in the in the forms that the local
23 governments use for collecting the data from the fishers.
24
25 So, these are things that, you know, we have to start thinking
26 about because they are underutilized now, but in a couple of years
27 from now, they might just be part of a big effort to target them.
28 Okay. So, you know, thinking in terms of what we need to be doing
29 to make sure that we have the information that is required when
30 the time comes to assess these species.
31
32 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** When we identify those species, we spoke
33 with Marcos, and that's why we selected those.
34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But don't worry about it. They have been
36 selected by us, period, but what Graciela is telling us is very
37 important.
38
39 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yeah. I know.
40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Because as an example. In the Gulf Council, one
42 chef overfished or caused the overfishing of one species because
43 they blackened the fish. So, these kinds of things are important.
44 The point that Graciela is bringing for the record is something
45 that we need to start working now.
46
47 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Okay.
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So those species that we have identified as such,
2 that we call them underutilized species, should be in the priority
3 list of species that we need to start collecting information from.
4

5 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Okay.
6

7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Some of them, we cannot do anything about it.
8 But at least we will be able to get the information that we need.
9 Like the squid, for example. The diamondback squid. The point is,
10 Mr. Chairman, that Graciela has been discussing this since before,
11 and we want to be able to have synergy of the two activities that
12 we have and the need for collecting the data that the Council uses
13 for monitoring the species that we are responsible for.
14

15 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Okay. Thank you.
16

17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Jannette. And whenever you all come
18 to Saint Croix to do this outreach, we'll coordinate it with the
19 agriculture and food fair because in a 3-day period, 10,000 people
20 come through that fair. So, you'll get a lot of outreaches. Next
21 on the agenda is Cristina.
22

23 **CFMC SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS**

24

25 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** I'm going. I'm also managing the owl
26 camera. Just a second.
27

28 Okay. Good morning, everybody. Thank you for letting me present
29 today. My name is Cristina Olán, and I work for the Caribbean
30 Fishery Management Council as a social media information
31 coordinator. Thank you very much again, for the opportunity and
32 always for following us in all of our media social media platforms.
33

34 There are a couple of things that I want to highlight today. First
35 of all, the kind of messages that we are receiving through the
36 inbox and the DMs. We have a lot of people that use our social
37 media platforms to send us their request for information on
38 fisheries, for educational materials, collaboration and
39 educational booths, and also questions about the workshops. Those
40 are the main topics on the inbox. However, there are other kind of
41 topics that they are reaching out for information too.
42

43 We are in the process of also creating some frequently asked
44 questions and answers. Thanks to, Graciela, Liajay, and Kiara for
45 putting together that document. We are also feeding the documents,
46 so sometimes when people ask the same kinds of questions, we
47 already have an answer prepared to give it to them through their
48 inbox or on the DMs.

1
2 We have several social media platforms. We are on Facebook,
3 Instagram, X, formerly known as Twitter, YouTube, ISSUU and we are
4 now in LinkedIn. Again, thanks to the CFMC staff, especially Kiara
5 and Liajay for suggesting opening an account in that platform.

6
7 The main platforms that we are in are Facebook and Instagram, and
8 we have been experiencing a significant growth in the past 90 days.
9 I'm showing there a graph, so you can see how we are growing. We
10 have, in terms of followers, we have 6,700 followers on Facebook.
11 Also, we are increasing in the reach and engagement, too. And
12 something similar is happening in Instagram. We are also growing
13 in terms of engagement and followers. That is mostly because we
14 are also collaborating with other organizations and people to put
15 out information and post.

16
17 There I added a "hola/hello" because we always publish in the two
18 languages, in the main languages for our region, Spanish and
19 English. And the main topics and content that we are sharing is
20 related to closed seasons, NOAA Fisheries Bulletins, CFMC
21 Bulletin, funding opportunities, meeting announcements,
22 educational activities, comment periods and new publications.

23
24 This is an example of our bulletin, in English and Spanish. You
25 can find it in ISSUU. also, sometimes when we have common periods
26 and, topics that require more to go more in-depth and simplify
27 communicating in plain language.

28
29 Also sometimes, when we have comment periods and topics that
30 require more in-depth explanation and simplified communication
31 with plain language, we add voice in English and Spanish, too. We
32 are publishing those reels in our social media platforms. We are
33 also in Linktree so that people can find where we are easily.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Cristina, que expliques que quiere decir
36 Linktree.

37
38 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Voy. Linktree is also a platform
39 where you can add the main links related to your organization, so
40 that people can click there and find the information there, too.
41 It helps a lot when you have Instagram and you cannot be adding a
42 lot of links in Instagram, so people go there to the bio and click
43 on the Linktree and in the Linktree we have the links that they
44 can go to.

45
46 Collaborations. We have been, as I mentioned, collaborating with
47 other people and organizations for posting. As an example, MREP,
48 we produce a promo for the workshops in the U.S.V.I. and in Puerto

1 Rico. Also, we provided information to-- they are working on their
2 new branding, and they asked us to provide information so they can
3 work on the branding of MREP in the region. As Jannette presented,
4 for the festival ;Come pez león y calamar diamante! we posted a
5 lot about that festival. Photos, videos, but I want to highlight
6 the two reels that we published in collaboration with a chef
7 Giovanna Huyke and the Sea Grant program. Those two are the most
8 visited and viewed reels in our page. We have, 10,700 views in the
9 case of the lionfish and 3,865 views in the case of the calamar
10 diamante, the diamondback squid. It is only the metrics of
11 Instagram. We also publish it in Facebook as well. When Jannette
12 was there with the CFMC staff dedicating the festival to Alida, we
13 also recorded that moment, and it is included in our YouTube page.

14
15 Sea urchins. Some weeks ago, many people were asking information
16 about sea urchins, because apparently there was one person fishing
17 for it, and it's prohibited. Vanessa Ramirez, reached out to us
18 and she presented her concern on the topic. So, we, in
19 collaboration with Sea Grant, we produced several posts regarding
20 the topic and reminding people that fishing for sea urchins is
21 prohibited.

22
23 Queen conch, the hot topic. Again, Vanessa reached out to us and
24 also the CFMC staff with a concern that there was a need of
25 information out there about queen conch and what is happening. So,
26 we produce a fact sheet in English and Spanish with the
27 regulations, information on the queen conch, and what is happening
28 recently. Also, when they have workshops, like the one that you
29 already know about, the queen conch recovery, we collaborate with
30 NOAA Fisheries to distribute information. Also, and it is not
31 included there, we also collaborated with NOAA Fisheries to put
32 out there the announcement for the HMS workshops that will be
33 conducted in May.

34
35 Fish rules. We are in the process of updating the information that
36 is included in the Fish Rules App because of the concern of people
37 that local regulations are not included in the app. So, with the
38 collaboration of DNR and DPNR, we are in the process of revising
39 it. What we did was that we already prepared a list of the species
40 that are included in the fishery, in the island-based fishery
41 management plans and the DPNR and DNR staff are collaborating on
42 updating the information.

43
44 Big Fish Initiative. As you already know, it is a campaign focused
45 on protecting spawning aggregations in the wider Caribbean that
46 combines the components of fishers and science, Treasure of the
47 Caribbean, as you know, the documentary, and it produces lots of
48 valuable information on the topic of conservation, sustainable

1 use, and protection of spawning aggregations. We are very thankful
2 to Ana Salceda and her team, because they always are providing
3 content that is very suitable for our platforms. We have been
4 collaborating on sharing content and providing information for the
5 campaign, especially the contact information of the WhatsApp group
6 administrator in the U.S. Caribbean, because they are also putting
7 that together to create a Big Fish WhatsApp Page to continue
8 distributing the information. And in the Día del Pescador in Puerto
9 Rico, in collaboration with Big Fish, we produce a post honoring
10 the fishers of Puerto Rico. We also collaborated with the Big Fish
11 Initiative on providing information for about the nassau group or
12 critical habitat designation.

13
14 Again, thank you very much for everything. To all the people that
15 everyday help me to produce more and better content. They are a
16 lot. I don't I want to miss a name, that's why I'm not mentioning
17 every name here, but scientists, fishers, CFMC staff, people of
18 different ages are and organizations. They all know that, without
19 them, it is impossible to produce the content that we publish in
20 our platforms.

21
22 Thank you very much.

23

24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Cristina. Any, question for--
27 Vanessa?

28
29 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa for the record.
30 Cristina, as always, I have to thank you because sometimes I know
31 I send text message during late hours. I really appreciate all the
32 attention and the fast response that you and the staff of the
33 Council give to these important, hot topics that we have in
34 fisheries. Thank you.

35
36 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you, Vanessa. I also want to add
37 that we, through the broadcast list that Wilson manages, and also
38 Nicole Greaux, we always send information through, for the fishers,
39 that have WhatsApp as well. I didn't mention that there. So, thanks
40 again.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy.

43
44 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I just wanted to say a huge thank you.
45 It's impressive to listen over the course of the last couple of
46 hours and hear about all the work that the Caribbean Council is
47 doing for outreach and education. And specifically, thank you for
48 the work you're doing to amplify and bolster information from NOAA

1 Fisheries and communicate that out to fishers. The question I have
2 for you is-- you're doing a tremendous amount of outreach and
3 education work and communication, what are the biggest challenges
4 you're seeing in terms of that and kind of hurdles with
5 communicating with the fishermen? And then also where do you see
6 kind of the successes that work you've put into this so far?

7
8 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Challenges are a lot. People, today,
9 they communicate in many, many ways. you also have a lot of pages,
10 not necessarily from agencies, but people that produce their own
11 content. Some of that content is very, very good. Another is
12 misinformation. So, I think that the biggest challenge is how to
13 cope with that.

14
15 Wow. Also, another challenge is that not all the people have social
16 media. So, we are covering the people that follow social media
17 pages and the Council platforms. So, you always have people that
18 don't follow any kind of social media. So, that's another challenge
19 beyond the social media thing.

20
21 Another thing is that the algorithms are working crazy these days
22 and it changes a lot. If you don't grab that engagement very, very
23 quick, you will be working for hours in a post and you will not
24 reach anybody. Eso está bien loco. Lo tengo que decir en español
25 porque-- We have a lot of tools that we can continue managing on
26 that and improving the ways that we publish here, but it's a huge
27 challenge.

28
29 And success there are a lot there. One of the greatest successes
30 that I can say is that people here, it doesn't matter if they are
31 mad at us, they don't blame us, and they don't leave bad comments
32 there in the posts. So, what I have seen of the Caribbean is that
33 they are very, very respectful in the platforms. If they don't
34 have anything good to say, they don't write anything in the post.
35 They just simply don't like or don't follow or don't comment. But
36 yeah. I keep repeating that every day. Or, I don't have to manage
37 that amount of hate that others have to manage in other pages.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Go ahead, Andy.

40
41 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thank you for that. You know, I think
42 we're finding the same challenges and successes, right, especially
43 with social media. This is coming from someone who doesn't tweet
44 or post or do any of that. Right? But being responsive to
45 constituents, being available to obviously answer their questions
46 goes a long way.

47
48 And then, I think in the way we communicate, right, we're in a

1 world where people have, essentially, seconds to grab someone's
2 attention. So, social media can be a great way to do that with
3 small snippets of information or some of the videos that you've
4 created. So, great job. Really nice work.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. [applause]

7
8 Any more questions for Cristina? Hearing none. Thank you again,
9 Cristina, for a job well done. Thank you.

10
11 Next, we have the liaisons officers' reports. We'll start with,
12 Liandry. So, Liandry is the Saint Croix liaison.

13
14 **CFMC LIAISON OFFICER ST. CROIX, USVI - LIANDRY DE LA CRUZ**

15
16 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ:** Hi. My name is Liandry De La Cruz. I am
17 the liaison for Saint Croix. Good morning, first of all. Yes. I'm
18 going to be giving my report. Sorry for my language. I lay a bit.
19 I'm going to be giving my report on everything that I've been doing
20 for the past couple of months. Can I get the first slide? Thank
21 you.

22
23 So, I guess the first thing I want to talk about is MREP. Just
24 because that's the first thing that I started working on after the
25 Council meeting the last time. So, we've been having a lot of talk
26 on it, and we're very excited about it. I started off the year
27 pretty sick, so, like, I wasn't working on anything for a while.
28 But as soon as I did get back into it, it was just a matter of
29 sharing this information, simply because it's going to be the first
30 thing that, well, it was the first thing that we needed to get
31 into basically, and it's going to be the first one in a long time.
32 And so, this is pretty new to the island, so not a lot of people
33 know about it. Not a lot of people was interested in it, but it
34 was a matter of-- I guess the first big thing was Grayson starting
35 the WhatsApp channel for all of our fishermen. So, I thank him a
36 lot for that because it was really big on getting everybody
37 interested in it.

38
39 And so, yeah. We started sending out flyers and information through
40 there. People was asking questions, and it wasn't only about that.
41 It was about not only targeting commercial fishers or people who've
42 been in it for a while, but it was about targeting people my age,
43 at least for me. Especially because, honestly, we don't grow up
44 knowing about this kind of stuff. I didn't know about it until I
45 started working for you guys, but it was a matter of, you know,
46 growing up watching our families fish, and we didn't really
47 understand the collaboration, the amount of collaboration and
48 initiatives that bring fishermen and government agencies and stuff

1 like that together.

2

3 And so, yeah. So, I was on my side uptaking these flyers, and we
4 posted it all over social media. I had my friends post it all over
5 social media. And I was talking to people at my university. I had
6 my university send it out on both campuses. By then, we had, a lot
7 of people very interested in it, coming in and applying for it.
8 And me, even if it was just over the phone getting people to apply
9 just like that. And so, yeah, to the point where we set everything
10 up, and we're ready to start this next month. And yeah. Being able
11 to work on presentations, with different biologists and basically
12 just getting people really hyped and excited for it next month.

13

14 The next big thing was the agriculture fair is one of our big
15 events. Well, one of our biggest events in the V.I. Right? And so
16 the fair was a matter of introducing it into the community. Right?
17 Not only aquatic education, but reef responsible, at least for me.
18 When I started this semester, I took one of my courses and I made
19 it an internship. And this internship was about me taking aquatic
20 education. The work I do as a liaison as well as, helping with the
21 reef responsible program, starting to basically manage more
22 trainings and being able to start integrating this education, not
23 only within our fishermen and our restaurants, but within kids as
24 well, which I can get into a little bit later. But also, to be
25 able to gain more data and start measuring knowledge change. Right?
26 Knowledge impact within our communities.

27

28 So, what we did was, yeah, we had a reef responsible table, and we
29 had little activities for kids and families. Even adults and older
30 people was coming. People that was visiting from other places, and
31 they all had a chance to come and hear about the program, hear
32 about what we do here and also to play these games. I learned a
33 lot about essential species and why is it important that we
34 conserve them and stuff like that. It was great. It went amazing.
35 I collected a whole bunch of data, and it was just a great turnout
36 because people were enjoying it. People was receiving it well, and
37 that's what I want to let you know the responses.

38

39 But yeah. In terms of our responsible trainings, we don't have the
40 most people getting into it right now, but I have started to talk
41 to more fishermen about it and more restaurants about it. It is
42 stuff that everybody has been getting interested in, and now it's
43 just a matter of finding times and days that work for people,
44 especially since these trainings is them taking time out of
45 something that they do on a daily basis and being able to just,
46 you know, receive some knowledge on things that they might have
47 not understood before. But, yeah, the people that have gone through
48 the trainings had good responses. You know what I mean? It's things

1 that they didn't know before, and so they're really getting into
2 it. And that's the most important thing because once we start doing
3 it on a bigger basis, then we could start doing that every year,
4 right, as a goal.

5
6 I'm going to skip bringing education and outreach because that's
7 the biggest thing for me to talk about today. We started
8 introducing the grouper guides to the island. The grouper guides
9 are amazing, but it took a while for me to get them. We started
10 handing them out to a good amount of fishermen who appreciate it,
11 especially because they did have that issue trying to figure out
12 or distinguish between certain species. Especially now that we are
13 seeing nassau groupers, like, everywhere where we're starting to
14 do surveys on stuff like that. People are catching them more, even
15 if it's just by mistake. And so, yeah, they've been receiving it
16 well, and they look great. And, you know, a lot of people started
17 contacting me to get them and to be able to just have them on hand
18 whether it's on your boat or in a car and stuff like that.

19
20 So, yeah. And then we also have our 1st tournament of the year, or
21 the first of many, which was the Golden Hook Dolphinfish
22 Tournament. This was fun. This was, like, really fun. I'm not going
23 to lie to y'all. Honestly, like, it's one of the first tournaments
24 from the Golden Hook. The Golden Hook Club is a diving club made
25 up of different kinds of fishers, and they're the one that won
26 most of our tournaments on Saint Croix. And so, you know, we had
27 captain's meeting, and we got out there. But what was so essential
28 about this event for me is that, yeah, I was the weighmaster, and
29 we had our reef responsible setup. We were talking to families.
30 We're talking to fishers. But on the second day, we caught marlins.
31 So, like, the first day is mahi, second day is marlins. We catch
32 and release marlins.

