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PAGE 39: Request the SSC to review pelagic (year 2022) and spiny lobster (years 2020-2022) annual catch limit and annual catch target overages at their next meeting. The motion carried on page 42.

PAGE 42: Request staff to develop a presentation/paper for next Council meeting for spiny lobster accountability measures. The motion carried on page 42.

PAGE 55: Request the Council prepare a letter to the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Environmental Resources and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources to request compatible regulations with Amendment 2 to the Island-Based FMPs trawl, net gear, and descending devices. The motion carried on page 58.

PAGE 62: Motion for the Council to share any final action taken by the Council with the Department of Natural Environmental Resources and Department of Planning and Natural Resources and include any justification and supporting documentation used in making that decision. The motion carried on page 64.

PAGE 64: Motion for the Council to prepare a letter to the Puerto Rico DNER and the U.S. Virgin Islands DPNR to request compatible regulations with Amendment 3 to the Island-Based Fishery Management Plans- Management Measures for Dolphinfish and Wahoo. The motion carried on page 65.

PAGE 83: Council moves to select Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative under Framework Action 3 to the Saint Croix Fishery Management Plan - Modification of Queen Triggerfish Status Determination Criteria and Reference Points. The motion carried on page 88.

PAGE 88: The Council moves to select Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative under Framework Action 3 to the Saint Thomas/Saint John Fishery Management Plan - Modification of Queen Triggerfish Status Determination Criteria and Reference Points. The motion carried on page 89.

PAGE 89: The Council moves to approve Framework Action 3 and submit the action to the Secretary of Commerce for review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to the Framework Action3. We give the Council Chair the authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule and regulations as necessary and appropriate for implementing Framework Action 3. The

1 [motion carried on page 91.](#)

2

3 [PAGE 225](#): Motion for the Council to submit a letter of support of  
4 the exempt fishing permit application referenced in docket #2024-  
5 0127 submitted by researchers Dr. Virginia Servette and Dr. Jesús  
6 M. Rivera. [The motion carried on page 227.](#)

1                                   **CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
2                                   **185<sup>th</sup> REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**  
3                                   **HYBRID MEETING**  
4                                   **EMBASSY SUITES HOTEL**  
5                                   **CAROLINA, PUERTO RICO**

6  
7                                   DECEMBER 04-05, 2024  
8

9   The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened at the Embassy  
10 Suites Hotel in Carolina, Puerto Rico on Tuesday morning, December  
11 04, 2024, and was called to order at 9:00 A.M. by the Council  
12 Chairman Carlos Farchette.  
13

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

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:**   Okay. Good morning, everyone. So, welcome to  
17 the 185th Caribbean Fisheries Management Council being held in San  
18 Juan, Puerto Rico at the Embassy Suites Hotel, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024.  
19 Oh, 4th. Sorry. I'm lost here. Andy's laughing at me.  
20

21   So, we're going to start with the roll call. I'm going to start on  
22 my right with Clay Porch.  
23

24 **CLAY PORCH:**   Clay Porch, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Fishery Science  
25 Center.  
26

27 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:**   Good morning. Andrew Mcgraw-Herdeg from  
28 U.S. Coast Guard, Sector San Juan.  
29

30 **ROBERTO SABATER:**   Roberto Sabater, Council Member.  
31

32 **ANNE M. KERSTING:**   Anne Kersting, Office of NOAA General Council.  
33

34 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:**   Kate Zamboni, NOAA's Office of General  
35 Council.  
36

37 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:**   María López, designee for Andy Strelcheck,  
38 NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office.  
39

40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:**   Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.  
41

42 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:**   Ricardo López, Council Member, DNR Puerto  
43 Rico.  
44

45 **SENNAI HABTES:**   Sennai Habtes, EBFM TAP Chair, Council designee  
46 for commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol, DPNR U.S.V.I.  
47

48 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:**   Good morning. Graciela García-Moliner,  
49

1 Council Staff.  
2  
3 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Good morning. Liajay Rivera  
4 García, Council Staff.  
5  
6 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Cristian Olán, Council Staff.  
7  
8 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, everybody. Gerson Martinez, DAP  
9 Chair, Saint Croix.  
10  
11 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair  
12 of Puerto Rico.  
13  
14 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Morning, everyone. Julian Magras, DAP Chair, Saint  
15 Thomas/Saint John.  
16  
17 **VANCE VICENTE:** Vance Vicente, Scientific and Statistical  
18 Committee Chairman.  
19  
20 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** María Irizarry, Council Staff.  
21  
22 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Kevin McCarthy, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast  
23 Fisheries Science Center.  
24  
25 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Jannette Ramos-García, Outreach and  
26 Education Chair.  
27  
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Good morning. Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.  
29  
30 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos Caraballo, Puerto Rico  
31 Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.  
32  
33 **VICTORIA VITAL:** Victoria Vital, NOAA Fisheries.  
34  
35 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Colleen O'Brien, University of Miami and  
36 Southeast Fisheries Science Center.  
37  
38 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Good morning. Jennifer Pytka, CIMAS, Southeast  
39 Fisheries Sciences Center.  
40  
41 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good morning. Nicole Greaux, Saint Thomas/Saint  
42 John Fisheries Liaison.  
43  
44 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico  
45 Fisheries Liaison.  
46  
47 **MICHELLE L. WALSH:** Mick Walsh, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional  
48 Office.

1  
2 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good morning. Sarah Stephenson, Southeast  
3 Regional Office.

4  
5 **LAURA CIMO:** Good morning. Laura Cimo, NOAA Fisheries Office of  
6 International Affairs Trade and Commerce.

7  
8 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Buenos días. Martha Prada, CFMC IRA coordinator.

9  
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you. Cristina, can you read the names of  
11 the people on the Internet?

12  
13 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We have Andrew Strelcheck, Refik  
14 Orhun, James Kreglo, Yamitza Rodríguez, Rachel Banton, Chelsea and  
15 Evan Tuohy, Cynthia Grace. That's it. The rest of them are in the  
16 room. Guillermo Cordero, our interpreter, is here, and Alberto,  
17 the 2 Albertos.

18  
19 **ELECTION OF OFFICIALS**

20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Carlos Farchette, Council  
22 Chair.

23  
24 So, we got a little swearing thing going on here. Give us a second.

25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Ella lo va a hacer, no te apures. Just sit down.  
27 Be cool.

28  
29 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, this is the swearing-in of the Council  
30 Members, Vanessa Ramírez and Carlos Farchette. You have your oaths,  
31 so I will do it with you. You can stand up. If you want. So, I  
32 will start with you. I will read the first two and then you continue  
33 in unison.

34  
35 So as trustees of the nation's fishery resources, all voting  
36 members must take an oath specified by the secretary as follows.

37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I Carlos Farchette.

39  
40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I Vanessa Ramírez.

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE and VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** As a duly appointed member  
43 of a Regional Fishery Management Council established under the  
44 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, hereby  
45 promise to conserve and manage the living marine resources of the  
46 United States of America by carrying out the business of the  
47 Council for the greatest overall benefit of the Nation. I recognize  
48 my responsibility to serve as a knowledgeable and experienced

1 trustee of the Nation's marine fisheries resources, being careful  
2 to balance competing private or regional interests, and always  
3 aware and protective of the public interest in those resources. I  
4 commit myself to uphold the provisions, standards, and  
5 requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and  
6 Management Act and other applicable law and shall conduct myself  
7 at all times according to the rules of conduct prescribed by the  
8 secretary of commerce. This oath is given freely and without mental  
9 reservation or purpose of evasion.

10  
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you very much, and we want to thank you  
12 for your willingness to continue to serve on in the Caribbean  
13 Fishery Management Council. For you, Carlos.

14  
15 Thank you so much.

16  
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay, Mr. Chairman. Now that you are an official  
18 member of the Council, we would like to open the election of the  
19 officers. The gentleman from the Coast Guard will guide us through  
20 this one. So, he will call for the nomination of Chair followed by  
21 a vote. And then, if there's no more than one person, we can vote  
22 by saying "Aye." Then, he will open the floor for the position of  
23 Vice-Chair.

24  
25 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Thank you. And please bear with me as I  
26 navigate through the process. At this time, is there a nomination  
27 for Chair?

28  
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You don't have to do it all at the same time.  
30 Just one person.

31  
32 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I nominate that they will remain the same and  
33 everybody remains in the Chair if they will take it and the Vice-  
34 Chair, etcetera.

35  
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, the motion, for the record, will be to  
37 maintain Carlo Farchette and Vanessa Ramírez as Chair and Vice-  
38 Chair respectively. So, then you can--

39  
40 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Any opposition to the motion?

41  
42 **SENNAI HABTES:** I second the motion to nominate Carlos Farchette  
43 as Chair and Vanessa Ramírez as Chair.

44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** If you look at Robert, you'll need seconds for  
46 nominations. But anyway-- yeah.

47  
48 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** At this time, all in favor of the motion

1 say "Aye."

2

3 **GROUP:** Aye.

4

5 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Sounds like the "Ayes" have it. Motion  
6 carries.

7

8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you very much. We ambushed the officials  
9 from the Coast Guard. We will never do that again... until next year.  
10 Chairman, are you open for the agenda? We have some suggested  
11 changes.

12

13

#### ADOPTION OF AGENDA

14

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. On the adoption of the agenda, we have  
16 some changes to the agenda. We're going to move Jennifer Lee for  
17 tomorrow afternoon at 1 PM, 1:00 to 1:30. And we're moving on that  
18 slot for the 2:30, we'll move Sennai Habtes with the EBFM TAP  
19 update and Liajaj to today at 2:50.

20

21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We also have a letter that we are going to read  
22 tomorrow at 2 PM. That slot is open, so we're going to read the  
23 letter regarding some changes proposed by some of the scientists  
24 in the Virgin Islands.

25

26 In addition, if we need the time, we can go into the 12 to 1:30  
27 and then break at 12:30 for lunch. And I will leave that to the  
28 discretion of María and Dr. Strelcheck over here.