33
34 So, I went out with a group of fishermen, who do sport fishing for
35 every tournament every year, and I learned about what they do, and
36 how they do it, and how they fish, and how long they've been in
37 these tournaments, and a lot about the history of it. The fact
38 that we reached at a point that, before, we used to be catching
39 well, they were expected to catch, you know, 400 or 600 pounds of
40 fish every tournament. I waited to the point where, like, three
41 out of seven teams brought in only four mahi between all of them.
42 And on the second day, only one team out of the seven caught,
43 actually, caught a marlin. One caught some tuna, and then somebody
44 else catch an eye, but we aren't going to talk about that.

45
46 And so, you know, learn about the history, learn about what they
47 do. Not only that but interacting with their families. That's the
48 most important thing for me, because that's the connections we

1 make. Right? That they see my face so much to the point where they
2 could trust me, and they're inviting me, and they're talking to me
3 about, not only, like, how they do these tournaments and what
4 they're doing, but their concerns on the things that they've been
5 seeing. And you know what I mean? That's the things that we want
6 to know about. You know what I mean?

7
8 And so, when it comes to bringing educational outreach to the high
9 schools, this was huge for me because a main part of what I wanted
10 to make my internship was, like I said, getting out there into the
11 community. So, what I did was I took the reef responsible
12 materials, and I created a new presentation out of it that is more
13 catered towards kids, students, schools. Right? And, figured out
14 what kind of materials I wanted, and I went out to the two main
15 high schools, which is the first thing that I wanted to start with,
16 including Complex on Central. I started with Complex.

17
18 But first before I get into all that, imma tell you guys a story.
19 Right? So, like, I mean you guys know I didn't do college. Right?
20 So, I started, well I was in high school just like two years ago.
21 Right? And so, when I left high school my last year, we had one
22 marine biology course or class. And this was like on the entire
23 island. My issue, the year before that, when I was in my second to
24 last year of high school, was that I already knew what I wanted to
25 do and what I like to do, but my concern was that there was nowhere
26 for me to learn it and to apply it. That's the kind of courses
27 that colleges want to see. Right?

28
29 And so, without knowing it, I met the assistant principal. Because
30 she used to be my teacher, and she asked me what my interest was.
31 I told her what it was and what I wanted to study. In my graduating
32 class, me and another girl were the only ones out of between 101-
33 150 students that actually wanted to come into anything to do with
34 sciences. You know, girls were into cosmetology. Boys was like
35 engineering. That's what makes you money and that's what you like
36 to do. That's what you know what to do. Right? But, yeah, the point
37 is that by the next year, already, when she came into the position,
38 she added a marine biology course into that high school. That was
39 the first high school that ever actually incorporated anything to
40 do with actual environmental conservation on marine biology.

41
42 So, now, at this point, I revisited the high school, we're to the
43 point where we have the first course. They've added a marine
44 biology course too, and now they're about to add a course three,
45 which would include certifications in things like snorkeling,
46 diving, free diving, scuba diving, just because of how popular
47 it's gotten. In coming back to these high schools, there are a
48 whole month multitude of students that are interested in this

1 field, you know, that want to know more about these fields, asking
2 questions about how they get into it, where do they go, and who do
3 they go to. The point was that a fear back then was that it wasn't
4 sustainable enough. It was my fear. It's still my fear. But now
5 the point is is how do I make this sustainable, for me to make a
6 career out of it? You know what I mean? And that was the main
7 thing.

8
9 Right? So, about the presentations, what I did was I made it more
10 of, like, lessons. And so, now in not only teaching about the work
11 we do with trainings, with fishermen or restaurants, but also
12 teaching about the life cycles of corals. Why is this so important?
13 The life cycles of essential reef species. Why are they important?
14 What kind of relationship they have? The things that we do, the
15 CCRs, the reports, the territorial limits, what kind of fish do we
16 deal with, how do they look, what are examples of them, and what
17 part or role do they play. Not only that, but working with
18 fishermen like Gerson and Gerson's son, people like Jose López and
19 people that brought me actual specimens, for now it's lobster. I
20 want to eventually get into lionfish. But bringing it to the
21 schools, teaching them about the biology, the life cycles, the
22 reproductive and behavioral habits of the lobster. They're
23 interacting with it. To the point where it was a learning
24 experience for me, but they really get into it, and they're very
25 interested in it. You know, they were talking about it to the point
26 where they you know, more teachers were contacting me, asking me
27 to come. You know what I mean?

28
29 And we haven't gotten to Central yet, but they have already
30 approved my presentation on the things that I want to do with the
31 kids. And so, this is a thing where I want to move it from the
32 high schools to even more school programs, and stuff like that.
33 You know? That was the biggest accomplishment for me this year or
34 the beginning of the year. So, yeah.

35
36 Can I get the next slide, please? So, these are some of the
37 pictures. These are some of the kids that I work with. They were
38 all amazing. They were great, very responsive, asking me all kind
39 of question. I know it's, like, my main fear because, like, knowing
40 what kind of high school I came from, very disinterested students.
41 I'm not going to lie to you. But they really loved it.

42
43 And then this is from agriculture fear. This is one of the games
44 that we played, which was like a simulation of a reef you are
45 fishing certain fish, but the point was to show them the certain
46 fish, how it looked, what kind of status do they hold on our fish
47 list, you know, where do you find them, what's the importance of
48 that species of fish.

1
2 Can I get the next slide? Thank you. And then, the first two is
3 just examples of one fisherman that went through the training and
4 one of our restaurants that went through the training. This is
5 Linton. He's one of our deepwater fishers. He was cool. He was
6 amazing. We taught him everything. He's been fishing since he was
7 a kid and to see that even a lot of the things that I was talking
8 to him about, he didn't know about, but now he does. You know?
9 That's what we're striving for, and that's the kind of areas that
10 we want to target.

11
12 And then, restaurants, he owns one, well, a very popular one and
13 a food truck that was around for, like, years on years. But, you
14 know, he's incorporating what he's learned from all of our
15 materials into his food truck and his restaurants. And, you know,
16 that was awesome to me. This is one of our fishers that received
17 our grouper guides. I have, like, a whole bunch more pictures, but
18 that's Grayson's son, which was very grateful for it. These is one
19 of the families that we talked to when we went fishing. This is
20 the day of the tournament. All we caught was barracuda, but we
21 gave it to them. It was pretty cool to interact with some of the
22 families. And this was from the mahi day, and, of course, this is
23 one of our other fishers that received the guide.

24
25 But, yeah, in terms of our future projects on goals, of course, is
26 attending MREP, because it's going to be lit. I know it. And
27 bringing education and outreach, like I said, to every educational
28 setting. So, like, even in the summer to be able to get them out
29 to youth groups. We have a whole bunch of conservation and biology
30 programs that kids don't know about. And that's another goal of
31 mine when it comes to going to the schools and stuff, being able
32 to incorporate lists or posters or something for the kids to
33 understand that, you know, you have all of this going on around
34 the island, and this is where they could go to. That was another
35 point, in terms of the tournaments and meeting different kinds of
36 people. Because these groups, groups like Golden Hook, is people
37 that have already heard my ideas and all that I said. You know
38 what I mean? Like, when we go out and we do these events, like, we
39 want you there and we want you talking to people about everything
40 that's going on, what you do, what you're teaching, and you know
41 what I mean? Just like that. So, in that way, we collaborate and
42 we're sharing information. We're sharing events. We're sharing,
43 experiences with everybody.

44
45 The potential queen conch status workshops, we already been hearing
46 about that. We're already ready to work with you guys on, you know,
47 how we going to spread the word, on how we going to set those up,
48 and how it's going to look for our community. And then more

1 tournaments because there's like a whole bunch left. But it's going
2 to be super great. We're going to figure it out. And, yeah, that
3 was the end of my projects on goals. Thank you for listening.
4 [applause]

5

6

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Liandry. Great job. I'm glad to hear
9 that you're doing outreach to high schools. I believe those are
10 our future fishers, and I'm always of the opinion that I think
11 that fishing should be a curriculum in schools or fishing
12 sustainably. Graciela?

13

14 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay, Liandry. Are you including the
15 taking of measurements from the different fish and the lobster in
16 your presentations?

17

18 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ:** Okay. I do. So, I took the commercial
19 handbook and I, like, took pictures of it so that they could see.
20 What I do is that I also bring, not only the live specimens, but
21 I bring conch shells. I bring, like, actual measurement tools that
22 we use and, like, get a taste of what these measurements look like,
23 how we take the data, and why that's important, of course. Where
24 does that go and who does it go to?

25

26 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, a high school MREP?

27

28 **LIANDRY A. DE LA CRUZ:** Basically.

29

30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And being a port sampler for Fish and Wildlife,
31 I think it's good to have the high schools know what you do and
32 what we do with fish and the data. Thanks. Anything else for
33 Liandry? Okay. Hearing none.

34

35 Listen. We are a little behind, so the management said that we
36 have got to go eat lunch, and then we'll come back because we still
37 have a couple more people on the liaison reports.

38

39 Okay. So, we're going to break for lunch, and we have a closed
40 session that's going to happen here at one o'clock from 1:00 to
41 1:30. So, the rest of the group don't come back in this room until
42 1:30. Yeah, until 1:30. I'll see you then. Voting members only for
43 the closed session. Remember that.

44

45 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on April 24, 2022.)

46

47

- - -

48

1 APRIL 24, 2024

2
3 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

4 - - -

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Let's get back to work. So, we're going
7 to have a little change in the agenda because Ricardo has some
8 medical appointment to go to, so we're going to bump him up first
9 before we get to Nicole Greaux from Saint Thomas liaison and then
10 Wilson. So, we're going to have the microplastic discussion with
11 Ricardo and Yessenia Marín. Ricardo, it's all yours.

12
13 **MICROPLASTICS AND FISHERIES IN PUERTO RICO**

14
15 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say a few words
16 before Yesenia start her presentation. Okay. As an introduction,
17 I would like to share with you some important information about
18 the subject. We're still in Earth week, in which Earth Day 2024 is
19 Planet vs. Plastic.

20
21 The focus is on working to eliminate plastic usage for the sake of
22 human and planetary health and to decrease plastic production by
23 60% by 2040. Approximately 98% of single use plastics are produced
24 from fossil fuels. Plastic has been found everywhere, not only in
25 ecosystems, in the atmosphere, but also in the food we eat, the
26 water we drink, and even inside of our bodies. Serious human health
27 problems associated with plastic include cancer, diabetes, heart
28 disease, obesity, respiratory issues, reproductive and hormone
29 problems, asthma, and more. Plastic is starting to generate a
30 staggering proportion of earths carbon pollution.

31
32 With this, I present you Yessenia Marin and welcome her.

33
34 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Pues, muy buenas tardes. Mi nombre es
35 Yesenia Marín-Vargas. me gradué recientemente de la Universidad
36 Interamericana de San Germán, de maestría en ciencias ambientales.
37 Mi comité es Ricardo López-Ortiz, Evelyn Cepeda Pérez y Daniel
38 Matos-Caraballo. Les voy a hablar un poquito sobre mi
39 investigación, sobre de los microplásticos en el sistema digestivo
40 en peces de arrecife comerciales y recreativos en Puerto Rico.

41
42 El objetivo general de este estudio fue evaluar la presencia de
43 las partículas microplásticas en el sistema digestivo en peces de
44 arrecife, de importancia comercial y recreativa en Puerto Rico
45 mediante un análisis descriptivo de las muestras colectada entre
46 el 15 de octubre del 2019 al 24 de septiembre del 2020. En cada
47 muestra se fijó una etiqueta con los datos de cada individuo que
48 se iba a estudiar, pero para yo poder investigar la presencia de

1 microplástico en los sistemas gastrointestinales, pues se
2 dividieron en dos partes. Como muestra en las imágenes, está el
3 contenido gastrointestinal, que es lo que fue consumido por el pez
4 recientemente, y no es parte del tejido, y el tracto
5 gastrointestinal que es el tejido desde el estómago hasta el final
6 del intestino. Las partículas microplásticas que se encontraron en
7 mi investigación, que estuvieron incrustadas en el sistema, en el
8 tejido, se consideraron como bioacumulados.

9
10 También para poder analizar las partículas microplásticas en el
11 sistema gastrointestinal, pues se analizaron las siguientes
12 variables. Las variables como microplásticas, biométrica,
13 morfométricas, ambientales, taxonómicas y pesquería. En el
14 muestreo los ejemplares fueron capturados en el este y el oeste de
15 la plataforma insular de Puerto Rico. Las muestras de los
16 comerciales me fueron donados por varias pescaderías, como la
17 Pescadería Dockey en Mayagüez, en Villa Pesquera, Puerto Real, y
18 en Cabo Rojo, que es en Cabo Rojo, y Pescadería Kadmiel, que fue
19 en Naguabo. Los experimentales, pues, me fueron adquiridos para la
20 investigación científica del Departamento de Recursos Naturales,
21 por el programa SEAMAP en el laboratorio de investigación pesquera,
22 que ahí fue que hice mi investigación, y esta muestra se
23 recolectaron durante otoño, invierno y verano.

24
25 El procedimiento para poder extraer las partículas micorplásticas.
26 El procedimiento que utilice fue semejante al método de Lirio
27 Sánchez, pero se modificó ese método, en mi investigación,
28 cambiando el equipo, los materiales y añadiendo el contenido
29 gastrointestinal. Cada sistema gastrointestinal fue disectado.
30 Después de ese procedimiento, se observó el contenido como un
31 microscopio digital, como muestran las imágenes. Con esa cámara de
32 ese microscopio digital se procedió a tomar una fotografía a cada
33 partícula microplástica encontrada, para luego lavar los
34 contenidos, añadir el peróxido de hidrógeno, y luego proceder con
35 el secado con una plancha, y después recoger los residuos de los
36 tejidos gastrointestinales. Para después poder examinar los
37 tejidos gastrointestinales con un microscopio óptico.

38
39 En las variables de las partículas microplásticas cada partícula
40 se registró el color, la forma, si son fragmentos o fibra, y luego
41 se midieron la longitud de cada partícula microplástica
42 encontrada. Además, de cada proporción de peces contaminados con
43 partículas microplásticas, tanto en el contenido como en el tejido.
44 En las variables biométricas se determinó el peso, el largo de los
45 sistemas gastrointestinales, el peso de las gónadas, la
46 determinación de sexo y etapa gonadal, tanto visual como
47 microscópica. Más adelante los resultados se estarán demostrando,
48 solamente se van a demostrar los resultados que fueron

1 estadísticamente significativas.

2
3 En las variables morfométricas cada individuo se determinó la
4 longitud con un ictiómetro para medir el largo total y el largo de
5 horquilla de cada pez. Y también se pesaron y se midieron en gramos
6 con una balanza Ohaus. También estos datos fueron provistos por el
7 Departamento de Recursos Naturales. En las variables ambientales,
8 la precipitación con mayor influencia hidrológica en las zonas de
9 pesca que fueron muestreadas y se compararon con las variables
10 microplástica en los contenidos y también en los tejidos. La
11 precipitación mensual de la zona del este y oeste interior de
12 Puerto Rico se obtuvo de los datos de NOAA, del 2019 y el 2020,
13 que ahí fue que esos dos se hicieron en mi investigación.

14
15 En las variables ecológicas se compararon las partículas
16 microplásticas que frecuentan o no en los distintos perfiles de
17 hábitat, sanidades, fondos marinos y zonas batimétricas. En las
18 variables taxomónicas y de pesquería también se compararon los
19 peces con partículas microplásticas de cada individuo, que fueron
20 pescados por cada arte de pesca, como el arpón, caña de pescar,
21 carrete de mano, y el palangre. En los análisis de datos, para
22 tener los resultados para esta investigación, se utilizó las
23 estadísticas descriptivas, comparativas, asociativas, el error
24 alfa que fue igual a un 5% y se ejecutaron usando el programa Past.

25
26 En las variables biométricas se determinó el peso y el largo de
27 los de los sistemas gastrointestinales, el peso de las gónadas, la
28 determinación de sexo. En la comparación de los peces y longitud
29 del sistema con las cantidades de partículas microplásticas tanto
30 en el tejido y en el contenido, solo se encontró una correlación
31 débil significativa entre el peso con las cantidades de partículas
32 microplásticas, tanto en el contenido como en el tejido. En las
33 variables microplásticas, en las cantidades, las muestras totales
34 fueron de un 77 peces perteneciente a 13 especies. Todas las
35 partículas fueron detectadas en el estómago, ninguna en el
36 intestino. Tampoco se detectaron partículas mesoplásticas.

37
38 En el contenido de 61 peces muestreados, se detectaron 35
39 partículas en 21 muestras. En 34% de los peces contaminados con
40 1.7 partículas por pez contaminado. En el tejido. En comparación
41 con el tejido gastrointestinal, de 77 peces con 80 partículas
42 microplásticas, se detectaron 45 muestras. En el 58% de los peces
43 contaminados y con 1.8 partículas por pez contaminado. En
44 comparación, el promedio de partículas microplásticas en el
45 contenido fue significativamente menor que en el tejido.

46
47 En las variables de microplástico, en las longitudes, en la primera
48 gráfica se muestra las longitudes de partículas microplásticas en

1 el contenido. Se encontró que la partícula más larga en el
2 contenido fue de 1.1 microgramos, y la más corta fue de 6.8
3 microgramos. El largo promedio de las 35 partículas el contenido
4 fue de 3.3. O sea, que se demostró que la mayor frecuencia estuvo
5 en las partículas microplásticas de menor tamaño. En comparación
6 con el con la segunda gráfica, que ahí se demuestra las longitudes
7 de las partículas microplásticas en el tejido, se encontraron que
8 las partículas más largas en el tejido fueron de 15.5 microgramos,
9 y la más corta fue de 0.95 microgramos.

10
11 Y el largo promedio de las 80 partículas microplásticas que se
12 encontraron en el tejido, la mayor frecuencia estuvo de tamaño
13 mediano. En comparación con el largo promedio de las partículas
14 microplásticas en el contenido fue significativamente más corta
15 que en tejido gastrointestinal y también se obtuvo una correlación
16 débil, pero significativa.

17
18 En la variable microplástica, en la forma, en el contenido, este,
19 las 35 partículas que se encontraron en el contenido es se
20 encontraron que todas fueron micro hilos. En comparación con el
21 tejido, también se detectaron de las 74 partículas microplásticas,
22 todas fueron micro hilos, pero también se encontraron seis
23 microfragmentos, con un 7.5%, como muestra en la segunda imagen.
24 Este, no se hizo una comparación variada en las submuestras porque
25 solamente se obtuvo un solo pez con un solo microfragmento, o sea
26 que no se pudo comparar.

27
28 En la variable microplástica en colores, en el contenido, como
29 pueden ver en la primera gráfica, de las 35 partículas
30 microplásticas en el contenido, se encontraron cinco colores, pero
31 la más que predominaron fueron las negras, en las partículas
32 microplásticas fueron las más significativas. En comparación con
33 el tejido gastrointestinal se encontraron siete colores, y en el
34 tejido de las 80 partículas microplásticas también las que
35 predominaron fueron las negras con un 41%. También predominaron
36 las azules y las rojas, pero en total, pues la mayoría fueron las
37 negras.

38
39 En las variables climáticas no se detectó ninguna diferencia
40 significativa en las longitudes de las partículas en el contenido
41 entre el verano y el invierno, pero sí se detectó una diferencia
42 significativa en el tejido gastrointestinal con una menor longitud
43 promedio de partículas microplásticas en el tejido que fueron
44 colectadas en otoño que se demostró que las longitudes fueron más
45 cortas en comparación con las del verano que fueron las partículas
46 más largas. En el invierno fueron la segunda de longitudes más
47 largas.

48

1 En las variables ecológicas, en los perfiles de hábitat, la
2 longitud de las partículas encontradas en el tejido en los peces
3 que frecuentan en las áreas arenosas, las longitudes en los peces
4 que frecuentan esa área obtuvieron las partículas más largas que
5 las especies que no frecuentan en esa área. En la longitud
6 encontrada en el tejido de los peces que frecuentan en las bahías,
7 obtuvieron las partículas más largas, y fue mayor que las que no
8 frecuentan en las bahías. En los bosques de gorgonia hubo
9 diferencia al comparar lo encontrado en el tejido, hubo menor
10 proporción de peces con partículas microplásticas y las especies
11 que frecuenten este perfil, que fueron cuatro especies, que esas
12 fueron las capitanes. Y resulta que esos cuatro capitanes no
13 obtuvieron ninguna partícula microplástica en los bosques de
14 gorgonia. En comparación con las especies que no frecuentan en los
15 bosques de gorgonia obtuvieron cantidades microplásticas con un
16 62%. En las cantidades hubo menor cantidad de peces con partículas
17 microplásticas que frecuentan en este perfil, que también fueron
18 los capitanes que no tuvieron ninguna cantidad microplástica en
19 comparación con las que no frecuentan en ese perfil que obtuvieron
20 1.096 que sí obtuvieron cantidades microplásticas. Como no hubo
21 partículas microplásticas, en la especie que frecuentan en este
22 perfil, que son los capitanes, pues, no se pudo comparar las
23 medidas de longitud.

24
25 En los estuarios y lagunas, hubo diferencia en las proporciones de
26 peces con partículas microplásticas en el contenido entre los peces
27 que frecuentan en los estuarios y lagunas, que fueron un 50% y los
28 que no frecuentan en ese hábitat con un 23%. Sobre el perfil de
29 los lodos. Hubo diferencia al comparar lo encontrado en el
30 contenido gastrointestinal, en las proporciones los peces que
31 frecuentan en los lodos obtuvieron un 71%, y los que no frecuentan
32 un 30%. En las cantidades, los peces que frecuentan los lodos, los
33 que sí frecuentan obtuvieron más cantidad de microplástico en el
34 sistema con los que no frecuentan. Y en las longitudes de
35 partículas, los peces que frecuentan en los lodos obtuvieron las
36 partículas más cortas que las que no frecuentan en los lodos, que
37 fueron las partículas un poquito más largas.

38
39 En las salinidades solo hubo diferencia en la longitud de las
40 partículas encontradas en el tejido entre los peces que frecuentan
41 las aguas dulces que obtuvieron las partículas más largas con las
42 que no frecuentan en las salinidades. En las zonas batimétricas
43 entre las muestras obtenidas de peces que frecuenten las
44 superficies y columnas, hubo diferencia al comparar lo encontrado
45 en el tejido. En la cantidad, los peces que frecuentan en la
46 superficie y columna obtuvieron la mayoría de la cantidad en
47 partículas microplástica, comparada con las que no frecuentan. Y
48 en la longitud de partículas microplásticas, las que sí frecuentan

1 en la superficie y columna, obtuvieron las partículas más cortas
2 con las que no frecuentan en ese perfil. Similarmente en la zona
3 bénticas, que hubo diferencia al comparar lo encontrado en el
4 contenido. Los peces que frecuentan en la zona béntica, en las
5 cantidades, obtuvieron menos cantidad de partículas con las que no
6 frecuentan en las zonas bénticas. Y en las longitudes de partículas
7 microplásticas, los peces que frecuentan obtuvieron las partículas
8 más largas con las que no frecuentan en las zonas bénticas.

9
10 En las especies de peces, en el contenido no hubo diferencia
11 significativa, pero sí hubo diferencia en las proporciones de peces
12 con el tejido gastrointestinal. Como se muestra en la imagen, hay
13 una gran diferencia en los capitanes con la colirrubias y los
14 róbalo. En los capitanes, pues, esos fueron las únicas especies
15 que no obtuvieron partículas microplásticas en el tejido. Las
16 especies con mayor representatividad fueron el manchego, con un
17 46%, los róbalo con un 75%, que fueron los que más obtuvieron
18 cantidad microplástica, después la colirrubia con un 75%, el macabí
19 con un 33%, y el capitán con un 0%.

20
21 En los desembarcos y arte de pesca hubo diferencia en longitud de
22 las partículas microplásticas encontradas en el tejido, entre los
23 desembarcos en Villa Pesquera Puerto Real y Pescadería Dockey. En
24 la pescadería Dockey, los peces que se pescaron en la pesquería
25 Dockey obtuvieron las partículas más largas en comparación con la
26 de Villa Pesquera Puerto Real y con la pescadería Kadmiel. Y en el
27 SEAMAP obtuvieron las partículas más cortas, como se muestra en la
28 en las gráficas. En la cantidad y longitud en las artes de pesca,
29 en la proporción, los peces que se pescaron con la caña de pescar
30 fueron un 68%, los cordeles con un 54%, el palangre 80%, y el arpón
31 un 0%. Con el arpón fue con el que se pescaron a los capitanes,
32 curiosamente. En la longitud, los peces que se pescaron con la
33 caña de pescar obtuvieron los microplásticos más largos en
34 comparación con los cordeles y el palangre, que el palangre fueron
35 las más cortas. Y el arpón ninguno. Como no hubo partícula en la
36 pesca con el arpón, pues no se pudo medir las partículas
37 microplásticas.

38
39 En los tipos y tamaños de anzuelo. En el contenido, pues, no se
40 detectó ninguna diferencia significativa, pero en el tejido sí. En
41 el tejido de la pesca con el anzuelo J, se obtuvo las partículas
42 más largas que en el tamaño número 10. Este, perdón, con la C, con
43 el tipo de anzuelo C, que fueron las partículas más cortas. Y en
44 la J, las partículas más largas. Y en el tamaño número 10, se
45 obtuvo las partículas microplásticas más largas en comparación con
46 el tamaño de anzuelo 9/0.

47
48 En conclusión, con las variables de las partículas, fue el primer

1 registro de partículas microplásticas en los tractos digestivos de
2 peces en Puerto Rico y el Caribe, actualizando el nivel de alerta
3 sobre estos contaminantes. Más del 50% de los peces bioacumuló, o
4 sea, que las tenían incrustadas en el tejido gastrointestinal,
5 hubo mucha bioacumulación comparable con lo reportado en el Canal
6 de la Mancha, Ecuador, México, Turquía y Guatemala. Se detectaron
7 partículas microplásticas con mayor cantidad en el tejido que en
8 el contenido. Lo que sugiere que la bioacumulación es bastante
9 persistente. Las partículas microplásticas bioacumuladas, o sea,
10 en el tejido, fueron en promedio el doble de largas que la ingerida
11 reciente en el contenido gastrointestinal, lo cual sugiere que las
12 más pequeñas están menos tiempo detectables en el tejido, ya sea
13 porque penetran menos o son rechazadas al ambiente o transferida
14 a otros tejidos más rápido. Las partículas detectadas fueron
15 principalmente en forma de microhilos similar los reportes
16 encontrados.

17
18 En las biométricas y morfométricas, la longitud de las partículas
19 ingeridas recientemente y las bioacumuladas no fueron relacionadas
20 al sexo, etapa gonadal o tallas de peces. La gran diferencia de
21 los tamaños entre los peces muestreados y las partículas sugiere
22 que las ingieren pasivamente, según entra el agua al sistema
23 digestivo o indirectamente, por biomagnificación con presas
24 contaminadas. En las variables ambientales, las similitudes en las
25 características de las partículas microplásticas detectadas entre
26 zonas y estaciones de mayor y menor precipitación fluvial, apunta
27 que estos contaminantes son ubicuos en el océano y su principal
28 origen no necesariamente es endógena en Puerto Rico. Las partículas
29 encontradas en el tejido durante otoño fueron de menor longitud
30 que las detectadas en verano e invierno, lo que coincide con el
31 hundimiento de las aguas más densas durante la lluvia, teniendo el
32 efecto contrario a las zonas de afloramiento.

33
34 Y en las ecológicas, taxonómicas y de pesquería, pues la ingestión
35 de partículas fue mayor en las especies que frecuentan los lodos,
36 estuarios y lagunas lo cual puede estar relacionada al tamaño del
37 grano, la deposición de los sedimentos y el dinamismo de las
38 corrientes en estos hábitats, que causan una mayor exposición, y
39 por más tiempo, de estos contaminantes a los peces y sus presas.
40 A juzgar por la proporción de peces con bioacumulación, es posible
41 que los bosques de gorgonias sean de los hábitats con menos
42 exposición a las partículas microplásticas, en comparación con los
43 lodos, los estuarios y lagunas; probablemente por el dinamismo de
44 las corrientes. Pero hay que tener cautela con esta inferencia, ya
45 que la muestra de los peces que frecuentan los bosques de gorgonias
46 fue de tan sólo de cuatro capitanes, como dije anteriormente. La
47 contaminación estuvo presente en peces que frecuentan aguas
48 marinas, salobres y dulces, aunque la longitud promedio

1 bioacumulada fue mayor en peces que frecuentan las aguas dulces en
2 comparación con los que no lo hacen, probablemente se incluye aquí
3 alguna influencia de partículas originadas en Puerto Rico, menos
4 desgastadas. No se encontró diferencias en las proporciones de
5 peces con partículas y las cantidades de estas, entre las zonas de
6 desembarcos, consistente con que la exposición a los contaminantes
7 es ubicua a estas especies. La hidrodinámica de nutrientes de las
8 zonas de afloramiento usadas por el pescador comercial, en
9 comparación con la pesca experimental en lugares aleatorios usados
10 por SEAMAP, pudiera explicar porque: hubo más partículas y estas
11 eran de menor longitud, en el tejido de las especies que frecuentan
12 la superficie y columna de agua, en comparación con las especies
13 que frecuentan las zonas bénticas; las partículas bioacumuladas
14 tenían menos longitud en la pesca desembarcada por SEAMAP y los
15 tipos de anzuelo C con tamaños 9/0, que la desembarcada en las
16 pescaderías y los anzuelos J, tamaño 10. Se encontró que la
17 longitud de las partículas fue menor en las muestras de palangres
18 que en la caña de pescar y el carrete.

19

20

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

21

22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Se tranco? ¿Yessenia?

23

24 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Mhmm.

25

26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Yesenia?

27

28 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** No. Esa fue mi investigación.

29

30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Es refrescante ver jóvenes como tu entrar en las
31 ciencias pesqueras y me alegra mucho porque esto es un tópico que
32 nosotros empezamos a explorar. Y el trabajo que has hecho con los
33 plásticos, como se integran a la cadena alimenticia a través de los
34 peces es importante para nosotros poderlo entender en el futuro.
35 Así que te felicito y te agradezco que hayas venido acá para hacer
36 esa presentación. Te exhortamos a que continúes con eso y estamos
37 a tu disposición cuando quieras presentar algo de los trabajos que
38 tienes.

39

40 Mr. Chairman, si hay alguna pregunta del grupo--

41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. We have a few questions here. Crespo
43 and then Vance. Oh, I'm sorry. Ricardo. I'll do Ricardo first.

44

45 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yessenia, thanks for the presentation. I
46 just have a comment for the for the Council. It is very interesting
47 that when she compares the data collected from SEAMAP, we have to
48 take into consideration that SEAMAP fishes in a random way, and

1 she compared that random sampling with what was brought by the
2 fishermen. The fishermen don't go randomly. They go to special
3 spots where they know they're going to fish.

4
5 What she found was that in the random plots of SEAMAP, the amount
6 of microplastic was lower than in the fishes brought by the
7 fishermen. The fishermen usually go to places where there is a--
8 afloramiento. How do you say that? --Upwelling. Upwelling. In
9 places with upwelling. So, most probably, that movement towards
10 the surface is moving the microplastic to the surface where many
11 of the fishes are found and fished.

12
13 I wanted to bring that because the dynamic of the waters seems to
14 be very important in terms of the bioaccumulation of microplastics
15 in the fishes. Thanks.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Nelson Crespo?

18
19 **NELSON CRESPO:** Interesting presentation. I wonder if you are
20 planning to extend this investigation to other species.

21
22 Me gustaría saber si-- tremenda presentación. Te felicito. Me
23 gustaría saber, usted piensa extender esta investigación para
24 otras especies.

25
26 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Me gustaría. Sí.

27
28 **NELSON CRESPO:** Si usted está interesada, a mí me gustaría que se
29 evaluaran los pargos de agua profunda y yo le podría proveer de
30 las muestras que usted necesite de diferentes partes de la
31 plataforma pesquera del oeste de la isla.

32
33 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Estaría encantada.

34
35 **NELSON CRESPO:** Hablamos ahorita.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** ¿Vance?

38
39 **VANCE VICENTE:** Si, felicidades por tu trabajo. Estas dentro de un
40 campo que tiene un futuro bien bien extenso y espero que puedas
41 expandir tu investigación para contestar preguntas como, por
42 ejemplo, ¿cuál es el origen de estos plásticos? ¿Qué tipo de
43 plásticos polipropileno, polietileno, PVC? Eso sería una, y lo
44 otro es investigar. En cuanto hablaste de béntico, pues, diferentes
45 comunidades bénticas acumulan, son áreas de deposición versus
46 otras que son áreas de resuspensión. Por ejemplo, las praderas de
47 hierbas marinas tienen el efecto de baffling, trapping and binding.
48 ¿Tú sabes? Y tienen un récord en el sedimento que con unas catas

1 y haciendo carbono 14 e inclusive isotopos de oxígeno para saber
2 la temperatura, puedes saber cuándo comenzó este problema y de ahí
3 puedes establecer hipótesis de cómo es que llega ese sedimento
4 acumulado, desde que se empezó a acumular a las diferentes cadenas
5 alimenticias. Esa es la pregunta que a mí me estimularía seguir--
6 pero felicidades, Yessenia, y que sigas echando pa'lante.

7

8 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Gracias.

9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo and Sabater.

11

12 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. A comment for what Vance just brought.
13 Her master's thesis is available on Internet, and one of the things
14 that she found was that the samples from the east and the west,
15 she didn't find any difference in terms of amount of microplastics
16 and the length of the microplastics. So, that with the other
17 comparison that she made, she's suggesting that most of the
18 microplastic that we have in Puerto Rico are not indigenous from
19 Puerto Rico, are not produced in Puerto Rico, but they are coming
20 from elsewhere. Most people talk about the microplastic coming
21 from the currents of the water, but new information, the new
22 science is talking about that, probably, microplastics at that
23 size, which more of them were nanoplastics, super tiny, might be
24 coming with the air, probably from Sahara or from other places. We
25 don't know that yet, but that is what is being talked about in the
26 latest news.