29

30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mr. Chair, we would like to request a change  
31 in the agenda for the morning after the Update of NMFS/Council  
32 Actions and Amendments to the Island-Based FMPs. Instead of doing  
33 the Review and Final Action for Framework Amendment 3, we would  
34 like to have the discussion that was supposed to come right after  
35 the 2024 Annual Catch Limits and Overfishing Monitoring by Andy  
36 Strelcheck because he's not going to be able to join us at the  
37 allocated time, if that's okay with you.

38

39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sure. Thank you. Thank you, María.

40

41 Any other changes to the agenda? Hearing none, I guess we need a  
42 motion to accept the agenda as corrected.

43

44 **SENNAI HABTES:** I move to accept the agenda as corrected.

45

46 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.

47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. We have Dr. Habtes made the motion

1 and seconded by Vanessa. All in favor, say "Aye."  
2

3 **GROUP:** Aye.  
4

5 **CONSIDERATION OF 184TH COUNCIL MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTIONS**  
6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion  
8 carries.  
9

10 Next on the agenda is the motion for the consideration of the 184<sup>th</sup>  
11 verbatim transcriptions. Are there any corrections to the  
12 transcription for the last meeting? I guess we don't have any.  
13

14 Somebody needs to make a motion to accept the verbatim  
15 transcriptions as submitted.  
16

17 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Motion to accept the transcription as is.  
18

19 **SENNAI HABTES:** Second.  
20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Verbatim transcription, motion by  
22 Vanessa, seconded by Sennai Habtes. Any nays? Any abstentions?  
23 Hearing none, motion carries.  
24

25 Next on the agenda is the Executive Director's Report, Miguel  
26 Rolón.  
27

28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**  
29

30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I usually make it very  
31 short, but this time we need to talk about a lot of things.  
32

33 The first thing is the situation regarding the budget. As you know,  
34 the 5-year cycle ends this December 31st. Next 5-year cycle will  
35 start January 2025. We were instructed to submit the budget based  
36 on 2024 and add 10 to 15% increase, to submit the budget. We did  
37 that. We submitted our budget. It has been reviewed at the level  
38 of scientific concerns. It passed that one. Now, it is being  
39 reviewed at the administrative level, and we couldn't get a yay or  
40 nay today. We are supposed to have an authorization or an approved  
41 budget for next year's cycle.  
42

43 The issue is this, the 5-year cycle only has funding for 4 years,  
44 until 2028, because the last year is the one that we are going to  
45 be using, rather than asking for a no-cost extension. These are  
46 technical things that will bother you to help. But, anyway, the  
47 important part is that we are going to be-- all the eight Councils  
48 and NOAA will have, well, a tight budget for all the activities

1 that we are supposed to undertake. In some of these cases, we will  
2 have virtual meetings rather than in person meetings. For example,  
3 the CCC that will be held in Washington next year will be a virtual  
4 meeting in order for us to save considerable amounts of money.  
5 That has been decided already by NOAA, people in Washington and  
6 the Executive Directors of each one of the Councils.

7  
8 To give you an idea of the things that we could not do, we do not  
9 have any money for hosting international meetings. Unless we  
10 receive money from outside, the Council participation will be only  
11 to send myself or the Chair to any of those meetings.

12  
13 Remember, the working group, for us, is very important because we  
14 depend on whatever happens upstream with the fisheries in the  
15 Caribbean. Our fisheries are affected by whatever happens in the  
16 Lesser Antilles all the way to Barbados. So, it is important that  
17 we participate in these international meetings. You will hear a  
18 report by Laura Cimo from the Office of International Fisheries,  
19 Trade and Commerce on the situation regarding the activities that  
20 we have in the Caribbean.

21  
22 The other thing that will be difficult to undertake would be the  
23 Big Fish Campaign. For those of you who are not familiar, the Big  
24 Fish Campaign started several years ago, and we have FAO, CRFM,  
25 the Council, and NOAA fisheries involved, and we were successful  
26 in terms of developing the campaign. The campaign includes a web  
27 page; we call it HUB.

28  
29 We have an expert; a communications expert has been dealing with  
30 all this. And actually, Ana Salceda won two awards, important  
31 awards, in Europe with the main video that she put together for  
32 the protection of the spawning aggregations. However, if we don't  
33 receive more money for next year, all that effort will stop. So,  
34 she's now trying to secure some funding from outside and we will  
35 see what we can do to sustain at least part of the effort for the  
36 first half of 2025.

37  
38 The feedback that we received from countries, fishers, including  
39 the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico has been very positive.  
40 People use the HUB for downloading information, scientific  
41 information. They use it to share it with fishers, with managers,  
42 etcetera. We have meetings with different countries. It's a very-  
43 It is a success story. It's a successful story, the Big Fish  
44 Campaign.

45  
46 So, I should mention this for the record, to see if anybody has  
47 any ideas on how to work this out and keep the Big Fish Campaign  
48 going. I sent 2 emails to key people but haven't received any

1 answer yet as they also have problems with their budget.  
2  
3 We had a meeting, the administrative committee, and we were  
4 discussing ways that we could, maybe, secure funding from other  
5 sources. The Chair here will appoint an ad hoc committee of  
6 scientists when we get this done. Probably, it will be shared by  
7 Dr. Sennai Habtes because it was his idea, and we will have members  
8 of the group. Dr. Vance Vicente will be one of the scientists  
9 involved, Ricardo López from Puerto Rico, and then we have Kevin  
10 and María López. Hopefully, these people can work together to see  
11 if there is any opportunity to secure funding.  
12  
13 Right now, if you look at the sources of funding that we can tap,  
14 we have Saltonstall-Kennedy. We have other monies from other  
15 institutions that might be available. We don't know what is going  
16 to happen in the next administration, but at least it's open there.  
17 So, the effort here is for these scientists to look at sources of  
18 funding and probably provide the opportunity to submit proposals.  
19  
20 Remember, the Council cannot submit a proposal. All the money that  
21 we get has to go through the grants office, but the members of the  
22 Council, members of the SSC, can make this proposal. So, Dr.  
23 Habtes' idea was very welcomed by the administrative committee,  
24 and we are going to then do our best to secure some extra funding  
25 that will enhance the opportunities for us to manage our fisheries.  
26  
27 The eight Councils have a celebration of the 50-year anniversary  
28 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and each one of us is supposed to  
29 contribute some money, but right now we are trying to see where we  
30 can get the funding for that, maybe ask the National Marine  
31 Fisheries Service to contribute. The idea is that this celebration  
32 will allow us to have videos depicting the difference that we have  
33 in fisheries. The beauty that we have in and the differences. We  
34 have people from Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands that  
35 fish under the U.S. flag, and we want to show that.  
36  
37 We have industries in Alaska, the Pacific Council, the South  
38 Atlantic, and the shrimp industry. We want to show the world that  
39 this is important and has been important under the Magnuson-Stevens  
40 Act. The Magnuson-Stevens Act has been able to manage our fisheries  
41 for the betterment of those resources. The video also will be shown  
42 to key members of Congress. As you know, that's where the money  
43 comes from. The idea is to celebrate our anniversary, but also to  
44 share the success stories that we have had during the last 50 years  
45 and also the challenges that we've had. Everything is not rosy; we  
46 have issues that we need to still work on.  
47  
48 One positive thing is that we have been working together with NOAA

1 Fisheries, probably closer than any time in history of the MSA. We  
2 meet with them every year, once or twice. We just had a meeting,  
3 a close meeting with Sam and Kelly Denit and the top branch of  
4 Washington NOAA Fisheries and we were discussing the future of our  
5 fisheries, especially with the new administration. And, hopefully,  
6 with this anniversary, we will be able to show to the world the  
7 things that you can do if you put your money into it and put some  
8 money into the management of these resources.

9  
10 The last part is, as you know, the Inflation Reduction Act funds  
11 are a lot of billions of dollars, but for the Council it is  
12 \$20,000,000. The process was to submit proposals. The eight  
13 Councils submitted their proposals. They were reviewed in  
14 Washington by experts, and then, out of those proposals, there  
15 were some that were approved, others that were sent back to add  
16 more information.

17  
18 In our case, we have two ladies who deal with the IRA funds. I  
19 want the lady to my right to introduce herself again for the record  
20 and what is it that you do.

21  
22 **MICHELLE L. WALSH:** Thank you.

23  
24 So, I'm Mick Walsh and I was hired specifically to be a liaison  
25 with the Council, and I'm honored that I'll be able to work with  
26 Martha Prada as we move forward on the projects that the Council  
27 has had approved. I know that there are two more, you said, that  
28 are still in the pipeline.

29  
30 I know we don't know what the future will bring, but in the  
31 meantime, we're going to keep charging ahead and try to be  
32 productive in these proposals that you put forward to make the  
33 management of fisheries here in the Caribbean much better and more  
34 resilient to the changes that we see are happening in our  
35 environment. So, thank you. I'm honored to be here and very much  
36 looking forward to meeting more of you personally over the next  
37 couple of days because I like the relationship building. I had a  
38 wonderful time last night with Vanessa having some conversations.

39  
40 So, thank you very much for having me, and I'm here to support  
41 you.

42  
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Thank you for that. The two proposals that  
44 she mentioned, and Martha will address them now. Martha is our  
45 coordinator for anything that is IRA. She's also our coordinator  
46 for WECAFC and she has many roles. We were lucky to ask her to be  
47 the coordinator and she say, "yes."

48

1 I in the case of IRA, we have two proposals. One is about  
2 administration. There's a ground officer who found that in order  
3 for us not to cross-pollinate the basic fundings of the Council  
4 with IRA that we need to submit a proposal for management  
5 activities that we have related to IRA. As an example, if I look  
6 at a paper submitted by any of the PI, that time has to be counted  
7 against the IRA fundings, not against the basic funding. The same  
8 with Graciela and the others. Dr. Sennai Habtes submitted another  
9 proposal and those are the two proposals that were submitted that  
10 are being considered.