27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** ¿Sabater?

29

30 **ROBERTO SABATER:** ¿Cuando tú dices que hay microplásticos en el
31 tejido, te refieres a la piel más la carne?

32

33 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Eh, sí.

34

35 **ROBERTO SABATER:** ¿O solamente es la piel?

36

37 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** No, es del sistema digestivo, pero después
38 que están secados en la plancha. Porque se secaron por 24 horas.
39 Pero es el sistema gastrointestinal. Primero se lavan, después se
40 echan al peróxido de hidrógeno por 18 horas y después los residuos
41 que quedan se dejan secar en una plancha por 24 horas y ese es el
42 tejido de los residuos que se pudieron rescatar de ese experimento.

43

44 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Pero, ósea, de la parte que se come del pescado,
45 encontraron plásticos.

46

47 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Del contenido recientemente, sí.

48

1 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** No, no, no. ¿De la carne?
2 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Sí, de la carne.
3
4 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** La carne no.
5
6 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** No, ella no estudio la carne. Ella solamente
7 estudio el sistema digestivo.
8
9 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Si.
10
11 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Ah, o sea, la carne no. Por eso, pues esa es la-
12 - gracias.
13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I know we are short on time but to Roberto. Other
17 studies have shown that, in the meat, they found it. One important
18 finding of her work is something that Ricardo touched on, is that
19 those microplastic or nanoplastic are in the water, not necessarily
20 created by our people here.
21
22 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Mhmm.
23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Because every time that we have this, there's
25 somebody looking for an excuse to knock on the head of the fishers.
26 And the other thing is that the percentage produced locally, versus
27 the percentage that arrives to the area is significant.
28
29 You know? And you and I, according to the latest study, we eat the
30 equivalent of an American Express plastic card every week. It used
31 to be every year; now it's every week. For some people, that's
32 good because it helps some tissues, for others it creates cancers
33 and everything.
34
35 Yo creo que tu trabajo va a tener mucha influencia en los próximos
36 años en términos sobre el concepto de de dónde vienen esos
37 plásticos. ¿Quién los produce? ¿Como podemos nosotros atacar, tal
38 vez, ese problema? Ahora mismo todo el mundo está en contra de los
39 plásticos, pero sin embargo se produce más plástico ahora que lo
40 que se producía hace 10 años atrás. Y yo soy uno de los culpables.
41 Porque antes las bolsitas, cuando eran de gratis, contaminaban.
42 Ahora que cuestan diez centavos, no contaminan. Sin embargo, duran
43 400 años versus 100 que eran las otras. Así que te agradecemos
44 mucho que hayas podido venir hoy.
45
46 Yo creo, Mr. Chairman, que podemos invitarla otra vez cuando
47 continúe sus trabajos. Muchas gracias.
48

1 **YESSENIA MARÍN-VARGAS:** Un placer. [applause]
2
3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, thank you. Okay. So, between drinking from
5 water bottles and eating a lot of fish, I must be loaded with
6 microplastics.
7

8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Oh, yeah.
9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo, do you need to finish up the deepwater
11 snapper? Or--
12

13 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. I can do that.
14

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Okay.
16

17 **DEEP WATER SNAPPERS: PUERTO RICO REGULATIONS UPDATE**
18

19 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ricardo López for
20 the record. In terms of timing, during Friday, September 1, 2023,
21 the Secretary of DNR endorsed the administrative order 2023-07,
22 which eliminates the restrictions on permits through the limited
23 entries and creates a precautionary ban for three consecutive
24 months starting in June. That was in September last year. A few
25 months after that, we achieved the interest and main goal of the
26 Commercial Fishery Research Management Division, which was to be
27 able to have a better approximation of the fishermen who harvest
28 these species, many of them fishing without permission and who
29 have now requested permission, becoming legitimate.
30

31 On December 6, we had the 183rd meeting of the Caribbean Fishery
32 Management Council, and we discussed this. We discussed the need
33 to prohibit the fishing for these species in accordance with the
34 order 2023-07, which was a social and economic precaution
35 considered by DNR based on a previous experience back in 2013.
36 Then, the possibility of amending the administrative order and
37 eliminating everything related to the 3-month precautionary ban
38 was suggested in that meeting. On December 13th, a week later, the
39 DNR Fisheries Research Management Division received suggestions of
40 the language for the new administrative order. The same day in the
41 afternoon, it was suggested to the subsecretary of DNR that the
42 precautionary ban will no longer be necessary.
43

44 On April 17th, a lot later, last week, a new attorney came to DNR.
45 His name is Luis Soto Mieses. He wrote to us that he was taking
46 care of this new administrative order. We didn't know if that was
47 good news or bad news at that moment, but just the fact that he
48 wrote to us was very good news. A little later, he told us that he

1 would be working in the administrative order, make some questions,
2 and produce the new administrative order, which is 2024-a new
3 number that I don't have yet, to establish the procedure and
4 requirement to obtain the special permit for fishing for queen
5 snapper and cardinal snapper.

6
7 Section nine of that new order, specifically says administrative
8 order 2023-07 issued on September 1st, 2023, is repealed. So, that
9 administrative order is no longer in function. In section 12, this
10 administrative order will take effect 30 days after its publication
11 on the Internet and on the newspaper, whichever comes first.
12 Yesterday at 4:17 PM, the new order was in the secretary's desk.
13 So, hopefully during this week, that will be published, and we
14 will not have the ban of those three months, but the requirements
15 will be the same as in the other orders that the fishermen have to
16 provide the statistics, need to have some experience. Exactly the
17 same requirements as the other ones. So, hopefully for this week,
18 we will have that new order approved and signed. That's my update.

19 20 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Ricardo. Miguel?

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Ricardo and I spoke about this before.
25 Please let us know once you have the document, and Cristina is
26 going to help DNR publish it and make sure that all the fishers
27 get to know this information in Spanish. And then, in the case of
28 the Puerto Rico DAP, this is one of the topics they wanted to
29 discuss, so I believe that we can then invite you directly with
30 that good news, by the way, but also to explain the process for
31 them to obtain that particular license.

32
33 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Of course. Thanks for that opportunity.
34 I'll be there if you call me. Another thing is that even when we
35 have this new order, the important thing is to collect the new
36 data and see where we are going instead walking blind. We need to
37 know where we are going. So, things may change. There are other
38 things that we must do. For example, start talking more about a
39 permit, a federal a permit, which I know is one of the plans, and
40 keep the conversation with María López and Andy, keep them updated
41 with this. That is part of our plan.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy, and then Nelson.

44
45 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Thank you for the update, Ricardo, and thank
46 you for taking the time to speak with us during one of the breaks
47 earlier. It's very helpful and informative to understand the
48 context, especially when you're trying to improve compliance and

1 particularly with reporting and kind of the lack of compliance
2 with limited access. I just wanted to put on the record, obviously,
3 what we shared with you. Our concerns, obviously, is that deepwater
4 snappers are long lived. They are vulnerable to fishing mortality
5 because of the long-time span that they live. And right now, the
6 regulations are being relaxed. We haven't changed the catch limits.

7
8 And so, certainly as landings data and information emerges, right,
9 we'll have to evaluate those catch limits and accountability
10 measures carefully and work with Puerto Rico DNR if in fact the
11 catch limits are triggered and, ultimately, accountability
12 measures have to be implemented. But with that said, the
13 information also coming in will be beneficial in terms of learning
14 from that, and what changes might be occurring in the landings
15 data. So, just look forward to working with Puerto Rico further on
16 this.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

19
20 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before all, Ricardo, I really
21 appreciate the time you take to attend the fishers' concerns. That
22 for me is a high value from you. I'm wondering how many permits
23 does DNR have for the dewater snapper at the moment?

24
25 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Nelson, thanks for that question. I do have
26 a little table that I used to evaluate that back in 2023. If I may
27 share this with you. In 2022, the permit requested at that moment
28 were 67. Those were the ones evaluated by Daniel Matos, but valid
29 permits before the 2023-07 administrative order were only 50. There
30 is a small difference between 50 and 57 that can be explained by
31 many ways. For example, permits that are in transit that Daniel
32 was checking, but were not approved yet, other that were not
33 approved, etcetera. So, the final number, the valid number at that
34 time was 50.

35
36 We had at that time, 91 observed new fishermen requesting the
37 permit. A total of 141 permits is what is added when you add 50+91.
38 That's the total permit that we have at that time. 108 fishermen
39 who reported fishing in 2022 statistics, of which 50 to 77 had
40 permits. 41 to 58 fishermen report fishing queen and cardinal
41 snapper in 2022 out of 108, which I mentioned before. That means
42 that 41 to 58 fishermen were fishing without having the permits,
43 but they were reporting. Could be more.

44
45 219 fishermen or anglers report number unit one in 2022. So, that
46 is what we expect of a fisherman that can go and fish the unit
47 two, not immediately, but close to immediately. That's our
48 universe. 152 to 169 fishermen were expected at that moment in

1 December, like the ones that could be requesting the new permit.
2
3 That difference is minus 61 to minus 78, when you compare what we
4 observe of what we expect. That was in December. From December to
5 toward today we might have new permits that are not included in
6 this analysis.
7
8 **NELSON CRESPO:** Okay. It is evident that at any moment the ACL is
9 going to be overpassed. I am open to working with you to develop
10 strategies to mitigate the impact, and, you know, try to find some
11 ways to maintain the resource sustainable and to try to work as
12 much as possible to not overpass the ACL. So, I'm here if you need
13 me. I'm here anytime you want.
14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nelson. Vanessa?
16
17 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Chair. Vanessa Ramirez for the record.
18 Regarding the same line of Nelson, I really appreciate the
19 importance that you give to the comments of the fishermen and what
20 we asked in the past meeting, and also that you have been always
21 open to not only hear our comments, but to also work together to
22 get all the best information available. Of course, we are always,
23 as fishermen, available to work with the state department with
24 information that they need and to spread the word also with the
25 fishermen the importance of the data. And, of course, we are
26 waiting for that new order. So, as soon as it's good, I wish to
27 have a copy. Thanks.
28
29 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Vanessa.
30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Great. Thank you. Anything further for Ricardo?
32 Hearing none. Thanks a lot, Ricardo.
33
34 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Mr. Chairman, please excuse me. I have to
35 leave. I will leave Daniel Matos.
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, I'm sorry. We got one thing up there on the
38 chat.
39
40 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Michelle Schärer. "Ricardo López, will
41 this be a limited entry permit?"
42
43 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Can you repeat the question, Michelle?
44
45 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** "Will this be a limited entry permit?"
46
47 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** No. The permit in the new order is not a
48 limited entry permit.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Ricardo. Okay. Back on schedule
3 with liaison reports. Next, it would be, the Saint Thomas/Saint
4 John liaison, Nicole Greaux.

5
6 Sorry. I had to bump you, Nicole.

7
8 **CFMC LIAISON OFFICER ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN - NICOLE GREAUX**
9

10 **NICOLE GREAUX:** That's okay. Good afternoon to everyone. I am
11 Nicole Greaux, the fisheries liaison for the Division of Fish and
12 Wildlife on Saint Thomas and Saint John.

13
14 So, some of the fishing community activities I have been up to
15 this year are quite interesting and also incredibly educational.
16 So, the biggest thing that we did or that I've done so far was the
17 Watershed Pollution Prevention Workshop, but I'll get to that in
18 a moment. So, we started off the year with the Mangrove and Coral
19 Restoration Workshop, which was put together by Dr. Marilyn Brandt,
20 Kristin Grimes and also Dr. Cynthia McCaskey. That was really
21 interesting because very rarely do we ever have an anthropologist
22 there during these workshops to figure out and to see the reactions
23 of the people that utilize these communities and the areas and
24 habitats where these mangroves and coral outplantings are being
25 done. So, I was very happy to see someone there to truly listen
26 and take the feel of the community for these things.

27
28 Some of the things that were discussed, the area that was
29 particularly discussed for this particular workshop was Hull Bay.
30 Some of the questions that were asked during the workshop were not
31 really thought of by the people that were carrying it out.
32 Questions like what happens to these outcroppings for the coral
33 specifically when we have fishery tournaments? When the boats are
34 coming in, are you going to have buoys there? Is there going to be
35 someone that will be going out consistently and taking a look at
36 where these new corals are being planted to make sure that no one
37 is messing with them? that we don't have visitors in the water
38 trying to pick them up or move them around? and so Dr. Marilyn
39 Brandt was able to give us answers on that particular question.
40 The disheartening thing that, I spoke with to Dr. Grimes with and
41 also to Dr. McCaskey is that when we have these workshops and these
42 outplantings that are taking place, a lot of times, the people
43 that are utilizing these areas are not, I would say, targeted to
44 attend these workshops. And so, in the future, they are going to
45 try to have a more mass advertising of these workshops to try to
46 incorporate the people that are actually utilizing the places where
47 these plantings are taking place.

1 Now for the watershed pollution prevention Workshop and Listening
2 Session. That was very surprising. I only learned about that from
3 a colleague of mine that told me that the listening session was
4 taking place and so far, they didn't have any representations from
5 the people that were going to be affected by what is called non-
6 source point pollution. So, in other words, we have a lot of guts
7 running through, Saint Thomas especially, and when the water leaves
8 the hills, it inevitably ends up into the ocean. So, the key point
9 for this particular listening session was to figure out what is
10 happening on the hillsides that could potentially be affecting the
11 corals and the habitats, the delicate habitats in the areas where
12 these guts will drain out into. They are planning on taking that
13 information and having another meeting and listening session that
14 hopefully will produce a wider audience. I gave them the names and
15 contact numbers of some of our representatives from the fishing
16 community, as well as from the dive community.

17
18 I have to say that the most exciting thing that I have done as far
19 as interaction with the fishing community is the scheduling of
20 port samples. We finally have ice available to our fishermen, which
21 is a beautiful thing, and it just makes them feel that much easier
22 about having their fish out to have these port samples done. Some
23 of these port samples can take anywhere from an hour to an hour
24 and a half, and that is a lot of time to have your fish out,
25 especially if you're a fisher that comes in at around two or three
26 o'clock in the afternoon. So, they were very pleased to hear that
27 we now have ice available to them.

28
29 I've been communicating with not only our Division of Fish And
30 Wildlife Branch, but also our enforcement officers dealing with
31 issues that are taking place and that the fishers are concerned
32 about. Things like the bringing in of catch that is possibly not
33 from the Virgin Islands, having officers be aware of activities
34 that are taking place in our marinas that fishermen have called me
35 and brought to my attention, and also for really cool things like
36 sea turtle nesting on one of our keys off of the north side of the
37 island. We also have been fielding a lot of calls. I utilize
38 Maggie, who is our fishery biologist for the Division of Fish and
39 Wildlife on recreational fisher questions. So, because a lot of
40 the folks have been seeing me out and about the fish markets, they
41 see me attending different community activities and events. They
42 get my phone number, and when they have a question concerning the
43 recreational side of things, they give me a call. So, I'm really
44 glad that they have my phone number, that they're also able to go
45 into the Division of Fish and Wildlife Office and pick up materials
46 on the questions that they're asking.

47
48 So, this is the fun stuff. This is what makes the liaison position

1 really interesting and pretty much worthwhile. The reef
2 responsible program is about our sustainable seafood, and Liandry
3 touched a lot on that, almost being the educational aspect of the
4 Division of Fish and Wildlife. We get invited, reef responsible,
5 to attend different functions, to attend different events where we
6 get a chance to not only educate the public on sustainable seafood
7 and the hows and whys of fish being sustainable, which fish you
8 should really pay attention to, which fish you may want to not eat
9 so much of. We, the Division of Fish and Wildlife, because that's
10 who I was representing, had a chance to attend different things
11 like the Kids Expo where the photo with the young man and that
12 blue circle, that is our fishing game. This was really cool.

13
14 So, our fishery biologist, Danielle and Tia, helped with putting
15 this together and getting the fish and everything. It's really
16 interesting to see the children interacting with this as well as
17 their parents. The gist of this game was the kids were allowed to
18 catch a fish. They also learned about whether or not the fish they
19 caught, even though they were allowed to catch it on a hand line,
20 if they needed to release it or if it was allowed to stay and go
21 home for their plate. Catching things like the nassau grouper or
22 fish that we had put on the mat that were considered out of season.
23 If anyone caught any of those fish, we told them why they needed
24 to put it back. And then, we also told them the level of
25 sustainability and the function of that particular fish in the
26 ecosystem.