11  
12 One issue here, I have sent an email to Kelly Denit. As you know,  
13 Kelly Denit is the person in charge, in Washington, of anything  
14 related to IRA funding. Because one of the paragraphs of the  
15 administration said, "We are going to rescind any unspent money of  
16 IRA." And as you know, in accounting, "spent" could also include  
17 obligated funds, but if they do not include obligated funds, the  
18 IRA fundings probably could stop.

19  
20 Hopefully, we will be able then to have secure funding for the  
21 next three years, until 2027 of those proposals that have been  
22 approved, or could be approved by the end of this year. If that  
23 happens, then we will be able to continue the work as presented.

24  
25 One thing that happened was that we were supposed to start at the  
26 beginning of this year, 2024, because of many reasons beyond the  
27 control of the people involved. We started--

28  
29 Then we have \$13,200,000. That's the cash in hand, and those are  
30 the monies that were used for the Council, out of the 20,000,000.  
31 We were supposed to submit proposals in 2024-2025, the fiscal year,  
32 for the remainder of those funds. However, that's on the air now.  
33 We don't know what is going to happen.

34  
35 So, I want Martha to give an opportunity to Martha so she can  
36 present to us, very quickly, the projects that have been approved  
37 and the two projects that are being submitted. Martha?

38  
39 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Okay. Thank you, Miguel, and good morning,  
40 everyone. It's my pleasure to be here with you. I will be short  
41 but try to share with you as much information as possible. So,  
42 this is the status of the IRA proposals or projects, I must say,  
43 so far. We are about to submit the 2<sup>nd</sup> progress report with the  
44 advances of the details of some of these projects.

45  
46 Next. Okay. By the deadline at the end of December 2023, the  
47 Council submitted a total of eight proposals. And from that  
48 package, a total of five proposals were actually approved. These

1 are the five that were approved.  
2  
3 Some of them are related to educational aspects, and others are  
4 related with different things on climate change, including climate  
5 vulnerability analysis, including the development of a climate  
6 scenario planning for the red hind and the spiny lobster. We also  
7 had project approval to address some issues on climate change on  
8 the dolphinfish population and fisheries and combination of the  
9 complexity or the variability of that species. Finally, we had a  
10 project that will deal with the two species that are listed on the  
11 protection at different scales. One is Nassau grouper, and the  
12 other is the queen conch.  
13  
14 With that, the Council is aiming to address issues related to the  
15 habitat, particularly of those stages of life that are outside of  
16 the fishery, which is the juveniles and possible recruitment and  
17 some of the associated issues, socioeconomic issues perhaps  
18 associated with that.  
19  
20 We also, like three months ago, were informed about the possibility  
21 of submitting additional proposals. And so, we presented and are  
22 trying to develop an additional four proposals. From those four  
23 proposals, only two got to the actual pipeline for revision under  
24 NOAA, their more formal process. That proposal is the one related  
25 to administrative issues.  
26  
27 So, the dedication of the Council Staff to the attention of IRA  
28 projects is considered on a separate as the regular work and an  
29 additional new proposal is the one submitted by Sennai Habtes.  
30 With that work, it is intended to finalize the process that the  
31 Council and the EBFM TAP have been conducting in the past two years  
32 or two and a half years for the completion of the EBMF Fisheries  
33 Management Plan. So, that proposal is still under evaluation. Those  
34 two proposals, in total, are 160-something for the administrative  
35 one, and 550,000 approximately. These are the two proposals in  
36 revision that I have been talking about in the previous minutes.  
37  
38 And so, with that, we have also not completed the 3,000,000 that  
39 were initially, potentially, seen as a possibility for the  
40 Caribbean Management Council. And so, perhaps depending on the  
41 future situation, it can be an additional opportunity for  
42 submitting proposals. There are a lot of projects and work that  
43 need to be done related to climate change. That is an unknown for  
44 now, but if not through the IRA, perhaps we need to start looking  
45 at some additional funding to cover those works.  
46  
47 With the approved projects, actually, the Council is addressing  
48 three out of the four goals of the strategic plan for the Council

1 that is ending next year and is entering into the evaluation  
2 process. I know you cannot read anything of that, but it's just to  
3 let you know that the proposals were not because of climate change  
4 itself, but because this is inserted in the Council Strategic  
5 Management Plan.

6  
7 So, if everything goes as planned, more or less, this is the time  
8 framework expected to complete the work from the IRA funding. Two  
9 of the proposals are expected to be completed in two years, the  
10 majority, and the others in the remaining total three-year  
11 extension. So, far, we have been informed that perhaps any of the  
12 projects has to be complete in the three-year cycle. So, we are  
13 depending on the future announcement on the timing associated with  
14 that, adjusting the planning and developing of the activities. So,  
15 everything will be completed by March 2027.

16  
17 And so, I guess that's all that I have to share with you right  
18 now. All of the projects have been formally contracted. All of the  
19 projects have started already. We have the benefit of having the  
20 involvement of Michelle helping us in coordinating and planning  
21 the development phases for all of the projects. So, thank you,  
22 Michelle and others in this room that have been supporting the  
23 Council work on the IRA initiative.

24  
25 Thanks.

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chairman, also, Martha is going to  
28 provide an update at every meeting of all the projects to let you  
29 know how we are doing. If we get approval of the last two projects  
30 submitted, we will send you a note, to all Council Members, of the  
31 outcome of those two proposals. Martha, please send a copy of your  
32 proposal to every Council Member when we finish.

33  
34 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** The presentation?

35  
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep.

37  
38 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Okay.

39  
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Oh, not the proposal, excuse me, the presentation  
41 of all the projects that you just mentioned. The idea is to keep  
42 the Council abreast of everything that is related to the IRA.

43  
44 And the last thing that I was going to say, unless you have a  
45 question for Martha or Michelle. Okay. So, thank you very much.

46  
47 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Thank you.

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And the last thing that Graciela reminded me to  
2 mention is that the Equity and Environmental Justice, EEJ, as you  
3 know, is an initiative. Each region is supposed to have a plan to  
4 implement environmental justice. However, we don't have any money  
5 for that.

6  
7 We had an idea to have a National EEJ meeting or workshop in  
8 Washington. However, we decided to table that until we secure the  
9 funding for that activity. The Regional Office, as you know, have  
10 presented to us, several times, the EEJ efforts they have put  
11 together, but the authorities are telling us that there's very  
12 little funding to move this forward, and nobody knows exactly how  
13 the new administration will treat the issues related to equity and  
14 environmental justice.

15  
16 For those of you who are not familiar with it, remember we have  
17 minorities. We have Indians, Latins, especially in the U.S.  
18 Caribbean. The whole U.S. Caribbean is an EEJ country, and we were  
19 being sold since the beginning of times. This is not new. About 34  
20 years ago we had a similar approach. We declared fishing  
21 communities; Saint Croix was the first fishing community declared  
22 as such. The idea was that we were able then to secure funding for  
23 activities needed to manage the fishery of, in this case, Saint  
24 Croix, but that didn't fly too high. Now, we have environmental  
25 justice, we have all the plans and everything, but we are going to  
26 be waiting for the new administration to see if they fund any of  
27 these activities.

28  
29 We have been told that there are groups like the Indians in the  
30 Pacific, they have a group of tribes who are going to be  
31 implementing their own version of EEJ as they have done in the  
32 past. And so, there are other groups that are working with the  
33 NOAA Fisheries to see what can be implemented regarding these  
34 issues. In our case, just translating our document into Spanish  
35 and from Spanish to English is part of the agenda. Actually, we  
36 had a meeting, and I remember Dr. Brown was so excited because it  
37 was the first time that we have a meeting in English, Spanish, and  
38 Vietnamese. Because there's a community of Vietnamese fishers and  
39 people that live in the gulf, and they are part of the of the  
40 fishery and part of the community.

41  
42 So, that's all we have, Mr. Chairman, at this time.

43  
44 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Cristina? Oh, Andy. Andy, the floor is  
47 yours.

1 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Good morning. So, Miguel, I really appreciate  
2 you making the comments about the equity and environmental justice  
3 work that you're doing in the Caribbean and certainly recognize  
4 the challenge that it is not funded at this point. I just wanted  
5 to share some good news that we were able to set aside some funding  
6 last year for an EEJ contractor for the region. We haven't brought  
7 that person on board yet, but we are hoping to bring that person  
8 on board soon. The goal would be obviously to work with all of the  
9 Councils, as well as, you know, on our regional implementation  
10 plan to move forward our equity and environmental justice  
11 initiative.

12  
13 And then as you noted, there's a number of things that we're just  
14 integrating into, kind of, our normal business activities, one of  
15 which is doing translation services so that bulletins and other  
16 information can be shared in multiple languages. And so, we're  
17 going to continue to move forward and do that based on the limited  
18 funding we have available. We certainly want to do more, and I'm  
19 hoping that the EEJ coordinator will certainly provide some  
20 additional bandwidth and support for this effort. So, thanks.

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other comments? Okay. Hearing none. Next on  
23 the agenda is--

24  
25 **SENNAI HABTES:** Hey, Carlos. Can I ask a question?

26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Sure Sennai.

28  
29 **SENNAI HABTES:** Miguel, going back to the EEJ, like, points that  
30 were made. Have we, within the CFMC, come up with an EEJ strategy?  
31 Meaning, what are our priorities for implementing EEJ that we would  
32 like to see?

33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Each region has an EEJ plan. We are under the  
35 Regional Office. So, yes. We have. But, the Council, we haven't  
36 done it yet because we will rely on the implementation plan from  
37 each region. That was agreed and presented before. Out of that,  
38 then the Council has to see, you know, what we can adopt that will  
39 move forward the agenda of EEJ.

40  
41 So, far what we adopted is that all the documents that we have  
42 that go to the public will go into Spanish and English. The  
43 summaries, the bulletins, all of that will have to be in Spanish  
44 and English. To the surprise of many, but in Saint Croix, many  
45 people prefer the Spanish version because, as you know, 51% of the  
46 people that live in Saint Croix are descended from Hispanic  
47 families, and they always ask for that. So, we have that part of  
48 the EEJ covered by the CFMC.

1  
2 Others, meeting, etcetera, will depend on, especially what Andy  
3 just said. When the coordinator comes into work, then we will meet  
4 with that person and identify what activities we can do to move  
5 forward the agenda of the EEJ. Because for some of them, we don't  
6 need extra funding. Some of them, we just do it. You know,  
7 Graciela, myself, Liajay, we have been able to go to meetings,  
8 have workshops, etcetera. Ricardo, also, at the Department of  
9 Natural Resources, has different workshops that we can intervene.  
10 And also, we have liaison officers. The liaison officers are part  
11 of the EEJ, not directly related, but they are part of it because  
12 Wilson and Nicole Greaux, they incorporate part of this into every  
13 workshop that they put together with the fishers.

14  
15 And, also, they bring feedback from the fishers in terms of the  
16 needs they have. This is important. And, of course, we rely on  
17 your office, Ricardo's office, to interact so we make sure that we  
18 cover what is needed to be covered regarding EEJ.

19  
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah, I think we'd need to do maybe a little bit  
21 more to coordinate and prepare. You know, obviously, we don't know  
22 what's happened at the executive level for EEJ, if it is going to  
23 continue with the next administration. I would recommend  
24 identifying one of the Technical Advisory Panels or working groups  
25 that we have so that we, as a Council, have an idea of the  
26 objectives under EEJ that we would be recommending under regional  
27 plans because we don't have that right now. And in my opinion, you  
28 know, simply waiting until the Southeast has a coordinator coming  
29 and telling us what can be done under EEJ is not the right approach.

30  
31 I think there's been sustained underinvestment in the U.S.  
32 Caribbean, in terms of infrastructure needed to effectively manage  
33 our fisheries. And if we do not have a clear idea of those under  
34 investments and needs from an EEJ standpoint, we're going to miss  
35 out on stating our needs effectively under that standpoint. I mean,  
36 I think there needs to be people working on that through our  
37 current working groups or another working group.

38  
39 My recommendation is to put that under the OEAP and have them work  
40 with individuals that you mentioned, the liaisons, the territorial  
41 agencies, to come up with clear objectives, and a prioritized list.  
42 Right? Because there are some things that are going to be more  
43 important than others, but if we don't have that clearly laid out  
44 and we, as a Council, haven't made that decision, we're not going  
45 to get anywhere with it. And the easiest things are the only things  
46 that are going to get done.

47  
48 That's kind of what's happened with EJ continuously. You know?

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?  
3

4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López, NOAA Fisheries. So, I just want  
5 to remind the Council that the Southeast Region has an Equity  
6 Environmental Justice Implementation Plan that has been presented  
7 to the Council on several occasions. The plan is ready. There are  
8 activities that involve the Caribbean Fishery Management Council.  
9

10 We, in our office, are making sure that those activities can be  
11 coordinated. Both Sarah and I participate in the group, in the EEJ  
12 group. So, we will be happy to bring that back again to the table  
13 where we are going to coordinate in our office to ensure that the  
14 activities that are listed in that Implementation Plan that are  
15 related to the Council can be implemented and that we have the  
16 resources to do that.  
17

18 We talk about, you know, translations of things, which is one of  
19 the things, and we personally are taking care of that in our  
20 office. Every time that we see something that is of interest to  
21 Caribbean constituents, we want to ensure that it's available. So,  
22 that's one of the things. We are also going to have that EEJ  
23 coordinator that Andy Strelcheck mentioned.  
24

25 But I think it's very important that we bring some action, so the  
26 recommendation to have that as a part of the outreach and education  
27 committee, I think is important. Those actions that we have in the  
28 implementation plan, we can definitely bring them to their  
29 attention to see how we can move it forward. This is a high priority  
30 for our office.  
31

32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, we also intend to incorporate the  
33 DAPs. Actually, the first meetings in 2025, that's part of the  
34 agenda. But we wanted to make it simple in terms of the list of  
35 things that we can do without money or with the funds that we have  
36 and the things that we could do if we have extra funding somewhere.  
37 That's the approach that the other Councils are doing at this time,  
38 and we agree that all of us will try to do the same.  
39

40 What María mentioned that was presented to us is what we are going  
41 to be using to address this at the OEAP and on the DAP. That will  
42 happen during the first half of 2025.  
43

44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?  
45

46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Sennai, you mentioned the infrastructure  
47 that is needed in the U.S. Caribbean for the management of our  
48 fisheries. I think that we've talked about the continuity of data

1 collection, the improvement of data collection, and the actual  
2 buildings and people that are needed in the region to do the work.  
3 Do you want to expand on that if that's what you were referring  
4 to?

5  
6 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I think that is. I think from an equity and  
7 environmental justice standpoint, probably the biggest thing  
8 lacking in this region is the infrastructure to develop the  
9 necessary people. Right? I think we all notice, like, the limited  
10 number of people that are available to serve within our Technical  
11 Advisory Panels or sitting on the Council.

12  
13 The limited number of PhDs that come out from institutions in the  
14 U.S. and come back to this region to serve and work on fisheries  
15 related aspects. The limited availability and time for people to  
16 write grants to develop the infrastructure necessary for managing.  
17 We have great partners in the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
18 and across NOAA, but there need to be people on the ground able to  
19 do this, to help bring the needs forward for the people of the  
20 U.S. Caribbean to manage our fisheries sustainably going into the  
21 future.

22  
23 Without sustained investments in both academic, Council, and state  
24 agencies to develop, both, people who have the training to go out  
25 and collect fisheries independent data, work with the fishers to  
26 collect fisheries dependent data, work with the data management  
27 and coordination systems to store and keep the data, and create  
28 more lasting transitions between administrations within both  
29 Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, we're going to be trapped  
30 in the same feedback loop that makes us have to redo everything  
31 and redevelop the process every 10 years.

32  
33 That's where we are now and not recognizing that and not putting  
34 priorities towards giving us the resources to develop that from an  
35 equity and environmental justice standpoint is simply missing the  
36 mark. And I think we, frankly, have not done enough as a Council  
37 to make that point clear.

38  
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** How do you think we can make that point clear?

40  
41 **SENNAI HABTES:** I mean, I think we need, like, we cannot wait for  
42 other agencies to create a plan that tells us what the priorities  
43 that we can meet are. We need to have that before it happens.  
44 Right? Going forward, we need to clearly make a priority for  
45 figuring out how to develop the infrastructure for training for  
46 both people and physical infrastructure in the Caribbean. We are  
47 not devoting enough time toward that in any of our working groups  
48 or here at the Council. We haven't created a plan for how we're

1 going to do that in the next 10 years.  
2  
3 We, as a Council, have to have that before we can expect our  
4 partners to help us with it, and that's what we need to focus on  
5 doing. There are a lot of things that we put time into. Right? Not  
6 all of them are something that is an emerging priority and a need.  
7 This, in my opinion, is one of the highest. Because if we don't do  
8 something, in 10 years, there will not be enough people from the  
9 U.S. Caribbean to sit at this table and work in the agencies that  
10 are necessary to continue doing the work for the Caribbean.  
11  
12 I mean, another category 5 hurricane comes in and 50% of the people  
13 working in DRNA or DPNR or, you know, volunteering at the Council  
14 leave, the progress that we've made over the last 5 years goes  
15 away, Miguel, completely, and we have to start over. And not having  
16 something in place where we have a plan on how we're going to  
17 address that, and not simply thinking about it, but when partners  
18 come to us and say, "Hey, there's this EEJ priority, what are the  
19 things that you need to see happen?" We should've had a 15-page  
20 document with a plan ready to go for them when they were doing  
21 that. You know?  
22  
23 And so, that's what we have got to do going forward. I'm not saying  
24 that as blame. I didn't get it done as well. But I think that just  
25 goes to say the reason why we don't get it done is we're over  
26 tasked with everything that we're doing. We have got to train more  
27 people here in the Caribbean that are going to be able to work  
28 with us and do those things. You know? And so, this isn't to say,  
29 you know, we screwed up. This is to say, how do we meet those needs  
30 going forward? And I don't think we're having that conversation  
31 right now.  
32  
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I cannot agree with you more. I believe that  
34 that's the thing that we need to do. And also, we've discussed it  
35 in the past, we need to reinstate it. We have a generational change  
36 that is not happening. Actually, Julian mentioned that several  
37 times, and we have been addressing that in different workshops.  
38  
39 The fishers that we have now, either because they've retired or  
40 they've died, have not been replaced at the optimum rate by  
41 youngsters coming in. That's something that should be included  
42 also in the EEJ. So, I proposed, Mr. Chairman, that probably by  
43 January, Graciela and I can sit down and talk to Sennai and others  
44 and see how we can address this, so we can present something at  
45 the spring meeting. This is where we are. These are the things  
46 that we propose that the Council can continue working on.  
47  
48 And, also, I will knock on the door of Ricardo López because the

1 Department of Natural Resources has also been working with this  
2 several times, so we can do that. So, we do it. We have the yellow  
3 hand up, Cristina?

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

6

7 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, Sennai, I really appreciate the  
8 points you're making and couldn't agree more. I guess the one thing  
9 I'll add, and this is where, maybe, Clay or Kevin could weigh in.  
10 You know, we as an agency have also kind of made a dedicated effort  
11 to invest more in the Caribbean in recent years. Right?

12

13 And that's, I think, been evident in terms of some of the work  
14 that Kevin and his team have been doing. Is it enough? Do we need  
15 more? Absolutely. Right? So how do we build off of that success,  
16 as well as, you know, support the territorial sciences work,  
17 people, and other things that need to be done to have that  
18 sustainable over the long term.

19

20 So, I just wanted to note that because I think, it would be good  
21 to include the Science Center in those conversations and some of  
22 the things that have been successful as well as lessons learned  
23 with our expansion and focus on the Caribbean.

24

25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María and then Clay.