27
28 We had a touch tank where the children were able to interact with
29 different species of invertebrates that we had collected. And also,
30 there was a habitat exhibit, and that is on the top right-hand
31 corner where you'll see a lot of trees and leaves and bush. We
32 even have a mangrove exhibit there where the parents and the
33 children learned a lot more about our mangrove habitats and the
34 different areas of the mangrove habitats. The fishing tournaments
35 that I attended enabled me to hand out the grouper guides as well
36 as more of our calendars. I also had a chance to interact with a
37 lot of the charter fishers, and this was really good because not
38 only were they very interested in obtaining more of the grouper
39 guides, but they also, some of the crew members, were not aware of
40 specific seasonal closures on some of the fish that we had. And
41 some of these charters do not stay within our 3-mile limit, so it
42 was really good and very helpful to be able to educate those
43 particular people.

44
45 We were also able to display some of the posters and the
46 educational materials that the Division of Fish and Wildlife has
47 available for the general public, and that is what's displayed on
48 the poster board and also on the tables that you see there.

1
2 So, works in progress. Here in Saint Thomas and also in Saint John,
3 we have an issue with sanitation and also with areas for the
4 fishermen and their customers to relieve themselves. One of the
5 biggest markets we have here, that does not have any restroom
6 facilities available in the general area is Market Square. So, the
7 fishers there have asked for sanitation improvements. I have been
8 in conversations with the Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture who
9 has jurisdiction over that particular fish vending site, and we
10 are trying to see what we can do to assist the fishers with that
11 particular request for sanitation improvements.

12
13 There is the equity and environmental justice push that's now
14 taking place in the Virgin Islands. And I'm really pleased to see
15 that we now have a V.I. Justice Initiative that is done by the
16 Environmental Defense Fund. This is something that is going to
17 allow the marine side of the islands to get equity as far as
18 representation is concerned with things that are happening,
19 including laws that are coming down, things that are happening
20 within the marine fisheries that will adversely affect both fishers
21 and charters and also giving fishers and marine usage people a way
22 to help and have someone assist them with any legal matters or
23 questions that may come up involving the marine fisheries and their
24 rights.

25
26 The conch status information video is something that I'm looking
27 forward to. I had a chance to have a conversation and emails back
28 and forth with, Orian Tzadik. I'm hoping that when the conch
29 workshops get kicked off, that we're going to be able to have a
30 video as well because a lot of the fishers would like to see
31 something visual and easy for them to listen to as well as
32 something that is in plain speak about what is happening with our
33 queen conch status.

34
35 Radio program space. This is really good. So, we do have a public
36 relations officer, but very rarely do we ever have space to put
37 out things like incidents that are going to be positive for the
38 fishers, things that are coming up and coming down the line as far
39 as workshops or as far as meetings go. This is a way to get people
40 that do not use social media very often because almost everybody
41 listens to the radio here when they're going out on the boat or
42 when they're in their car, and this is just another way to have
43 information disseminated.

44
45 Public meetings with fish stakeholders. This is done directly
46 through the Fishery Advisory Committee, and we are now in the works
47 of putting together a list of meetings that we're going to include
48 our commercial and recreational fishers to get their feedback on

1 different regulations and also different things that we would like
2 to see implemented in the near future through our fisheries
3 advisory committee.

4
5 Enforcement communications I touched on a little bit earlier. This
6 is dealing with things like the sea turtle nesting, boats coming
7 and offloading, fish that are unfamiliar to the fishermen that
8 utilize the marinas or the areas where it's happening, and then
9 seeing large amounts of things like lobsters being offloaded at
10 marinas with boats that do not have U.S. Virgin Islands
11 registration. So, I want to thank the communications officers,
12 especially officer Gumbs and officer Castro, who have never ever,
13 refused my phone calls and always call me back with what they have
14 done and when they were able to go out to the areas that I have
15 mentioned to them.

16
17 So, this is one of our fisheries, or one of our most utilized
18 fishermen docks where our fishing boats or the fishing fleets are
19 on the east end. That is our east end reserve. One of the things
20 that we're going to be working on is trying to get that area
21 cleaned up. A lot of the fishermen have been talking about the
22 fact that hurricane season is on the rise. We still have not heard
23 or seen anything being done with the derelict boats that are being
24 tied and chained up to the mangroves. What is going to happen if
25 we do have another category four or five? How many more boats will
26 be lost?

27
28 So, I just want you all to take a look at that final slide. That
29 is not even a third of the area. And those boats that you see in
30 the background, yes, they are tied up to some mangroves. So,
31 hopefully, we'll be able to get that taken care of in the near
32 future. I know grant money and grant funding is a really big deal,
33 so the Fishery Advisory Council or Committee is going to also have
34 that as one of our public meeting discussions.

35
36 Thank you all for your time, and I hope you have a good afternoon.

37
38 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nicole. Any questions for Nicole?
41 Graciela?

42
43 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Nicole, thanks for the presentation. So,
44 I heard you a number of times say that funding initiative to do
45 the work that you want done and the and the fishers want done.
46 Have you already identified any of these funding sources?

47
48 **NICOLE GREAUX:** There is one that is going to be spoken about, and

1 it's with the Environmental Defense Fund. I'm going to be in a
2 meeting, actually, tomorrow, with that. So, in my lightning talk,
3 I have a chance to ask that particular question about getting
4 funding for these specific things, because this is concern this is
5 actually considered an inequity as far as the way that it affects
6 that specific demographic. So, so far, the only thing that I've
7 come up with, or that I've reached out to has been the
8 Environmental Defense Fund.

9
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Nicole? Hearing none.
13 Thanks again, Nicole. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico liaison. Thank
14 you.

15
16 **CFMC LIAISON OFFICER PUERTO RICO - WILSON SANTIAGO**

17
18 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, everyone.
19 Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico Fisheries Liaison. Okay. This is my
20 report from this past month in 2024.

21
22 Okay. So, my participation. We have had a very busy month, this
23 past one, with a lot of educational tables and participation as a
24 liaison. We participated in SEDAR 84, virtual DAPs and SSC
25 meetings. We have attended to calls from fishers regarding the
26 federal and state waters. Those calls have been to the Council.
27 Some of them to the Council. I just wanted to bring something to
28 the Council, because some of those calls were American people,
29 like tourists, some of them tourists, some of them Americans that
30 are going to live over here, and they are recreational fishers.

31
32 So, the majority of their questions were about the states and
33 federal regulations. So, I just oriented them and sent them to the
34 to the CFMC website. But it will be good if we can work with some
35 educational material or putting it in the social medias regarding
36 the recreational fishers' regulations. You know, bag limits,
37 species, and all that. So, that is a recommendation for the
38 Council. I will be bringing this to the OEAP meeting. In June I
39 think it's the next meeting.

40
41 So, other participation that I have done as a liaison was
42 participating in the Virtual Caribbean Branch Seminar Series
43 monthly. That is a very good initiative. They have had very good
44 topics. So, another virtual NOAA Fisheries Aquaculture meeting. We
45 have been collaborating with Cristina Olán with information on the
46 Puerto Rico State Waters, for CFMC web page and the fish app.

47
48 We gave an orientation workshop for the Puerto Rico, Department of

1 Agriculture Agronomist. The agronomist and the Department of
2 Agriculture work directly. Some of them work directly with the
3 fishing communities, with federal funds, and we gave them a
4 workshop regarding the statistics program, everything that the
5 department of agriculture need to know about the fisheries. So, we
6 have been helping, PhD and master students pointing them toward
7 people that can help them in their studies, in Puerto Rico fishers
8 or corals. So, they have been sending me emails. Those students
9 sending send me email. We meet virtually. So, we have been helping
10 the students too.

11
12 Okay. In the Outreach and Education Participation with Dr. Ricardo
13 López. We have been creating a state water closure sticker. We are
14 working with it right now. I'm going to the graphic designer. Yeah.
15 Yeah. So, we are working with it. We have been printing various
16 factsheets for distribution. We have been delivering the CFMC
17 educational materials to several to several people and fishing
18 communities around the island. We delivered the calendars and other
19 educational material to fishing villages and fishing communities.
20 The calendars, we take them to all fishing village. Me and Jannette
21 Ramos went on a trip to all the fishing villages and gave them the
22 calendars.

23
24 The educational tables during this past month. One of them was in
25 the festival ;Come Pez León y Calamar Diamante! in Guayanilla;
26 Marine Science Career Day at the Puerto Rico University, on
27 Mayagüez, the RUM. AECiMa, that's an organization of the Puerto
28 Rico University in for marine biologist students. So, they invited
29 us to the 7th Marine Symposium in Lajas. So, we brought them the
30 educational table. And also, the Cabo Rojo municipality fair.

31
32 This week, on Saturday, I'm going to be participating, with another
33 educational table, in Cabo Rojo, in a fishing tournament from DNER.
34 So, they are continually inviting me to bring them educational
35 table with educational materials. So, we'll be joining in a lot of
36 places.

37
38 Another outreach and education participation is the MREP Puerto
39 Rico steering committee. I belong to the steering committee. MREP
40 is going to be in August. So, we are working together with them
41 and with other partners to make this happen. And the weekly post
42 at WhatsApp broadcast list that, like always, Cristina gives me
43 back up on sending me information for me to distribute. I have
44 added, like, 200 fishers in this past month. So, now the numbers
45 are, like, 600 fishers that I have in that broadcast list in
46 WhatsApp. So, they are getting the message.

47
48 Okay. So, from the week of April 29th to May 3rd, personnel of NOAA

1 Fisheries HMS office, contacted me so I could help them with the
2 coordination for this workshop. Okay? They are going to be here
3 from the 29th to May 3rd. We have coordinated five different
4 workshops in five different places, municipalities. They are going
5 to bring in Aguadilla, Cabo Rojo, Ponce, Arecibo, that was
6 tentative, but yesterday I got confirmation. So, it is going to
7 happen in Arecibo and Dorado as well. They are going to give a
8 workshop about the HMS permit for commercial and recreational. So,
9 it will be a one-hour workshop and then two hours helping them to
10 solicit and renew their permits. So, we are going to be this next
11 week working with this.

12
13 So, my next steps as a liaison. The HMS workshop this next week.
14 CFMC educational exhibit at different location, and I want to thank
15 Miguel Rolón for inviting me this year for the Fish Fry Event at
16 the Office of Department of Commerce in Washington. So, we will be
17 with the with the Caribbean CFMC tent over there.

18
19 We are returning with the educational commercial workshop. We have
20 been in a stop, like, for more than eight months, but we are
21 returning with them soon, and continue spreading the CFMC
22 educational materials around Puerto Rico and other educational
23 materials that the Sea Grant program brings us, [inaudible] brought
24 us some educational materials too, so we are giving them to the
25 fishing communities.

26
27 So that will be all from me for my report. This is my contact
28 information. Any questions?

29
30 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

33
34 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramirez for the
35 record. I just want to thank you, Wilson, as always, for the great
36 communication that you have with the fishermen. They really love
37 you. They really are open to receive the message, and for them
38 especially. I have to say, the WhatsApp, messages that you send,
39 they're always looking for that. They always receive you in a nice
40 way, no matter the information, whether it's good or bad, but the
41 way that you transmit that and the way you express the truth is
42 something that they really value.

43
44 So, thank you for all your work. As always, they are waiting for
45 more and more education programs in the Fisherman Village and
46 around the Puerto Rico. And I hope that you enjoy the Fry Fish
47 because I know that you deserve to be there. Thanks.

48

1 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Thank you, Vanessa.

2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more questions for Wilson? Hearing
4 none. Thanks again, Wilson. So, next on the agenda would be the
5 Wilson with kids also.

6
7 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Wilson with kids.

8
9 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** He looks like me. [laughter]

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** "He looks like me." [laughter] Okay. Next is
12 shark management needs in Puerto Rico, Wanda Ortiz.

13

14 **SHARK MANAGEMENT NEEDS IN PUERTO RICO**

15

16 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Yes. So, let's talk a little bit about some
17 things we should consider regarding shark management in Puerto
18 Rico and a few observations as well. Let's see if this works. Okay.
19 So, this is a very, how would you say, a variable group of fish,
20 sorry, that range from predators to omnivores, all classified under
21 the infraclass selachii. Worldwide they have been described around
22 544 species, and more are still being discovered, to this day, of
23 which 47 species have been reported in U.S. Caribbean waters, and
24 there are possibly more. As a group, they're facing global decline,
25 many of them, and this positions most of them among the most
26 threatened group of vertebrates and megafauna in the world.

27

28 So, these are some of the threats they are facing. The main threat
29 being overfishing. They're being captured as target and bycatch
30 species. In the case of Puerto Rico, they're mostly catch
31 incidentally. But what mostly has been affecting them from this
32 topic specifically is mixed fisheries because they're being
33 exploited for multiple uses that range from, meat for human
34 consumption and animal feed to skin to use the leather for
35 furniture; shark culls; also, one of the main threats is habitat
36 degradation and destruction of essential shark habitats. This is
37 particularly affected by coastal development and can particularly
38 affect species such as the lemon shark that exhibit native
39 phytolatory. So basically, the females go back to the place where
40 they were born to give birth themselves.

41

42 Other threats include pollution, marine debris, particularly from
43 entanglement, microplastic aspiration by filter feeding species
44 such as the basking shark and whale shark, and, of course, the
45 climate change. The effects of ocean warming, acidification, and
46 deoxygenation also referred to as deadly trio, which impacts the
47 prey availability, habitat quality, physiology, and so on.

48

1 But the decline is not due just to threats themselves. It's due to
2 a combination of certain factors instead. For example, the rate at
3 which these threats are increasing in magnitude and speed, how
4 exposed they are. The trend is the larger the shark is the least
5 productive or the lower its productivity is in comparison to
6 smaller sharks. Also, if their habitat range is in proximity to
7 the coast or densely human populated areas, and if their depth
8 range is limited, so the more exposed to these threats or human
9 impact the sharks will be. These threats with their life history
10 and poor inadequate management in some countries is what overall
11 contributes to their global decline.

12
13 So, these are the factors that come into play, and some things
14 that we should consider. Probably conducting an Ecological Risk
15 Assessment, also known as ERA, abbreviated, particularly a
16 productive and susceptibility assessment, which is essentially a
17 semiquantitative test or assessment in which we evaluate the
18 productivity of the sharks using certain parameters and compared
19 it or measured that with a certain threat they might be facing and
20 uses this ability for parameters of that specific threat. I'm not
21 going to go over all of these parameters, but this is a list that
22 can be used for it. For instance, in accessibility parameters, we
23 also consider the behavior in response to, for example, if the
24 threat we're considering is fishing, whether it be commercial or
25 recreational fishing. One of the things we could look over is the
26 behavior or change in behavior in response to that fishing, if
27 they're changing the migration patterns and aggregations. Also,
28 desirability and value if we are overfishing the specific stock or
29 if they're already overfished. Also, fishing effort versus product
30 value. If it has a low fishing effort or is a high valued species,
31 and so forth.

32
33 Even though Puerto Rico has a complicated baseline and catch
34 history, we do have some studies that have been done studying the
35 abundance, the relative abundance. For example, there was the
36 Global Fin Print Initiative led by the Florida International
37 University and carried out here in Puerto Rico by HJR Reefscaping
38 from 2017 to 2018, in which they use baited remote underwater
39 videos to assess a lot more biodiversity and relative abundance in
40 the south and west of Puerto Rico within the coral reef habitat.

41
42 So, in the sample sites they found that their findings were in
43 line with previous findings that there is low elasmobranch overall,
44 low elasmobranch diversity and relative abundance in Caribbean
45 coral reefs. And also, low presence or absence of large predatory
46 sharks, suggesting a low population sizes of this specific group.

47
48 When we, speak about large predatory sharks, we need to consider

1 that these are sharks that are ten feet or longer that live in
2 tropical waters and are predators, not filter feeders, like the
3 basking and the whale shark, which can be large species. And we
4 also need to consider that these sharks are typically the ones
5 that assume the top predator position within oceanic traffic webs.
6 And with this, they assume important ecological roles that also
7 expand beyond the ecological scope and can be economically
8 important as well. For instance, they exert top-down population
9 control that overall maintains balance in health within an
10 ecosystem, on which other commercially important species could be
11 depending on. They're also weeding out the sick and the dead, help
12 avoiding the spread of disease. And they also perform other roles
13 that are being undertaken by mesopredatory sharks, which are
14 smaller sharks. And once they assume this position, they could be
15 also carrying a function as a keystone species, which is basically
16 one of the factors that holds an ecosystem together, which means
17 that the loss of these sharks could lead to direct and indirect
18 effects, ecologically and economically as well. And something we
19 need to consider about this is that because of the fact that they
20 are large predatory sharks or because of their size, they could be
21 more exposed to certain threats than other sharks, especially if
22 they're coastal sharks that inhabit inland and neritic
23 environments.

24
25 Something that we should consider is social environmental studies,
26 because this could actually bring a bigger insight into what we're
27 dealing with. The shark populations we have and their condition.
28 Also, may suggest what other efforts need to be brought forth in
29 order to complement management strategies, such as workshops and
30 resources. I say this because there's this study that was led by
31 Emmanuel Maldonado with HJR Reefscaping in Isla Mar regarding the
32 sharks and the rays of Puerto Rico, in which they conducted a
33 series of interviews and analysis to a group of stakeholders, three
34 groups, fishers, conservationists, and the general public. They
35 found, actually, that lack of information, leads to negative
36 perception and that there's something that connects knowledge to
37 a more positive perception for sharks. And they also mentioned
38 that there's an interest in learning about sharks and rays in
39 Puerto Rico, and there is a dire need to be able to learn to tell
40 similar species apart. That way, they can know what species they're
41 dealing with and whether they're protected, regulated, or not. And
42 there is a specific group that also mentioned alternatives to shark
43 fishing within the study.