26

27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Thank you. María López, NOAA Fisheries.  
28 I think we may want to continue this conversation when OEAP has  
29 their participation, the outreach and education panel, perhaps, so  
30 we can get some, probably some priorities in there, like, related  
31 to this and maybe some tasks that can be discussed for the OEAP  
32 when they have their participation later. Thanks.

33

34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Clay?

35

36 **CLAY PORCH:** Yeah. I just want to follow-up on Andy's comment.  
37 Sennai, I 100% agree with you. This is a problem, obviously,  
38 throughout the Caribbean, not just the U.S. Caribbean, just not  
39 having the infrastructure in in many ways, both for fishing and  
40 doing the fisheries data collection.

41

42 So, one of the things we're trying to do, and Kevin's been very  
43 active, is trying to build that capacity with the IRA funds that  
44 we got. We get 500,000 a year. It's only for two or three years.  
45 I don't know if we got the third year. 4<sup>th</sup>? Are we getting it for  
46 all four? Yeah. We've got two. That's what I thought. And then,  
47 we'll see, you know, what the current administration does, whether  
48 we'll get it for the subsequent years.

1  
2 But the idea there is to do everything cooperatively. So, we have  
3 cooperative fishery independent surveys, which is fishermen  
4 actually doing the survey work, just following a scientific design.  
5 So, fishery independent is not quite the right word, but  
6 essentially, it's a scientific survey with the fishermen actually  
7 doing the work and obviously, we're doing the work trying to  
8 improve our port sampling and other forms of data collection. But  
9 that's still not enough. There's no question about that.

10  
11 So, I definitely encourage folks to contact their representatives  
12 and get folks up in Washington aware of the challenges down here.  
13 But I 100% agree with you, Sennai. Very well said.

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more comments?  
16

17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. Not a comment, but the assignment for the  
18 staff will be that we are going to be, Graciela and I will sit  
19 down and look at the items that we are going to be discussing  
20 before the April meeting and then we'll incorporate Sennai,  
21 Ricardo, maybe Kevin and the Regional Office, into the discussion.

22  
23 We can have a brief meeting or maybe a virtual meeting, but the  
24 idea is to look at the priorities. These are the elements that we  
25 need to address, and these are our priorities. So, you will have  
26 sort of a draft outline to be considered by the Council at the  
27 April meeting.

28  
29 And as I said before, there are several things that we can do with  
30 our extra fundings, with the things that we have. Others, we need  
31 to have that funding. But we have been trying to convince the  
32 universities to have degrees, fishery degrees, in Puerto Rico and  
33 the Virgin Islands to see if we can, you know, replace the people  
34 that are leaving the area, etcetera. I've been successful only  
35 three times, but the two ladies and the guy decided to get a better  
36 job in the States. So, they had the degrees here, but they went to  
37 other places.

38  
39 The point is that it's something, and that's why I agree with  
40 Sennai, maybe we can include some language, for lack of a better  
41 word, that we can discuss with the universities and others. This  
42 is not unique to this area. In the Pacific, they are trying to  
43 recruit people. It's very, very difficult because, I'm not trying  
44 to offend anybody, but one guy said, "I had to have a job in with  
45 National Fisheries Service because with your Council I had to work  
46 three times as much." So, he decided to decline. The reason for  
47 that is, as you know, we do it all, all the things that we do in  
48 the Council.

1  
2 But anyway, the point is well taken. So, Mr. Chairman, that's our  
3 goal for next April, to have something that you can look at and  
4 make a decision as to move forward with it.  
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. So, moving forward, we have María  
7 López NMFS/Council Actions and IBFMP Amendment.  
8

9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mr. Chair, at this time, I would like to  
10 request a change to the agenda for our presentation. In the essence  
11 of time, I would like to request if the 2024 Annual Catch Limits  
12 and Overfishing Monitoring can be discussed before the  
13 presentation on Actions and Amendments for Island-Based FMPs, if  
14 that's okay with you. Okay. This is going to be Andy Strelcheck.  
15

16 **2024 ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS AND OVERFISHING MONITORING—PUERTO RICO**  
17 **SPINY LOBSTER ALLOWABLE CATCH LIMIT (ACL) OVERAGE AND**  
18 **OVERFISHING DETERMINATION—NOAA FISHERIES/SOUTHEAST REGIONAL**  
19 **OFFICE**  
20

21 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes. So, first, thank you for shuffling around  
22 the schedule, and apologies for not being able to attend the  
23 meeting. I'm double booked in North Carolina, and I'd much prefer  
24 being in the Caribbean rather than the 31-degree weather that's up  
25 here right now. So, we want to just talk through the annual catch  
26 limit monitoring, and the results of this year's monitoring.  
27

28 We had seven reef fish stocks or stock complexes in the Caribbean  
29 that exceeded their respective annual catch limits. Three of those  
30 were in Puerto Rico, two in Saint Croix, and two in Saint  
31 Thomas/Saint John. However, those overages, after we reviewed the  
32 landings data, were determined to be based on enhanced reporting.  
33 So, this has been kind of an ongoing challenge and in a way a good  
34 thing, right, that the catch limits were set based on older data  
35 and now that reporting has been improving, we are getting better  
36 records of data. And so, based on that enhanced reporting, we  
37 determined that no accountability measures needed to be applied.  
38

39 We did, determine that the annual catch limit for spiny lobster  
40 was exceeded. It's at 119% of the annual catch limit, and we  
41 determined that this was not attributed to improved reporting, and  
42 I'll talk about spiny lobster in a minute.  
43

44 For the pelagic fish stocks. There were several that exceeded their  
45 annual catch target, so landings of dolphinfish in Saint  
46 Thomas/Saint John and Barracuda in Puerto Rico exceeded both their  
47 catch target and their catch limit while landings of Wahoo in  
48 Puerto Rico exceeded the catch target, but not the catch limit.

1 So, the accountability measure for pelagic species states that  
2 NMFS and the Council review that exceedance and determine if any  
3 corrective action is needed. There's not an immediate  
4 accountability measure that's triggered. And so, we do want to  
5 discuss with the Council, kind of next steps that could be  
6 considered for evaluating those catch exceedances. One of the  
7 recommendations would be to share data and information with the  
8 Scientific and Statistical Committee for review at their next  
9 meeting, and then that they could bring some advice back to us  
10 thereafter.

11  
12 Then, going back to spiny lobster. If you recall there was an  
13 updated stock assessment, SEDAR 57, that concluded that spiny  
14 lobster was subject to overfishing in Puerto Rico but not  
15 overfished. So, in years where we aren't assessing the population  
16 we look at a multiyear average landing relative to the catch limit  
17 to determine whether or not the catch limit will exceed it, but  
18 also how that compares to the overfishing limit. We had sent a  
19 letter, probably a month ago or more to Puerto Rico DNR kind of  
20 initially indicating that overfishing was occurring for spiny  
21 lobster based on that landings data. But, between that time and  
22 now, there's been some adjustments to the correction factor for  
23 Puerto Rico and that reduced the landings levels below the  
24 overfishing limit.

25  
26 But we did have a very productive call, in my view, with the  
27 Council Chair and co-Chair, Council Staff in Puerto Rico, DNR,  
28 regarding spiny lobster management and we see some opportunities  
29 to, kind of, further that discussion at the Council table through  
30 improved collaborative management strategies. One of the things we  
31 are finding with spiny lobster is that the accountability measure  
32 that we have to implement is not very effective. The reason that  
33 it's not very effective is because most of the landings occur in  
34 state waters or territorial waters and not federal waters. So, any  
35 sort of closure that we implement to reduce harvest levels to help  
36 constrain landings to be within the catch limit only affects a  
37 small portion of the overall harvest. And so, we do want to come  
38 back, I think, with the information from the next stock assessment  
39 and discuss how we can improve the system of catch limits and  
40 accountability measures for spiny lobster.

41  
42 So, I'll stop there. Certainly, interested in kind of feedback  
43 input with regard to both spiny lobster as well as how we want to  
44 approach the pelagic species that had annual catch target overages.

#### 45 46 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions for Andy or comments?

1  
2 **SENNAI HABTES:** Andy, how many years was it that, with spiny  
3 lobster, we've seen the overage in the ACLs? This is over the 3-  
4 year average, or is this the 1<sup>st</sup> year for Puerto Rico that we've  
5 seen the overages?  
6  
7 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** I'll have to defer to María or Sarah for the  
8 actual specifics on landings data.  
9  
10 **SENNAI HABTES:** Okay. I can check with them later. There's no--  
11 Okay.  
12  
13 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** What I can say, Sennai, is that there's been  
14 an increasing trend in landings, and we know that the catch limit  
15 more recently was set by the Council and was lowered. And so,  
16 that's kind of my main concern right now is that landings are  
17 considerably higher than where that catch limit is set.  
18  
19 In talking with Puerto Rico DNR, Ricardo and others, there are  
20 potential reasons, you know, that they think that the increase is  
21 due to recruitment and the fishery is healthy. And so, we obviously  
22 want to understand the drivers behind those increases and how  
23 they're affecting overall catch levels. With the new assessment or  
24 updated assessment coming, that'll be helpful to understand.  
25  
26 But I think it's going to be important given my comments about  
27 accountability measures that we kind of really rethink that just  
28 given how little is harvested from federal waters compared to state  
29 waters.  
30  
31 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** This is Sarah Stephenson. I'd like to try to  
32 answer Sennai's question. It did exceed it this year, and it did  
33 not exceed the landings that we had last year. And then for a few  
34 years before that, like, '16 and '17, there was exceedance, an  
35 overage of the ACL.  
36  
37 The problem that we had was that for a while, our landings data,  
38 we didn't get new updated landings, so we were kind of frozen in  
39 time. So, we were using the same landings, like, every year. So,  
40 of course, if it exceeded it-- The 1<sup>st</sup> year we had those 3 years,  
41 it's going to exceed it until--  
42  
43 So, this year was the 1<sup>st</sup> year we've got updated landings, meaning  
44 2020 through 2022. So, it has exceeded it a few times in the past.  
45 As I mentioned, some of that was just due to the lack of landings  
46 that we had, but it has gone over, to answer your question.  
47  
48 At least 3 times. Yes.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Julian, and then Nelson.  
3