44
45 So, following, if we take, for example, the Global Fin Print
46 Initiative and follow their findings on the absence or low presence
47 of large predatory sharks, and we followed this criterion, large
48 sharks, predators that are possibly top consumers and have so many

1 important ecological worlds within the environment and coastal,
2 that they have a habitat range in proximity to the coast, inland
3 and neritic habitat range, which makes them more exposed to human
4 impact and have an overall low productivity, we could be measuring
5 their susceptibility, and we'll get these species.

6
7 From these species, their productivity parameters can range from
8 low to in between low and moderate and moderate productivity, or
9 score. From these species, these four had extremely low
10 productivity. What I mean by this is that all nine parameters
11 assessed for these species had a low score. From these guys-- Oh,
12 the scalloped hammerhead is already protected in territorial
13 waters because it is listing on the Endangered Species Act and
14 according to the new Wildlife Act of Puerto Rico. So, we're left
15 with these three guys.

16
17 An important thing that we should do along with this, if we ever
18 go forth with a management strategy to regulate or protect these
19 species in territorial waters, is we need a heavy educational
20 effort with it. Especially concerning shark ID. Particularly for
21 the dusky sharks, because this shark can be easily confused with
22 other members of their family, such as the Caribbean reef shark,
23 the silky shark, the galapagos shark, and other species as well.

24
25 So, with this, there are, of course, some challenges we need to
26 face head on. Species identification, we can improve that. We can
27 also improve data collection on landings and not only including
28 landings, also discards and releases if possible. That's something
29 that was suggested in Michelle Schärer's paper in 2019 and other
30 authors. We could also be improving our enforcement of current
31 regulations and addressing misinterpretation of current
32 regulations just to keep people informed in what applies and what
33 does not and where, if it's in federal waters and territorial
34 waters. And also, something we need to do is keep filling in the
35 gap of these data poor species, keep filling the gaps of
36 information. A problem that I've seen or noticed is there's not
37 enough research. Something very, very important we can do about
38 that is motivate and incentivize students and push educators to
39 develop courses and trainings so they can take on shark biology
40 and ecology research.

41
42 Currently, I'm working with a colleague named [inaudible] on a
43 photographic ID of shark species and also developing workshops of
44 shark ID. And as I said, we work together to improve data
45 collection sheets and improve just communication overall.

46
47 These are my-- hold on. I think it's frozen, but yeah. But what it
48 was next is my references, and if, you have any concern or

1 question, please let me know.

2
3 I wanted also to give a special thanks to Michelle Schärer and
4 Emmanuel Maldonado for filling in the gaps for me regarding this
5 specific topic in management. So, thank you so much to them for
6 helping with that. This is my personal information. Thank you.

7
8
9

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I have Kevin and then Graciela.

11
12 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Hi. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries Science
13 Center. Great talk. Really interesting. So, my group at the Science
14 Center is starting-- we don't have a good handle on sharks. We
15 also don't have a terribly good handle on the highly migratory
16 species. So, we want to look at the fishery aspects, of both of
17 those things, and so we're going to start that this summer. So, it
18 would be great to get with you and talk about how we can combine
19 efforts and get some good information going.

20
21 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Absolutely. Yeah. I can give you my business
22 card for that. Thank you.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

25
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramirez for the
27 record. I have to say I have seen you in action in those tables
28 and orientations that you give, and it's very impressive for me to
29 look at how, not only the way that you express the importance of
30 the sharks in our habitats, but also the way that people react
31 when you spread the word of they are not just like in the movies
32 that we have seen. At least our fishermen, that new generation,
33 are very scared of sharks. So, I wish, that you can work more with
34 the outreach and education in the Council and spread this very,
35 very important information with the fishermen, and not only that,
36 also with the restaurants.

37
38 Because I remember in the 90s there was a target for the shark's
39 fillet, and then suddenly that disappeared, especially, in the
40 West Coast. No one wants more meat shark. And for the past, I
41 think, two years, we have seen this growing again, but many
42 restaurants that are serving fillet, they don't even know what
43 they are serving. So, it's very important to spread this
44 information, especially the tables that you have, about
45 identification, the right ones, and the ones that have to continue
46 being protected.

47
48 I wish, as I told you, that you could be in the fish festival in

1 Puerto Real for the next summer. It's very important, the work
2 that you are doing. I'm very happy to hear Kevin say that you could
3 start sharing this information and working together because,
4 believe me, for the people that are down there, especially the new
5 generation of fishermen, they get very scared and sadly they are
6 killing sharks down there and just letting them there without
7 knowing what they are killing. Thanks.
8

9 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Thank you, Vanessa. Absolutely. I would love
10 to be a part of that, and you can count on me on whatever you need.
11

12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?
13

14 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay. So, we deal with the EEZ. I didn't
15 see any of the sharks that are really associated with the deepwater
16 snapper/grouper fisheries, the sixgill, and things like that. We
17 are in need of identifying all those associated with that fishery
18 and things like the spiny dogfish for which there are fisheries in
19 other areas, and that they are a pest for the deepwater snapper,
20 especially for the queen snapper fishers. So, you know, in that
21 sense, we need to think about that realm.
22

23 The one thing that I noticed regarding-- I mean, these most of
24 these sharks are territorial. Right? And being territorial, the
25 scale at which we're talking about here in Puerto Rico and the
26 Virgin Islands does not compare to where most of these sharks exist
27 in larger numbers. So, that's another thing that we need to
28 consider, you know, the basic scale of difference. And especially
29 when we're talking about spawning grounds or mating grounds like
30 the hammerheads of Güanica or the popping grounds in the area of,
31 Ceiba and Naguabo.
32

33 So, these are things that we need to bring to our attention because
34 of our efforts for EBFM, ecosystem-based fishery management.
35

36 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Yeah. Definitely. I would like for there to
37 be more students interested in assessing sharks that exhibit site
38 fidelity here in Puerto Rico because that could have important
39 implications regarding the habitat they're occupying and whether
40 or not this area has been exploited or not. But, yeah, for this
41 presentation, I wanted to focus on coastal sharks first, but
42 definitely, if you let me, I will keep talking about the
43 necessities for deep water sharks.
44

45 There was a recent paper that was published, recently, about the
46 threat the deep-water shark species is facing today because of
47 their liver oil that is used for multiple, multiple stuff. You
48 wouldn't even believe, like, candle making and vaccines and

1 medicines and whatnot. But, and also, the pelagic realm as well is
2 something that we should definitely be talking about.

3
4 But, yeah, I just, focus on the ones that could be more exposed of
5 for now, but there's a huge bunch of them that we should take a
6 look into. And also, the mesopredatory sharks that are coastal and
7 could, also, be performing important roles within the environment
8 and could be threatened as well at a certain degree.

9
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, specifically for the costal
11 pelagics, I mean, that territoriality, in terms of their spawning
12 areas, because I don't know if you've looked at the historical
13 information regarding, for example, when the Navy was here and the
14 attack on all the makos because they were man eating. I mean,
15 they're impressive pictures, everywhere. The same thing with the
16 recreational harvest and the commercial harvest of sharks because
17 they were part of the man-eating problem with commercial and
18 recreational fishers.

19
20 So, those things, you know, in terms of the historical information
21 and from pictures, you can identify specifically what species they
22 are. I will offer, if you are interested, a number of names that
23 were associated with that time when shark was everywhere, you know,
24 pinchos and fillet and you name it, they were available everywhere.
25 So, they do have a collection of photographs from those times.
26 That we should be able to make available.

27
28 But the identification of the species, you know, for all the
29 placemats that we had for fish ID would be perfect for the shark's
30 identification things. I mean, restaurants really, really love
31 them. So, thank you very much for that.

32
33 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Thank you.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

36
37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for your presentation. So, I have
38 a question regarding regulations. In terms of challenges, in terms
39 of, state versus federal regulations, if there's an issue there.
40 I know charts are not under purview of the Council, but it's, you
41 know, in multi species fisheries like the ones in Puerto Rico and
42 the U.S. Virgin Islands, our fishers' fish for reef fish, but they
43 may also go fishing for sharks, etcetera. So, there's that
44 connection with what we do over here. Plus, you know, sharks being
45 HMS species managed also by NOAA Fisheries.

46
47 So, what about challenges that you encounter, or you have seen in
48 terms of management and confusion of regulations or things like

1 that? If you can please tell us a little bit about that.

2
3 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Absolutely. What I have observed is that
4 there is a, like I mentioned in the presentation, a dire need for
5 people to be able to tell apart very similar species, especially,
6 sharks from the Carcharhinidae family because some of them are
7 have HMS regulations and the other don't. Something else that I've
8 noticed is that not everyone is on the same page concerning what
9 applies where. Because I've seen documents that says that HMS
10 regulations apply in federal waters and also in territorial waters.
11 And if you ask around, they say, "No. They only apply to federal
12 waters." Some other people could be telling you otherwise. So,
13 this generates a lot of confusion within fishers because they don't
14 know what they could catch or not, or land or not.

15
16 So, they often get scared and just, like, even though the shark is
17 already dead and they're not going to be-- you said because of the
18 fact that they don't know how to separate them and tell them apart,
19 and they don't know whether a regulation applies where they capture
20 the shark or not. They just discard it, and yeah. It basically
21 goes to waste. But yeah. Commercially speaking. So, yeah, those
22 are a few things that I've noticed and also heard about, often.
23 Yeah. Sure.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I want to thank you for accepting the invitation
28 when discussing it in Guyanilla, but please send me an email with
29 the specific regulation that you think should be addressed by the
30 local government. Although the Council does not have that much
31 leeway in terms of what we do with the sharks, that is HMS, they
32 are included in the ecosystem plan.

33
34 But things that we can do now is that we can help you with the
35 outreach and education. So, you can send me an email with a copy
36 to Dr. Alida Ortiz and Cristina, identifying topics that you think
37 are important in terms of outreach and education that we can do in
38 a fact sheet, maybe a little booklet identifying the sharks. But
39 we all know in order to identify the shark, you have to have an
40 intelligent next to you, and sometimes you have to take the sample
41 back to be able to tell them apart, unless they are a hammerhead.

42
43 And the other thing that we have discussed before is that in Puerto
44 Rico the give shark different names. Bacalao, empanadilla de
45 Chapin. They have fillet. They have shish kebab. In La Parguera
46 there was a guy from the Dominican Republic; he used to sell shark
47 meat as pork, as chicken. Anything but shark. He was selling that,
48 and we had a meeting and one of his friends said, "You better get

1 the hell out of here. Miguel is on the second floor, and he's going
2 to come down here to talk to people. And they will apprehend
3 anybody selling shark under different names.”
4

5 The point is that even the Sea Grant, when they have these issues,
6 and they have all kind of activities regarding outreach and
7 education, which I believe is important. So, thank you again for
8 accepting the invitation. Please send us that email as soon as you
9 can. One, to talk about the possible regulation that we can discuss
10 with the local governments and or the federal. And then, the
11 immediate thing that we can do, immediate, meaning within 2024,
12 outreach and education topics that you think are important that we
13 can help you with. Alida Ortiz will have a summer meeting of the
14 outreach and education. So, we have time to consider topics that
15 you think are important for the shark fishery, and the shark
16 population itself.
17

18 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Yeah. Absolutely. And thank you for bringing
19 the names up because names, common names of sharks here in Puerto
20 Rico actually vary regionally. And while some sharks are known by
21 a certain name and some other places are known by a totally
22 different name, and that can generate a lot of confusion. And it's
23 something that could be good on orienting or just teaching others
24 about.
25

26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela, now we have a chat.
27

28 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So a request. Anything that you have on
29 GIS on the distribution of these species for the EBFM approach,
30 would be really appreciated. We're developing a fishery ecosystem
31 plan, and that would include, you know, although we don't have
32 management of the sharks per se, but they are the top predator on
33 our fisheries. So, all that collaboration, you can let Liajay know
34 or me know. We would appreciate that. Thanks.
35

36 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Yeah. Sure. I don't have, a lot of
37 information, but you could definitely, for example, for the Global
38 Fin Print data, you can contact Michelle. She has the reports and
39 the paper for it. But, yeah, like, anything I have, I can send it
40 over.
41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Chat?
43

44 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Michelle Schärer. “Currently, there is a
45 department of marine sciences UPR student, Glorimar Franqui, also
46 working with deepwater sharks.”
47

48 Delisse Ortiz. “Thank you, Wanda. Please feel free to reach out to

1 me if you need any clarification on HMS regulations on federal
2 waters as you work on local shark regulations.”

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

5

6 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** Thank you.

7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I want to thank you. You know, sharks have a
9 safe haven on Saint Croix. We don't target them at all. We don't
10 hunt sharks. They're a nuisance to us because they take all our
11 fish, especially when the wahoos are running. Before you get to
12 land them, they take the wahoos. So, they have a safe haven in
13 Saint Croix.

14

15 **WANDA M. ORTIZ BÁEZ:** And, Jannette, wanted me to remind you that
16 there's a series of videos accessible from the Sea Grant social
17 media platforms about sharks and current situations that we've
18 have been dealing with for a while now. So, if you need that
19 information, you can always hop on our social platforms and see
20 those videos.

21

22 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, one more thing. I just remember that
23 the Council had the tiger grouper spawning aggregation surveys
24 that were conducted in the 90s, I think it was. Jesús León is over
25 here somewhere. So, our main problem there was the sharks attacking
26 the fish as they were pulling them out. But I don't think that
27 anyone did any identification of what sharks there were. So
28 spawning aggregation for us is a problem when we have too many
29 sharks.

30

31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Wanda. We're going to take a
32 quick five minute because we didn't have a break on the schedule
33 here for this afternoon. So, a quick 5, and then we'll get back to
34 finishing up.

35

36 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have got to get going so we can finish up
39 for the day.

40

41 Alrighty. We're going to get back to work here. Settle down.

42

43 Alrighty. So, we're going to continue with, the district advisory
44 panel reports. We're going to start with, Julia Magras.

45

46

47

48

DISTRICT ADVISORY PANELS REPORTS
ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN - JULIAN MAGRAS, CHAIR

1 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Well, it's very simple. Julia Magras for the
2 record. We only had one meeting so far this year. Are you guys
3 listening? Alright. I'm done.

4
5 So, we only had one meeting back on February 21st where we received,
6 two presentations. One was from the environmental justice team,
7 Brent and Heather Blough. And then we had another presentation on
8 the permits by Sarah Stephenson and María López. Out of that, we
9 were able to come up with six items which was presented to the EEJ
10 team. And yesterday, I was happy to see that a couple of those
11 items were chosen for funding. So, I don't need to list them, but
12 all of that was provided.

13
14 Actually, at that meeting, you know, my team normally likes me to
15 lead with what I think. So, at that meeting, I did things a little
16 bit different, and I made them come up with the items that we
17 chose. All I did was review them and make sure the wording was
18 correct, and I submitted it. I didn't have anything to do with it,
19 but being their full support, because going forward, that's one of
20 the things that I want to see. More engagement from the people who
21 sit on these committees.

22
23 As for the permits, we decided to table that for right now, but as
24 Miguel said, yesterday, Gerson and myself will join Nelson at his
25 meeting sometime here in the summer part in July, ending part of
26 July. We're going to look over the process that they're going to
27 be trying to do for one of their species or more than one. Maybe
28 we might even do a little input and have some discussions. Then
29 from there, we can decide if there's something in each one of our
30 island-based fishery management plans platforms that we think that
31 a permit might work. So, it's work in progress.

32
33 One thing that I must say, you know, over the last few meetings,
34 we have been working more and more closely together, the three
35 Chairs of the three different platforms. I find that to be very
36 important because, even though we manage each of our areas, which
37 are way different, sometimes we see something for their area, and
38 they would see something for our area, and we're able to
39 collaborate and help each other out, which I think is very, very
40 important. So, guys, thank you for us working together and continue
41 to work together.

42
43 One other thing that I'm going to give is some good news. MREP is
44 coming up, and it's coming up quickly. It's in Saint Croix. We
45 have, right now, 37 fishers between recreational, sports fishers,
46 commercial fishers between the Saint Thomas, Saint John and the
47 Saint Croix district that will be participating besides the
48 steering committees, the planning committee, and the different

1 individuals, federal and local agencies that will be presenting to
2 these fishers. I'm very excited that this is taking place on Saint
3 Croix. There was only one that took place in Saint Thomas in 2017.
4 I was part of that also. But this is going to be the first time
5 that we are able to give education like this to the Saint Croix
6 guys at a large scale.