4 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I'm going to start off by talking about a lobster  
5 for a minute. I know there are few people in this room that attended  
6 the SSC meetings that took place at the Council office when we  
7 were going through the Tier process of certain catch limits for  
8 all the different species and how we would combine different  
9 species into categories, etcetera. I remember very clearly when we  
10 discussed the Puerto Rico Lobster ACL. The original number that  
11 was put forward by the SSC was way, way higher than what was  
12 actually given to them. And at that moment, they decided to set a  
13 lower number to see actually if that number would have been met.  
14  
15

16 I think we need to go back. Graciela, you were there. Sarah, I  
17 think you might have been there. I think we need to go back to the  
18 minutes of that meeting. That's why we keep those logs and look at  
19 that number and have the SSC revisit the landings for Puerto Rico  
20 and the actual annual catch limit. Because it was clearly mentioned  
21 by the fishers in the room that this could end up being a problem  
22 for them. And now we are seeing that it's a problem because they're  
23 having these overages and the overages a day because the annual  
24 catch limit was set too low.  
25

26 That discussion needs to take place again and go back and revisit.  
27 And even though we're doing a SEDAR, we just started a SEDAR  
28 process again, SEDAR 91 lobster here a couple weeks ago, that needs  
29 to be looked at. Because I believe that if we look at it and looked  
30 at the whole Tier process that we went through, we will realize  
31 that we make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes at some point, and  
32 that needs to be corrected.  
33

34 As it pertains to pelagic. This is a question for Sennai. I know  
35 in the Virgin Islands we just did a whole bunch of new licenses,  
36 and the new licenses were for line fishing. So, has this been an  
37 impact that is causing the ACL to be overrun for the dolphin and  
38 wahoo? Because now we have new fishers, and they are targeting and  
39 reporting those species that have actually caused the overrun.  
40

41 Because they were not allowed to do traps. They were not allowed  
42 to do other fishing types. They were allowed just to do line  
43 fishing. So, if that can be looked at. You know, it's amazing. The  
44 fish have not passed through this area in a very long time. Right  
45 now, the guys that do this type of fishing, we are seeing one of  
46 the biggest wahoo seasons we have seen in years, and I mean years.  
47 Even Red Bailey, one of the oldest fishermen who runs the V.I.  
48 Game Club, says that the last tournament that they had, they

1 haven't seen these numbers in tournaments in many, many years. So,  
2 there's some kind of trend, some kind of change that's going on  
3 that has caused more fish to be caught right now. How do we adjust  
4 for that? I don't know. It's a discussion that needs to take place.

5  
6 I want to jump back to the lobster again. Also, Puerto Rico and  
7 the Virgin Islands right now, they're going to see one of the  
8 biggest lobster seasons that they have seen in years also because  
9 the water temperature has decreased significantly, and we're going  
10 to have the worst winter season in the states, which rolls in the  
11 swells that get the lobsters moving. So, of course, you're going  
12 to see higher numbers, higher landings once the markets can support  
13 it.

14  
15 Right now, the markets have been shown signs over the last five to  
16 six months of support in anything. It's slowly picking up now that  
17 the season has started. So, I put a lot out there, so I'll leave  
18 it to you guys now to decide how to move forward. Thank you.

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo and then Kevin.

21  
22 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to tell you what  
23 I see on the field. During the past year, I have been fishing in  
24 an area of about half a mile from shore that covers around three  
25 miles. I ran about 150 traps in the beginning. Right now, I've  
26 started reducing the number of traps that I have in the area due  
27 to the biggest amount of lobster we have right now which has caused  
28 a drop in the price that we get for it. It's going down to \$5 or  
29 \$6 per pound, and we use to get \$10 per pound. You know, that is  
30 a high reduction in price.

31  
32 In the beginning, I started leaving the trap with the doors open  
33 so the lobster could come in and get out. Now, I have started  
34 removing the traps. I went from 150 traps that I had in the past,  
35 in the water, and I reduced it, at the beginning of the year, to  
36 90.

37  
38 The amount of small lobster that we are catching is incredible. On  
39 every pull, every 15 or 20 days, we throw back in the water more  
40 than 200 pounds of lobster in my area. And I fish only on sandy  
41 bottom. I don't want to see if I move my traps to a grass bottom  
42 or rock bottom, hard bottom. It has to be incredible, the amount  
43 of lobster.

44  
45 I strongly support Julian's statement because I believe we have,  
46 right now, a high recruitment of lobsters, and I am scared of when  
47 the call comes to our area, we are-- I think that the markets are  
48 going to collapse, definitely, for the amount of lobster we are

1 catching right now.

2

3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin.

4

5 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thanks. So, Kevin McCarthy, Southeast  
6 Fisheries Science Center. So, one of the things we're doing with  
7 our partners at DRNA is really looking at the data, something that  
8 the landings data, specifically for lobsters, but this can apply  
9 across the board to other species as well. So, this came up in the  
10 SEDAR 91 data workshop a couple weeks ago where we're noticing  
11 outliers in the data. So, things like 18,000 pounds landed on a  
12 trip.

13

14 You know, there's a number of those things that we need to get  
15 sorted out. That could be a couple of things. That could be just  
16 a data entry error. That could have been, someone reported their  
17 landings over the entire month, and it appears as an entry for a  
18 single trip. So, that's something that we're working on with DRNA  
19 to get that sorted out.

20

21 We need to do that across time. Right? Because we can't just look  
22 at the most recent years because of the way we're managing. We  
23 need to sort out the entire time series of data. So, that's going  
24 to be a process. That's going to take some time.

25

26 The other issue that we have is the integration of the  
27 electronically reported data and the paper form data. That's still  
28 an ongoing process. And because they're not perfectly aligned, I  
29 won't get into all the gory technical details, but because they're  
30 not yet perfectly aligned, we're stuck with using average  
31 correction factors. We're not calculating new correction factors  
32 for every year yet.

33

34 Those data are available, but they're not yet integrated in a way  
35 that we can do that. So, getting the year specific correction  
36 factors may completely change the game here. Recall, what we're  
37 doing right now is taking the correction factors from 2014 to 2019  
38 and getting an average and applying that forward in time. So, that  
39 average is applied to 2020, '21, '22, and so on down the line.

40

41 Is that the correct thing to do? It's what we have. But it will be  
42 better to get all these data integrated, the electronic, the paper  
43 form data, and calculate year specific correction factors, which  
44 may give us a very different picture of where we stand with the  
45 landings relative to the ACLs. But right now, we're doing the best  
46 we can, given the data difficulties.

47

48 We can revisit a couple of things in those decisions as well. Those

1 were SSC decisions that we've continued to follow, but maybe  
2 there's even a better way to get those averages. So, there's a lot  
3 of data work that we can do that may provide us with a different  
4 picture of where the landings stand relative to the ACL, but right  
5 now this is what we've got.

6  
7 One of the things that we can immediately fix are these apparent  
8 outliers. You know, if it's not 18,000 pounds but it's a 180 in  
9 reality, that really changes where you are with the landings  
10 relative to the ACL just by, apparently, one trip. So, there's a  
11 lot going on. We're working with Ricardo and Daniel to get this  
12 sorted out, and it is active research right now.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Graciela and then Vanessa.

15  
16 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, a couple of additional things. We do  
17 not have recreational landing for lobsters in the U.S. Caribbean.  
18 That's a very big missing gap, especially when you have pulses  
19 like this that you have lobsters coming out of your ears. If you're  
20 out swimming and you see a couple of lobsters, they're going to  
21 increase that effort. Also, the use of illegal fishing gear such  
22 as traps by the recreational etcetera needs to be addressed.

23  
24 There are local permits that we've been talking about, you know,  
25 finding out how many of those permits are there that are directly  
26 related to the landings of lobsters and those that are providing  
27 information on lobster that might not have the permit but that  
28 it's incidental catch to that. So, one of the things that came out  
29 of the SEDAR meeting was that perhaps one way of dealing with our  
30 local fisheries is not to continue on the single species path, but  
31 to actually look at assemblages of species. Because, you know, if  
32 there is a lot of lobster coming out and people are reducing the  
33 number of days that they are out at sea, the number of poundage  
34 that they can bring to shore, and if the price is being reduced,  
35 this is the right time to go to Cabo Rojo and have a local fresh  
36 spiny lobster for less than \$20, a whole lobster.

37  
38 So, that's a very significant drop in prices starting at \$65.  
39 That's the usual price of lobster in a restaurant, \$60 to \$65.  
40 Being able to go to a first-rate restaurant in the main area of  
41 Lobster Landings and eating for \$20 a whole meal, it's an extreme  
42 change in the fishery.

43  
44 In addition to that, there are regulations on the imports of  
45 lobster. So, there is a size limit and there have also been  
46 complaints that the lobsters that are being served probably do not  
47 meet the requirements of the 3.5 inches carapace length and the  
48 ounces per tail that are supposed to be coming into the area. So,

1 these are gaps in our information that need to be addressed  
2 urgently because of the big changes.

3  
4 The other thing that we have all talked about is the changes in  
5 the oceanography. So, we are trying to incorporate that into the  
6 changes in the landings. How are we going to do that specifically  
7 that still needs to be looked at? But in terms of the social and  
8 economic data that needs to be collected that NOAA is addressing  
9 regarding the local indicators, we need to deal with the local  
10 indicators rather than the national indicators. So, Tarsila will  
11 be presenting on that today, and that's something that is an  
12 ongoing effort. Then, how are we going to introduce all those  
13 parameters into the stock assessment and the determination of the  
14 status of the spiny lobster fishery and the other fisheries in the  
15 area, that also needs to be addressed.

16  
17 The last thing, luckily, I have a list, is that we need to increase  
18 efforts in terms of fishery independent surveys in the area, and  
19 Clay, you mentioned this, and incorporation of fisheries into that  
20 effort. But I think that we also need to look at the comparison of  
21 what the fishery has done over the past 50 years or so. I mean,  
22 these are fishers that have provided for their families, etcetera,  
23 over that period of time and what we want to do with them regarding  
24 the work that needs to be done independent of the fishery.

25  
26 So, I don't know exactly how to address that, but SEAMAP, in the  
27 Caribbean, has been working and has [gapy?] data on recruitment.  
28 So, that might be one way of, you know, allowing the fishers to  
29 set out collectors and provide that information to us or Casitas,  
30 etcetera.

31  
32 So, there are ways that we can incorporate them into those efforts  
33 to actually get an index of recruitment or abundance. Thank you.

34

35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa and then Kevin again.

36  
37 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Graciela practically  
38 put up most of the points that I was going to bring, so I will not  
39 repeat them. But I want to share with you my experience at a fish  
40 market where I work daily. I think that Crespo and Julian really  
41 made their points.

42  
43 I have never seen the situation that we have right now with the  
44 lobster. I have been, since 2010, working daily in the ports. So,  
45 this is something that is not only, and I know that science needs  
46 to be with the data, but we already know that the data collection  
47 in Puerto Rico is really, really, wrong and that's the truth. We  
48 have a lot of new fishermen since, practically, 2021 up to now,

1 there is a new generation, a lot of new divers.  
2  
3 It's not only about the situation with the traps, as Nelson  
4 expressed that we have. Many of the traps have to be removed  
5 because they catch a lot, and we don't have sales. We also don't  
6 have where to put this amount of lobster either.  
7  
8 The situation and socioeconomic points that Graciela put. Right  
9 now, especially on the west and the east coast where there is more  
10 concentration of divers, we have to control them to practically  
11 two or three days only to go out and also the pounds that they can  
12 catch. So, when you control the fishermen that usually sells to  
13 the fish market, and then the fish market controls the prices to  
14 the restaurants, and you stop them this way, which makes the  
15 fishermen go directly to the restaurants. That is the situation  
16 that we have now.  
17  
18 Most of the fishermen that go out the days that they are not  
19 supposed to, then they go to the restaurant and the restaurant  
20 knows the necessity they have for the money, for the day, for the  
21 living day by day. And then, the restaurants are controlling the  
22 price. That's why it drops down from \$10 or \$11 per pound that  
23 they used to pay the fishermen, right now they are paying \$5 or \$6  
24 per pound.  
25  
26 The new generations, that are the most divers that we have right  
27 now, for them, because they were not here during the time of 2010  
28 before 2015, they didn't go through that moment where we made the  
29 efforts to put the price that the fishermen deserved for the effort  
30 that they put in day by day. So, for them, get 100 pounds and sell  
31 it for \$5, that's \$500 in their pocket and they are good with that.  
32 But when you compare those fishermen that have been putting the  
33 effort with the traps and those that have been here for more than  
34 20 years diving, for them, that's not the right price. It's not.  
35 It's practically taking them back 20 years and not recognizing the  
36 effort and not recognizing anything. The cost of going out every  
37 day is really high.  
38  
39 So, we have this situation: the restaurants are now controlling  
40 the price, the fishermen are not well paid, but the cost of going  
41 out day by day continues growing. So, in the meantime, I think  
42 that, practically, by next year the fish markets are going to  
43 disappear and this will go back to being a direct sale and the  
44 price will continue lowering.  
45  
46 We have a big situation with the knowledge of this new generation  
47 about the importance of putting the correct data in those reports.  
48 So, we need to make a big effort on that. They need to recognize

1 the importance. They need to understand that this will not affect  
2 their benefits for food stamps, for medical insurance because,  
3 practically, as I said, 30% is not reported because they don't  
4 have a license, and the 70% that do, only report 50% of the reality.

5  
6 So, for those numbers that we are working with the science is  
7 working, but you need to practically multiply that by 4 or 5  
8 because the reality right now is that we have a lot of lobster,  
9 and we don't have sales. Once we think about putting-- because we  
10 know that the quota for Puerto Rico is now lower, and every time  
11 that they receive the notice that we're going to go overfished, in  
12 their minds they think, "Okay. Now I have to report less, because  
13 if last year I reported good, but now I'm getting penalized, now  
14 this year, I'm going to report less than I was reporting."

15  
16 So, this is a big situation. It's something that we need to work  
17 with day by day and the orientation to the fishermen just to help  
18 benefits the data. DRNA can work better with their situation. And,  
19 of course, we need to focus on the last two years for that data.  
20 Don't think about 2015 or 2017. Everything changed after 2021.  
21 Thank you.

22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin and Andy.

24  
25 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. So, getting back to some of Graciela's  
26 comments, we do have a project ongoing. It's well underway now,  
27 that is cooperative research with the fishers here in Puerto Rico.  
28 It's a lobster trap survey.

29  
30 The idea of the survey-- and you'll hear more about this tomorrow.  
31 The idea of the survey is to look at those lobsters that in the  
32 next year, the next 6 months, the next 2 years, will molt to be of  
33 legal size. So, the idea is not larvae coming in. These are animals  
34 that in the next year, the next 2 years, are going to molt and be  
35 of legal size to enter the fishery, and what that allows you to do  
36 is make some predictions about what kind of harvest will be  
37 available, or how many animals, I should say, how many animals  
38 will be available for harvest in the coming year, 2 years. So,  
39 that allows the Council to be nimble in its management.

40  
41 You know, do we need to change the ACL? Are we seeing a big pulse  
42 of animals that will be moving into the fishery? If so, you all  
43 can adjust. Are we not seeing those recruits coming in? Maybe you  
44 need to adjust in another way. So that's the idea behind this  
45 project, and this is meant to be a long-term project. We've got it  
46 going in Puerto Rico.

47  
48 We tried to get it going in the Virgin Islands with IRA money, but

1 didn't get bids on that contract. So, we're going to try again  
2 this year to get that started. We'll start in Saint Thomas, and as  
3 more money, if and when more money becomes available, we move it  
4 throughout the Virgin Islands. So that's what we're doing at the  
5 Science Center.

6  
7 It doesn't fix the current problem. But in addition to looking at  
8 the data with DRNA and making sure that those landings data are as  
9 complete and accurate as possible, we've got, in the longer term,  
10 this trap survey that is fishery independent. It's cooperative  
11 research with the fishers, but it will be run as a fishery  
12 independent survey, meaning there'll be a survey design that the  
13 fishers work with us to follow, and we'll be getting that  
14 information over the coming years. It takes a while for these  
15 things to happen. Science doesn't always move very fast.

16  
17 Again, it doesn't solve the current issue, but, hopefully, in the  
18 coming years that kind of index can be a real game changer for the  
19 way we manage lobsters.

20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy.

22  
23 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, this has been an excellent conversation.  
24 I guess I was trying to think about the next steps and wanted to  
25 make some recommendations for Council consideration.

26  
27 So, I guess, first of all, I want to acknowledge, right, this is  
28 kind of a classic challenger problem with annual catch limits.  
29 Right? That you use annual catch limits to control the levels of  
30 harvest, oftentimes, we have fisheries that are not bumping up  
31 against their catch limits, and it's viewed as a good thing when  
32 in reality, that could mean that the stock is actually not doing  
33 well. And then, in situations where the stock of fish or lobster  
34 is doing well because of good recruitment, it's hitting that catch  
35 limit, but we just haven't caught up with the scientific advice  
36 and information and it's being looked at as a bad thing, but in  
37 reality, there's a lot of drivers affecting why it may be abundance  
38 is up and why fishers are seeing more lobster or other species.

39  
40 So, with that said, what I would recommend is for both the pelagic  
41 species that exceeded the catch targets, catch limit, and the spiny  
42 lobster ACL overage that we asked the SSC to take a look at that  
43 data and information. In particular the spiny lobster, if there's  
44 any information that could be brought forward by Puerto Rico DNR  
45 with regard to this increasing trending catch rates or abundance,  
46 as well as anything the Science Center could put forward. I think  
47 that would be informative to the SSC. And then, the outcomes of  
48 that, assuming the next SSC meeting are sometime between now April,

1 could be shared at the April Council meeting.

2  
3 And then, in the meantime, I guess my second recommendation, if  
4 the Council is agreeable to having the SSC take a look at this,  
5 would be to have staff take a look at our accountability measures  
6 for spiny lobster and come back with some potential proposed  
7 options or changes that the Council could then start working on at  
8 the April meeting.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks. Sabater?

11  
12 **ROBERTO SABATER:** The data collection from the recreational sector  
13 of Puerto Rico, I think is 0 or minus 1. We have a big problem  
14 here. I know every person that I talk to, who is a recreational,  
15 sends no data. The only data that is available sometimes is from  
16 the different tournaments around the island and not all of them  
17 report. I know there is a lot of fishing going on right now,  
18 especially bottom fishing in the north of Puerto Rico coming out  
19 of Cangrejos Yacht Club and all these areas.

20  
21 We must, I don't know how, put pressure on somebody or how to start  
22 creating systems. I know the infrastructure is there. It has to be  
23 modified. It has to be treated. But we must develop the will to  
24 pick up this data. The main one is creating a recreational license  
25 because that way you put them in the system, but that, because of  
26 political crap, we cannot be able to obtain. So, there must be  
27 some other way in which we should or could get these people slowly  
28 to start reporting what they catch every day. Thank you.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin.

31  
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Just a quick response. So, Grisel Rodriguez at  
33 DRNA has been running a program for a little over a year now or,  
34 with sampling throughout this year. We're working with her, at the  
35 Science Center in sort of a support role. So, she does have people  
36 out in the field collecting. It's kind of like the old MRIP, MERF  
37 survey that had been around since 2000 to about 2017. We think  
38 it's a better design, so we're helping work on the survey design  
39 there.