7
8 Coming from Saint Thomas, with the help of, the Fisherman's
9 Association and my DAP members, we were able to get eight young
10 fishers to sign up for this event. When I say young, some of them,
11 our starting age is 18 years old for the meeting, for the training,
12 and I have, I think it's six of them who are 18 years old. And
13 they're actually running their dad's boat or they're fishing with
14 their uncle's boat. So, both male and female, and they would all
15 be traveling with me. I'm really, really looking forward for this
16 opportunity for them to learn and start to get involved in the
17 process like we have done.

18
19 I already have been asked, once they receive their certificates,
20 what does that mean? Well, it means that they can get more involved
21 and learn more, even join the DAP, join different committees, the
22 Fishery Advisory Committee. I think this is going to be a great
23 opportunity and a steppingstone for these fishers. So, I'm really,
24 really looking forward for that.

25
26 You know, there's several people in this room that will be
27 participating in it. Me and Carlos Farchette are the moderators.
28 So, you know, it's going to be great, and thank you for everyone
29 that's, supporting the effort in us to do this. You know? Fish and
30 Wildlife and their team, NOAA and their team, everyone. It's going
31 to be exciting, and I think when we report in August, I'm sure,
32 Courtney and her team, she couldn't be on today to speak about it.
33 She has a full day meeting, but I told her I would do it for her.
34 I think once they give the report back to the Council, you guys
35 would be very excited and happy. So, that concludes my report for
36 today. I'm open for any questions.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Julian. Question for Julian? Hearing
39 none, we have Gerson Martínez, Saint Croix, DAP.

40
41 **ST. CROIX, USVI - GERSON MARTÍNEZ, CHAIR**

42
43 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening, everybody.
44 My name is Gerson Martínez. I always say that I admire Mr. Magras,
45 and I always tell him if he ever runs for governor, I will vote
46 for him because he will look out for us.

47
48 You know, with that meeting, Brent brought a presentation. I'm

1 very proud of my fisherman. When MREP started talking about
2 meetings, I was pushing for the meetings to go over to Saint Thomas
3 because I had the feelings that our fisherman was not going to go.
4 But I forgot that there's a new generation of young fishermen that
5 are very enthusiastic into being involved. They asked me a lot of
6 questions, and when they told me the numbers of our fishermen that
7 are coming, I was really glad that these guys wanted to be part of
8 all of this process. I always tell them, I'm only one voice. I can
9 only do so much. But when there's more people together, things can
10 happen.

11
12 Well, my points that we came to was increased collaboration between
13 scientists and fishermen. We have issues with the availability and
14 climate changes. Also, encourage, that's one main thing that I
15 would say, encourage young people to get involved in fisheries.
16 Our Chair said today that they should put that in curriculum. I
17 totally agree with him because there's not a lot of people that
18 are enthusiastic of being a fisherman because so much negative
19 will be put against towards us. We are the monsters. We are the
20 guys that are taking everything out of the sea. But a lot of people
21 don't see that we are also involved in decision making. We are
22 also involved in protecting our resource, and we would like our
23 future generations to see our view, our side of the picture. That
24 we are here to live out of a resource, but also protect it for our
25 future generations.

26
27 Also, we need manage managers to work closely to monitor our
28 resource with the fishermen. I think that's about it. Thank you,
29 Mr. Chair.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Gerson. Any questions for Gerson?
32 Hearing none. Next is Nelson Crespo, DAP, Puerto Rico.

33
34 **PUERTO RICO - NELSON CRESPO, CHAIR**

35
36 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the last DAP joint meeting
37 a subcommittee was created to discuss the possibility of this
38 Council considering the alternative of establishing a federal
39 permit to fish deepwater snapper and grouper in the EEZ around
40 Puerto Rico. This committee met on February 28th, and among the
41 issues related to this permit, it was clarified that the permit
42 can be used to simply document how many fishermen fish for those
43 species or to control the fishing effort, meaning the number of
44 vessel and fishermen involved that will be allowed for the
45 management of the fishing reserve from a sustainable way and/or to
46 address issues related to the socioeconomics or of the resource or
47 both objectives.

48

1 If it were to be included, the limited entry mechanisms should be
2 established for these fisheries, it is recommended that the permits
3 have no monetary value and are not transferable without the
4 intervention of the government office in charge of this permit. It
5 is also recommended that a study be carried out on setting a
6 maximum limit on vessels for this fishing as well as adopting
7 current regulation on fishing gear.

8
9 Also, the DNER representative expressed that if this permit is
10 established, the Puerto Rico government will consider the
11 possibility of promulgating compatibility regulation with this
12 permit to the extent possible following the local law and
13 regulations. In addition, this Council must see if having a federal
14 permit for recreational fishing is warranted. Although this
15 subcommittee concluded that it is recommended for this Council to
16 begin the pertinent analysis to see if this permit would be
17 necessary and viable in subsequent consultation with the Puerto
18 Rico DAP member through our chat and phone calls, they understand
19 that it's necessary to hold a face-to-face meeting to clarify
20 doubts and bring additional recommendation before moving forward.

21
22 Some of the comment they expressed to me are that it's necessary
23 to regulate the small boats to discourage the boats that have the
24 capacity to fish for several consecutive days without the need to
25 return to port and can make their own ice on board. All fishing
26 must be landed in Puerto Rico to have a good sampling of it. It is
27 necessary to carry out an evaluation of this resource every five
28 years. Other also thought that a new federal permit for fishing
29 that is not carried out totally in federal waters does not seem
30 appropriate or consistent with the strategy of EEJ. That concludes
31 my report.

32 33 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nelson. Any questions for Nelson?
36 Vanessa?

37
38 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Nelson. Vanessa Ramirez for the
39 record. Just to be clear, the points that you are bringing about
40 the reports and the deepwater snappers, are those the ones that
41 are going to be brought to Ricardo in the next consultations that
42 they do?

43
44 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yeah. We, Ricardo attends the meeting as-- yeah.
45 Well, that is the upcoming stuff that we are going to bring to the
46 next meeting.

47
48 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Thanks.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further comments or questions for Nelson?
3 María?

4
5 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López. Nelson, can you clarify your
6 last point about the annexes between the permits and the EEJ that
7 you just mentioned?

8
9 **NELSON CRESPO:** I just put what the members brought to my table,
10 but one member considered that establishing a permit for a fishery
11 that is not developed only in federal waters, does not seem to be
12 appropriate and consistent with the strategy of EEJ. I asked him
13 to know to explain better what he meant, but I never received
14 feedback from him.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Anything further for Nelson? Hearing none.
17 Thank you much, Nelson. Miguel?

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not for Nelson, just for the record. We are going
20 to invite Vanessa to that meeting, not only as a member of the
21 Council but also as a member of the West Coast. So, we will let
22 you know. I believe the Chair will agree with that, that we can
23 send you an invitation and travel order for that meeting.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. So, the next thing on the
26 agenda is shipping lane. However, in the essence of time, we'll
27 table that for the August meeting. Since it's going to be on Saint
28 Croix, it'll be better to talk about that then. Lang Bank lies
29 about eight miles northeast of Saint Croix, so maybe a site visit
30 in order. Just kidding. Walk with your mask and snorkel. You'll
31 see great essential fish habitats. Andy?

32
33 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. And I'm fine with you tabling till the
34 next meeting. I think what would be very helpful though is if we
35 could description of the issue, even some maps and, you know,
36 graphics that could be shared with NOAA Fisheries beforehand, and
37 then we could at least start doing some contacts and communication
38 to kind of start researching the issue more thoroughly. So, if we
39 could work with you or the U.S.V.I. government on that.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Perfect. I did have a nav chart, but I'll mark
42 it on the nav chart. Yeah. Okay. So, the next thing, the
43 enforcement reports, we have Puerto Rico DNER, Daniel?

44
45 **ENFORCEMENTS REPORTS**
46 **PUERTO RICO DNER**

47
48 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** The Puerto Rico DNER Rangers Corp

1 Enforcement Report from October 1st.
2
3 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Daniel, I'm going to--
4
5 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** So sorry.
6
7 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** --get the presentation. Thank you.
8
9 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Okay. The Puerto Rico DNER Rangers Corp
10 Enforcement Report from October 1, 2023, to March 31st, 2024,
11 prepared by Ricardo López-Ortiz, Yamiré Pérez-Román, and Carmen
12 Santiago-Cruz.
13
14 Okay. In the top of this image, you will see two squares. The
15 border color is green. This is important. The first one is Puerto
16 Rico fisheries law 278. The rangers intercepted ten people who,
17 unfortunately, broke this fishing law. And the second green square
18 is the fisheries regulation 7949. In the past six months, it looks
19 like they were able to do 97 interventions with some recreational
20 and commercial fishers who unfortunately broke these regulations.
21 The rest of the of the graphic are regulations for the conservation
22 of territorial waters; anyone who litters in public or private
23 places. On the regulations for registration, navigation, and
24 aquatic safety, there were a lot. And also, Puerto Rico water
25 navigation safety law. So, but at least 97 people were intercepted
26 for broking the Puerto Rico fisheries regulation.
27
28 So, the cases are described in detail. The law 278, the green
29 square on the left. Well, fishing regulated by measures; so, some
30 species were caught before they reached the legal size. Others
31 were doing illegal fishing. That means, doing fishing without
32 license or during the closed seasons for some species. And other
33 people use equipment not permitted by the state. This is about the
34 law 278.
35
36 About the regulation 7949. Use of harpoon and SCUBA tank without
37 commercial license. This is forbidden. Illegal possession of
38 species during closure date. Lobster does not measure as required
39 by law. So, lobster, under the size of 3.5 inches in carapace
40 length. This is the minimum legal size. Possession of queen conch,
41 not complying with the size limit. Fishing in an area not allowed.
42 And excess of queen conch possession on recreational and commercial
43 fish fishing.
44
45 Recently, last Monday, April 8, the rangers intercepted a few
46 landings, and they were in compliance. So, good news. This is the
47 picture of the bucket we saw. Those are deepwater snappers.
48 Unfortunately, they also intercepted an undersized yellowtail

1 snapper. The minimum legal size is 10.5 inches of fork length.
2 Unfortunately, this was a recreational person, so the rangers
3 continue to work to enforce the fishing regulation and the fishing
4 law.

5
6 If you have question, you can contact Ricardo López or Yamiré Pérez
7 on their phones which you can see in the screen. Thank you so much.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Daniel. Any questions for Daniel?
10 Okay. Hearing none. Thanks again, Daniel.

11
12 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** You're welcome.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Then we have, DPNR is not here on this meeting
15 today, and neither is the U.S. Coast Guard. Oh, yeah. Go ahead.
16 Sorry.

17
18 **U.S.V.I. DPNR**

19
20 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** No problem. I don't have any specific
21 statistics other than our routine, inspections as it relates to
22 the JEA were conducted for the quarter. I do know that we have
23 been in communication with NOAA OLE regarding the JEA. I think
24 we're trying to sort out some issues in terms of award and
25 agreement, cost cuts, that kind of thing. So, we're still working
26 out those issues right now, as far as I'm aware of. And that's it.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, commissioner. Miguel?

29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. So, do you have a memorandum of the standing
31 for enforcement, OLE?

32
33 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** So, with OLE, once every five years, I
34 believe, we sign an agreement. We did not have an agreement in
35 place, I believe, for fiscal year '20 into '21. But we were still
36 conducting the inspections, just not at the volume that's required
37 under the agreement. I think one of the big problems that we have
38 is that the volume that's being requested is not consistent \$94,000
39 that they are providing. It's much, much more intensive to get the
40 numbers that is being requested, based on boat time, staff hours,
41 those types of things. So, trying to sort that out is what we're
42 trying to do.

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, because I believe that's more or
45 less the same issue that we have with Puerto Rico with the
46 agreement. So, anyway, we cannot say anything from the point of
47 view of the Council, but I'm sure that they take note and they can
48 work together to see if we can-- everybody is now short of money,

1 so we don't expect to have a lot of money. But now that this year
2 is an election year, maybe there are some people that are happy to
3 enhance this memorandum. For the rest of the group and the Council,
4 this is important because both, the local government and federal
5 government, they rely on each other to patrol these waters and
6 make it effective enforcement.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. So, NOAA Fisheries Law
9 Enforcement? Sorry. Sabater?

10
11 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a question about law enforcement. In the
12 newsletter of the Billfish Foundation, and I believe too, in IGFA
13 or in ILTTA, something about in Puerto Rico and some parts of the
14 states, they're going to put in a regulation on the speed that
15 boats can be in the lanes where whales are. Is that in progress?
16 Does anybody know about that? Because it's all over the Billfish
17 Foundation and--

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

20
21 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, what you're referring to is that
22 there is currently a vessel speed rule that applies to vessels
23 that are 65 feet and larger on the Atlantic seaboard, and that's
24 intended to reduce the risk to North Atlantic right whales, which
25 are listed as endangered species, and their population is in
26 decline. Threats to right whales, currently, the two major threats
27 are vessel strikes and entanglement with fishing gear. It's based
28 on data and information. There's indication that vessels smaller
29 than 65 feet are also negatively affecting the right whale
30 population. And so, the agency has proposed a rule, and so it's
31 just a proposed rule at this point that would put vessel speed
32 restrictions in place for vessels that I believe are 40 or 35 feet
33 and larger. Now that's proposed at this point, it hasn't been
34 finalized.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** The NOAA law enforcement.

37
38 **NOAA FISHERIES OLE**

39
40 **PATRICK P. O'SHAUGHNESSY:** Hi. Pat O'Shaughnessy, Supervising
41 Enforcement Officer for NOAA Office of Law Enforcement. First off,
42 before I get started, Mr. Strelcheck covered that rule, but the
43 right whale speed zones don't travel as far south as the U.S.
44 Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico. So, it's midway down the East Coast
45 of Florida. So, should that rule get approved, and enacted, it
46 would not really impact anybody in Puerto Rico or U.S. Virgin
47 Islands. So, it will impact me and everybody north if it does.

1 So, welcome us. Assistant Director Manny Antonaras passed his
2 regards and not being able to attend here. So, he hopes to attend
3 again in the future. So, next slide.

4
5 A couple initial reminders, the seasonal spawning closures,
6 grouper species in federal waters off Puerto Rico and the U.S.
7 Virgin Islands goes through April 30th. So, there's six more days
8 of that closure. Same with the Grammanik Bank. Any non-HMS species
9 is prohibited through April 30th. So, six more days for that
10 closure. And then the mutton and lane in federal waters of Puerto
11 Rico and the Virgin Islands, through June 30th. So, another two
12 months for that. The same with the mutton spawn aggregation area
13 through June 30th.

14
15 Two, we just wanted to highlight the shark retention prohibitions.
16 Two sharks have recently added, the oceanic whitetip and
17 hammerheads are now prohibited sharks throughout all U.S. waters,
18 including the Caribbean. That's a commercial and recreational ban.
19 Obviously, dealers are included as well. That went into effect
20 February 2nd.

21
22 Given all the talk with queen conch and items now on the threatened
23 and Endangered Species Act, I went back and looked. Hammerheads
24 were added as a threatened species under the ESA in 2013 and
25 oceanic whitetip sharks were added as threatened under the ESA in
26 2018. So, here we are in 2024, and they both have been now added
27 as a prohibited species.

28
29 Couple of operations and cases to highlight. First one, we did a
30 joint operation in the port of Charlotte Amalie, Saint Thomas,
31 where we had two officers, one from Cape Canaveral, one from Miami,
32 joined Alex Terrero who's assigned there in Saint Thomas, and did
33 a weeklong operation where all seafood coming in through the
34 airport, the port, or by ferry from the British Virgin Islands,
35 they inspected all of those shipments as they came in. A couple of
36 minor mislabeling or repackaging seafood products issues came up
37 during that weeklong, but nothing other, which is good because
38 Alex has done a lot of work educating shippers on what is required
39 to bring things in.

40
41 I did have a question earlier in the Council meeting regarding
42 queen conch coming in and whether we check for CITES permits. And
43 that is something that Alex does check. He has educated, CBP
44 extensively on it, so he gets a call for all of those shipments.
45 He checks for both, the CITES permits as well as the U.S. Fish and
46 Wildlife, service permit, which is required to import any of those
47 species. And he has identified, in the last year three, shipments
48 that did not have the required items. Those items were not allowed

1 entrance into United States and were sent back to the British
2 Virgin Islands and Anguilla. So, Alex is having a big deterrent
3 effect and has educated a lot of overseas shippers and U.S.
4 recipients on what is required to have those shipments coming to
5 United States.

6
7 We got a couple of cases to highlight, but since they were all
8 done by Miguel, I'll let him jump in and cover them himself.

9
10 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Good afternoon. My name is Miguel Borges. I'm the
11 agent for NOAA Office of Law Enforcement here in San Juan, Puerto
12 Rico. I cover all the Caribbean as well.

13
14 The report for this quarter. I did an underway patrol with DNER in
15 February when we had the closures for the three protected areas in
16 the West Coast of Puerto Rico. So, we patrolled the Bajo de Sico,
17 Abrir la Sierra, and Tourmaline. During their closures, we boarded
18 several, five or six, vessels in the area. We had a couple
19 violations. One of them was red hind that was during the close
20 season. Red hind closes, December 1st through last day of February.
21 And one fisherman had a red hind on board, so he was fined. Some
22 of the settlement was sent and paid toward that violation. We also
23 had another violation in another vessel, but that's still under
24 investigation. We'll talk about that one, probably, in August.

25
26 Then, other cases that we have to report are criminal cases. We
27 could start with the one on the bottom, endangered species. We
28 charged an individual with an ESA take of a sea turtle. That was
29 back in-- last year. I think it was, like, in October. He was
30 sentenced to one year probation and some fines. We concluded that
31 case, the criminal case.

32
33 The most recent case is that eel case. We saw a more interesting
34 case because the species is so different, something that we don't
35 see that often. Almost nobody even knew that we had that amount of
36 eels. That case was-- so Coast Guard called me with a case that
37 they stopped the vessel. You can see, that's the one that showed
38 in that top right picture. They stopped it north of Puerto Rico,
39 and they had 22 bags of live eels. You can see that picture there.
40 They are at their juvenile stage; they're called glass eels.

41
42 Here, I want to do a shout out to DNER, which helped us immensely
43 during that case. Specifically, Ricardo López, who was constantly
44 on the phone with me answering calls. He had a little more
45 knowledge on that species, so we thank him for that help. I think
46 that was during the meeting of the DAPs, and he was both on the
47 call and on the meeting as well.

48

1 So, anyways, there were two individuals from the Dominican Republic
2 exporting over 100,000 eels, live eels from Puerto Rico. Supposedly
3 caught in the rivers of Puerto Rico. We discovered that this is a
4 multimillion-dollar industry that's going on in the Chinese
5 market. The Chinese market buys all those eels. They grow them,
6 and then they sell them. They are mostly for sushi. The importance
7 of this species is that, so far, they haven't been able to be
8 reproduced in captivity. So, they need the wild ones. So, it's a
9 very, very lucrative business.

10
11 There are also huge cases, criminal cases in the East Coast of
12 United States and Virginia and Maryland with the trafficking of
13 these eels to China. Both individuals were arrested. The Coast
14 Guard stopped them. We took the case, NOAA, along with Fish and
15 Wildlife, and transferred the two individuals to us and all the
16 evidence with the 22 bags full of eels. We charged the two
17 individuals with three felony charges, one lacey act trafficking,
18 smuggling goods from the United States, and failure to heave, too.
19 That failure to heave is that they didn't stop upon command from
20 the Coast Guard. So, Coast Guard had to use force to stop the
21 vessel. So, the three are felonies. Three felony charges. So, that
22 was a very recent case last month. So, it's still ongoing.

23
24 I think that's all for that case. Next slide.

25
26 **PATRICK P. O'SHAUGHNESSY:** That's everything we had. I did want to
27 highlight; I commend that video for the descending device that was
28 shown. That was a fantastic video, and I'm glad to see that it's
29 come down here. The South Atlantic Council, back on July 15, 2020,
30 enacted the descending device rule for all South Atlantic
31 fisheries. Every snapper/grouper vessel, both commercial and
32 recreational, are required to have a descending device on board,
33 and it's supposed to be readily available, rigged and ready, and
34 we've been enforcing that for the last four years.

35
36 Just talking to the fishermen, they'll readily admit, particularly
37 the commercial, no longer do you see a line of vessels, a line of
38 fish behind the vessel that are floating unable to get to the
39 bottom, because the descending device works so well. Yes. People
40 use venting tools, but unless you're a professional and you vent
41 it properly, you often do more damage poking that fish in your
42 intent to try to save it, and it doesn't make it to the bottom and
43 survive so it can be counted and caught in the future.

44
45 So, I'm excited to see that that video was out there, and I hope
46 it gets some wide viewing because it has shown some tangible
47 results in the South Atlantic. And that's all OLE has, unless
48 anyone has any questions.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Questions for OLE. Okay. We have
3 someone on chat.
4

5 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
6

7 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Michelle Schärer. "Are the two species of
8 shark retention prohibitions applicable in local Puerto Rico and
9 in U.S.V.I. waters as well or only in the EEZ?"
10

11 **PATRICK P. O'SHAUGHNESSY:** That would be in all U.S. waters, not
12 solely the EEZ.
13

14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, the last question from Pat is very
15 important because the reason we started, Marcos and I, started
16 discussing this issue, was exactly because of the South Atlantic.
17 When we talked to the South Atlantic Council, they have this, and
18 the idea is to have it throughout the southeast region. So, we
19 wanted to have this opportunity to give an orientation, outreach
20 and education first. But the idea that Marcos wanted is to see if
21 there is room for a regulation similar to what they have in South
22 Atlantic. So far, fishermen are receptive of this, but they all
23 wanted to know what is involved. How can they have this descending
24 device? So, I'm glad that you mentioned that today.
25

26 **PATRICK P. O'SHAUGHNESSY:** Yeah. One other thing I'll point out
27 about the South Atlantic regs, although it makes it somewhat
28 difficult for law enforcement, but you could have a self-produced
29 device as well. So, if you design and make something yourself, a
30 hook with a barb clipped off and a weight, and you can attach it
31 and show that it works, we've even had milk crates, weighted milk
32 crates where they put the fish in the milk crate, drop the weight
33 on, it goes to the bottom, you jerk the milk crate up and the fish
34 swims out. So, it does provide that availability to folks to design
35 their own device that they don't have to purchase one from
36 somewhere else. So.
37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
39

40 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I just want to, once again, extend gratitude for
41 all the work that Alex has been doing in Saint Thomas/Saint John.
42 You know, I work very closely with him. Anytime I see any issues,
43 I can call him. I actually called him at seven o'clock this morning
44 with an issue. I sent him the information that was posted in
45 Facebook, and he told me he was going to go and investigate it
46 tomorrow because it's happening, yeah, tomorrow. It's happening
47 tomorrow, so he's going to go and investigate a shipment of fish
48 that's coming in from Dominica. So, yeah, any issues that we have

1 had, you know, he has been right on top of it once he's available.
2 And also, the good thing that you mentioned is the education that
3 not only gives to the different areas, but he also gives it to the
4 fishermen. So, I am very grateful for all the work that he's been
5 doing in the U.S.V.I. Thank you.

6
7 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Michelle Schärer, "Is the case of traps
8 found inside the Red Hind Bank MCD still ongoing?"

9
10 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Yes. I could take that. Yes. That's still an
11 ongoing case. Hopefully, we could, report on it once it's finished,
12 maybe in August. Thanks.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you.

15
16 **MIGUEL BORGES:** But the traps were taken out, just to clear that.
17 Yes.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. I'm kind of glad to hear about
20 that there are two sharks, a whitetip and a hammerhead, actually
21 to the shoreline is prohibited take. So, when I go back, I'm going
22 to have enforcement do some outreach to the fishers because I don't
23 think they're aware of that right now. Thanks.

24
25 Any more questions for enforcement? Gerson?

26
27 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good afternoon. Gerson Martínez for a record. We
28 can also add it in our chat, and almost 80 people will get that
29 automatically in there and that would roll with them.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Very, very good point. Thanks. And on May 8th
32 at the FAC, remind me we put that on the agenda.

33
34 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** I was saying that we're going to put that in our
35 chat. We have a chat for the Saint Croix fishermen. We're going to
36 put that in so that word will be spread.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next on the agenda is Advisory Body
39 Membership.

40
41 **ADVISORY BODIES MEMBERSHIP**

42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Following the procedure
44 that we have, which we had a closed session to discuss all this.
45 We have recommendations for you to consider today for all the
46 panels that are within the advisory body groups that we have. I
47 consulted with, the three Chairs, Julian, Gerson, and Nelson
48 Crespo, regarding the composition of their Advisory Panels at this

1 time. In the case of the Puerto Rico Advisory Panel, we are
2 submitting for consideration the reappointment of Gary Wayne
3 Rogers, Joel González, José Chaar, Edwin Javier Arroyo, Carlos
4 Velázquez, Nelson Crespo, you better appoint that guy. Roberto
5 Silva, Gustavo Cruzado Rodríguez, Cedric Taquin for another term
6 in the Puerto Rico District Advisory Panel. The way that we have
7 it is once I read this, you say so I move and then you are second
8 and then you discuss. And then finally, you vote. So, we need a so
9 I move, a second, I have no motion.

10

11 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.

12

13 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.

14

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion? Having none, we'll take it to
16 a vote. Just a general aye or is it a vote.

17

18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. All in favor, say aye.

19

20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say "aye."

21

22 **GROUP:** Aye.

23

24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
25 carries.

26

27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And then Nelson will bring for the next meeting,
28 some suggestion as to one open seat that we have at the Puerto
29 Rico District Advisory Plan. Nelson or anybody actually from Puerto
30 Rico who knows the fisherman either recreational or commercial or
31 a member of the industry. It could be a restaurateur or a seller
32 or dealer, for the Council to consider that appointment during the
33 next meeting in August. Okay?

34

35 That's it. In the case of, Saint Thomas/Saint John, the group
36 recommends reappointing Gregory Ledee, Julian Magras, Daryl Bryan,
37 Ruth Gomez, Joshua Quetel, Shirley Ledee, Gilbert Mathew Laban.
38 Elizabeth Kadison, now she's a member of the SSC, so you have a
39 vacancy in the DAP. You will see that in the next recommendation.
40 Jessica Petersen and Winston Ledee. Christy Berry and Collin Butler
41 will retire by the end of the year, but you can reappoint them for
42 the time being. That's the information I got from Julian. And then
43 Julian will bring, during the meeting in December, possible
44 candidates who will replace those two people who are going to
45 retire this year from the DAP in Saint Thomas.

46

47 We also need another motion for recommendation. So, the first
48 motion will be to reappoint the people that I just read for the

1 record.
2
3 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.
4
5 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Vanessa motion. Kreglo, second. Any
8 discussion?
9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I'm in favor of that.
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Hearing none, we'll take it to a vote. All in
13 favor, say "aye."
14
15 **GROUP:** Aye.
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
18 carries.
19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The last motion regarding the DAP in Saint
21 Thomas, we have a vacancy there. We have a friend of ours who would
22 like to be considered for membership in the DAP. Tony Blanchard,
23 a former member of the Council for nine years. I tell you when he
24 left, he was the vice Chair of the Council. I believe that
25 everybody knows Tony.
26
27 So, the recommendation is by Julian for the Council to consider
28 the appointment of Louis Blanchard for a term as a DAP Saint
29 Thomas/Saint John member.
30
31 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.
32
33 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.
34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Vanessa, seconded by Kreglo. Any
36 discussion? Hearing none, we'll take it to a vote. All in favor,
37 say, "aye."
38
39 **GROUP:** Aye.
40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
42 carries.
43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The next one, we
45 consulted with Gerson Martínez and yourself regarding the DAP Saint
46 Croix. Tom Daley is retiring so we have a vacancy there. So, you
47 can bring to the next Council meeting a replacement for that
48 position. But at this time, we would like you to consider

1 reappointment of Randy Brewington, Edward Schuster, Patricia Skov,
2 Mike Fuller, Gerson Martínez, Marcia Taylor, William Tobias,
3 Michael Funk, and Michelle Pugh.

4

5 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.

6

7 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.

8

9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Moved by Vanessa. Seconded by Kreglo. Any
10 discussion? Hearing none. All in favor, say "aye."

11

12 **GROUP:** Aye.

13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
15 carries.

16

17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Then, we have two spaces. Dave Gubser and Thomas
18 Daley, as I mentioned. Those should be considered for the next
19 meeting. I encourage people for Saint Croix to bring candidates
20 for the DAP Saint Croix to fill those two vacancies. We have one
21 open seat, and it was suggested to have Gerson Martínez Jr., for
22 a term as member of the DAP, Saint Croix. Do we need a motion?

23

24 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.

25

26 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.

27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Vanessa, seconded by Kreglo. Any
29 discussion? All in favor for, Nickeyto, say "aye." [laughter]

30

31 **GROUP:** Aye.

32

33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
34 carries.

35

36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Then the next group is the Outreach and Education
37 Panel. We are here recommending reappointment for another term of
38 Alida Ortiz, present Chair of the OEAP, Stephanie Díaz, Jannette
39 Ramos, Nicole Greaux, Ruth Gomez, Vilmarie Román, Gerson Martínez,
40 Kim Iverson, Emily Muehlstein, Liandry De La Cruz, and Adyan Ríos.
41 In the case of Kim Iverson and Emily, they represent the Gulf
42 Council and the South Atlantic Council. They have been instrumental
43 in sharing information between the three Councils. We have learned
44 from each other. They have copied things from us, and we have
45 copied others from them. Cristina and Diana attend the meetings
46 that they have every year. They're also working with them, as part
47 of the-- what do you call the panel? That name?!? Jesus! Outreach
48 and Education Panel of the South Atlantic Council. The last one,

1 for the appointment, is Wilson Santiago.
2
3 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.
4
5 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Vanessa, seconded by Kreglo. Any
8 discussions? Hearing none, we'll take it to a vote. All in favor,
9 say "aye."
10
11 **GROUP:** Aye.
12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
14 carries.
15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You must be tired of my
17 voice already, so I will ask Graciela to tell us about the
18 Scientific and Statistical Committee. We need to replace-- I mean,
19 fill one vacancy.
20
21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, we would need a motion to reappoint
22 all of the SSC members that are in place now. I'm going to read
23 their names for the record. Jorge García-Sais, Richard Appeldoorn,
24 Juan J. Cruz-Motta, Todd Gedamke, Eric H. Williams, Michelle T.
25 Schärer-Umpierre, Vance Vicente, Walter Keithly, Tarsila Seara,
26 and Jason Cope.
27
28 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.
29
30 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Second.
31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by Vanessa, seconded by Kreglo. Any
33 discussion? Hearing none. All in favor, say "aye."
34
35 **GROUP:** Aye.
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
38 carries.
39
40 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, as Miguel said,
41 we do have one vacancy in the SSC. There is a new recommendation
42 for Elizabeth Kadison from the U.S. Virgin Islands to be appointed
43 to the SSC.
44
45 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** So moved.
46
47 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion by James Kreglo, seconded by Vanessa.
2 Any discussion? Hearing none. All in favor, say "aye."

3
4 **GROUP:** Aye.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays?

7
8 **UNKNOWN 1:** Nay.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** One nay. Any abstention? Motion carried.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I finished the advisory
13 body section of the agenda.

14
15 **OTHER BUSINESS**

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Do we have anything for other business?

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I don't know. It's up to you guys.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin.

22
23 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I saw that there was something in the chat.
24 There was a question in the chat from Michelle.

25
26 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** She said, "Tarsila Seara is no longer on
27 the SSC."

28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We talked so quick that she didn't learn that.
30 She's a member of the SSC for another term.

31
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, just to follow-up on that. I know at one time
33 there was some question on whether she'd be able to continue, but
34 it turns out she will be? Okay. Terrific. Thank you.

35
36 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any other business? So, we have a 5-
39 minute public comment period. Anyone dare? [laughter]

40
41 No public. No public comments.

42
43 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** In a chat.

44
45 **NEXT MEETINGS**

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** In a chat? Oh, okay. No? Okay. We're good.
48 Alrighty.

1
2 The next meeting will be in August on the beautiful island of Saint
3 Croix. The date would be, I think, somewhere around there.
4
5 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** Okay. I already made all the pertinent
6 reservations for the conference room at the Buccaneer Hotel. So,
7 I will be sending everybody the link for entering and making the
8 reservations. Please, when you receive it, make those reservations
9 as soon as possible. Thank you.
10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Do we have the date? Is it 11th of August?
12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. 11th of August.
14
15 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** What?
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The 13th?
18
19 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** No.
20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. Wait. 13th and 14th August.
22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** 13th and 14th of August.
24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We also would like to encourage you to make your
26 airplane reservations on time because there's only one airline
27 with an avion gordito. The others are the little, scary, small
28 planes. So, we're serious about it.
29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we only have a couple big airlines that
31 come to Saint Croix. American, Delta, and Spirit, but Delta is,
32 like, once a week.
33
34 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** We have 2. We have Silver and Cape Air.
35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes.
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Yeah. But those are--
39
40 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Cape Air is very expensive.
41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Those are mosquitoes.
43
44 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Yeah. They cancel a lot of flights.
45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Cape Air. We used to call it Cape Fear
47 because of--
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?
2
3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Just a just a quick question. This is Kevin
4 McCarthy, Science Center. Do we know yet when the SSC meeting will
5 be? That's normally a week or two ahead, or is that yet to be
6 determined?
7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, do you have any idea? Yet to be
9 determined? Okay.
10
11 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you.
12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, before we sign off, I want to give a
14 special thank you to our translator, Señor Cordero and our
15 recording technician, Alberto Font. Okay. Oh, yes. And the
16 technician for Cordero, Alberto Suarez. There we go. Give him a
17 hand. And also, for our behind-the-scenes staff, Cristina and
18 Liajay. Thank you. And Kiara. Who's Kiara? Oh, Kiara. Okay.
19
20 So, thank you very much. This meeting is adjourned. It is 4:44,
21 April-- my god --24, 2024.
22
23 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 24, 2024.)