40  
41 She's having some difficulty getting fully staffed, so there aren't  
42 people throughout the island. So, she's working where she can,  
43 where she's got port samplers to go out, and they're going to vary.  
44 I can't remember now exactly. I think they're working in the north  
45 and the west. Maybe it might be east and west.

46  
47 But anyway, she's doing the best she can with the available staff,  
48 but she's trying to get more people hired. She's running into some

1 administrative issues, I think, because the funds are there as I  
2 understand it, but keeping the staff has been a challenge. But she  
3 does have people in the field.

4  
5 We are working with her to build that survey design. And back in  
6 the days of MRIP, they were only interested in finfish. So, they  
7 didn't record lobsters or conch or anything like that. In this  
8 survey, if they bring it to the dock, her people are measuring it,  
9 and they're getting counts and weights and lengths and all that  
10 kind of stuff.

11  
12 So, there is a project ongoing. You're exactly right. We have to  
13 be able to do that because we don't know the size of the  
14 recreational fishing impact. So, it is happening.

15  
16 It's also happening in the Virgin Islands. Sennai and his staff  
17 are working with the Science Center to try and get those surveys  
18 going. So, things are happening, but as I mentioned earlier,  
19 science can sometimes grind along a little slowly compared to  
20 events on the ground.

21  
22 So, things are happening, though. Thanks.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. I think we-- Graciela, really  
25 quick.

26  
27 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, a couple of things. One, the Council  
28 does have a certain set of regulations that are in place that  
29 protect spiny lobster and those are the seasonally closed areas  
30 where traps are prohibited year-round, but they only close for 3  
31 months out of the year. But they also have Bajo de Sico, which is  
32 open to spiny lobster fishing. It used to be closed, but again, it  
33 would only be harvested via while you're diving or free diving.

34  
35 So, these are the things that, you know, the Council needs to  
36 review when we're talking about what to do about the overages of  
37 ACLs and keep that in mind.

38  
39 We're also working with DNER data on the geospatial distribution  
40 of spiny lobster. So, in the portal that we're trying to finish  
41 and make it available to everyone, you should be able to see, you  
42 know, what towns have been providing 75% of the lobster landings  
43 for the past 30 or 40 years. So, these are things that have been  
44 on the table.

45  
46 Also, the FAC in Saint Thomas and Saint-- well, mostly Saint Croix,  
47 I think. But at other meetings, the possibility of establishing  
48 seasonal closure for protection of the spawning period, of the

1 spiny lobster, might be something that the Council would like to  
2 consider at some point. So, there are things that the Council can  
3 do that are already part of the regulations that we have in place  
4 that might need to be changed. So, thank you very much.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're kind of way back in time. Go ahead,  
7 Gerson.

8

9 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** To Graciela's comment. I don't think that's  
10 accurate what you just said about establishing a closed season for  
11 spiny lobsters spawning time. We do have regulations on the size,  
12 and we are working with the traps to regulate the amount of traps  
13 that can be fish in the Virgin Islands, but not a closed season  
14 for the spiny lobster.

15

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Go ahead.

17

18 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** In reviewing the information, we go back  
19 to the FAC records from, for example, the nineties and things like  
20 that. It doesn't mean that it was proposed. It was discussed as a  
21 possibility to use a seasonal closure to protect the-- but we do  
22 have records of all of that, since the time of Toby Tobias and  
23 that-- so, we're talking 20 years ago.

24

25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Alright. So, I have somebody in the chat,  
26 and you want to say something?

27

28 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We have Grisel Rodriguez in the chat.  
29 She mentioned here, "We cover West and Northeast." "Tournament  
30 data is collected for all marine tournaments." And then she said,  
31 "Thanks, Kevin."

32

33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thanks.

34

35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Tú ibas a decir algo?

36

37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. All I wanted to say, really, on the  
38 exceedance of the catch target for pelagic. For whatever it's  
39 worth, I've been speaking to some fishermen on Saint Croix, and  
40 they believe that because Hurricane Beryl decimated the Barbados  
41 and Saint Vincent and the Grenadine Fisheries vessels, that that  
42 stock has moved up this way, and they're catching more. That's  
43 what they're saying. They're catching 186-pound bigeye tunas,  
44 something that's rarely seen. Miguel?

45

46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Just to close before the coffee break.  
47 Fishers asked me, whether there will be a closure or not, for the  
48 spiny lobster this year. I will ask María, probably, to clarify

1 for the record, if you can, what is the status? Because we received  
2 the letter as being discussed, etcetera. So, this fisherman would  
3 like to know, and I have to talk to him Saturday, what is coming  
4 because he's a lobster fisherman. His family, who are also  
5 fishermen, they heard this rumor, and they wanted to have  
6 clarification.

7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

9

10 **SENNAI HABTES:** I know we're moving on to the coffee break, but I  
11 think I'd like for us to have clear recommendations from the  
12 Council on what we're going to do moving forward based on Andy's  
13 recommendations. So, maybe if we can have somebody provide those,  
14 then we can motion, second and vote on them.

15

16 I think we do need the same thing for the previous conversation  
17 about EEJ as well. So, either we can decide to table that until  
18 the end of the day, vote on it all at once, or we can do it one by  
19 one.

20

21 No preference to me. I just want to make sure that we have that in  
22 process.

23

24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

25

26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I agree with Sennai. I think at this time we  
27 would like to take on the recommendation for the spiny lobster for  
28 the AMs and for the pelagics. And then, my suggestion is that once  
29 the Outreach and Education Panels have their participation, maybe  
30 we can bring back the EEJ because I think that's extremely related  
31 to what they are going to be doing. Mr. Chair, I think Andy has  
32 his hand up.

33

34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Andy and Crespo.

35

36 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, based on Sennai's recommendation, I  
37 guess I look to you, Chair, do you want the motions for  
38 recommendations to go forward?

39

40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

41

42 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Okay. So, I'll make a *motion to request the*  
43 *SSC review pelagic and spiny lobster ACL overages at their next*  
44 *meeting.* Can I get a second and discuss.

45

46 **SENNAI HABTES:** Second.

47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We are writing this up, Andy.

1  
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Sennai. I'll pause if you need time to  
3 write the motion.  
4  
5 So, I think it'll be good for the SSC, based on data and information  
6 that the Fishery Service as well as Puerto Rico DNR and U.S.V.I.  
7 can provide, to look at these overages. There's obviously a lot of  
8 information with regard to market conditions and other things that  
9 may be affecting harvest levels. And so, to get a kind of full  
10 picture of that issue and review that data and information would  
11 be helpful at the SSC level. And then, based on those discussions,  
12 we can get feedback at the April Council meeting.  
13  
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, I believe that while they work  
15 with the motion on the screen, the intention is clear to-- La  
16 puedes poner más grande, para que Carlos la pueda ver. ¿Tú la  
17 puedes ver?  
18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. I can't.  
20  
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, I will do the honors for the Chair. Motion  
22 to request the SSC to review pelagic and spiny lobster annual catch  
23 limit and annual catch target overages at their next meeting.  
24 Motion by Andy Strelcheck, second by Sennai Habtes. I believe, Mr.  
25 Chairman, it is for discussion now.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Any discussion? Crespo, ¿querías decir  
28 algo? Okay. I guess not. Open for discussion? Okay. María?  
29  
30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I just want to suggest also that as part of  
31 the information that is provided to the SSC, what Graciela was  
32 mentioning and Gerson about the regulations that apply into the  
33 different areas, everything that we have historically done for the  
34 spiny lobster and that is being done right now that also  
35 contributes to control effort. And also, Graciela also talked about  
36 oceanographic conditions and socioeconomic market, etcetera. All  
37 that information that should be provided to the SSC for their  
38 evaluation.  
39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?  
41  
42 **SENNAI HABTES:** So just for this motion, I would recommend that we  
43 also clarify the years that we're discussing what the overages  
44 were. Is it the 2022-2023 season, or is it 20-- it's 2022 to 2023?  
45  
46 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** My understanding is it's based on the 2022  
47 landings.  
48

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** 2022 landing?  
2  
3 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** And it's comparing--  
4  
5 **SENNAI HABTES:** So that'd be 2021 to 20-- No. It's the 2023 landing.  
6  
7 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** 202-- I'll let Sarah answer.  
8  
9 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** It's 2020 to 2022 for spiny lobster. For the  
10 pelagic species, it's 2022. So, it's separate.  
11  
12 **SENNAI HABTES:** Okay. Sennai again. Liajay, can you make sure you  
13 add that in the motion just so we have it clear?  
14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Robert's Rules, you have to make an  
16 amendment to the motion.  
17  
18 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sorry.  
19  
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Or you can just consider that we have it on the  
21 record, and we know what we're talking about. But I yield to Sennai  
22 to what we should prefer to do.  
23  
24 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. Well, we're in discussions, so I think we  
25 can have the discussion. She can make the edit and then I'll make  
26 a motion, once that edit is made, to change it to that. If that's  
27 okay with you.  
28  
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Your motion is to amend the motion to include  
30 the years.  
31  
32 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yes.  
33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, just do that now. Yeah. You need a second,  
35 and then you continue. We don't want to make it more difficult. It  
36 just--  
37  
38 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sure. I gotcha. I motion--  
39  
40 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Miguel?  
41  
42 **SENNAI HABTES:** Oh, sorry, Andy.  
43  
44 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Miguel, hold on. Miguel, I'm okay with a  
45 friendly amendment without having to do a second motion. So, if we  
46 wanted to just modify the initial one with the years, I'm fine  
47 with that.  
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Andy. That's still better.  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the amended motion is to request the SSC to  
4 review pelagic for the year 2022 and spiny lobster (years 2020 to  
5 2022) annual catch limit and annual catch target overages at their  
6 next meeting. Motion by Andy and seconded by Sennai. All in favor  
7 say, "aye."  
8  
9 **GROUP:** Aye.  
10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? *Motion carries.*  
12  
13 We're going to take a quick break. Oh, I'm sorry. Andy?  
14  
15 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Before we break, if you don't mind, two  
16 things. I wanted to answer the question about the closure. So,  
17 because we received the landings data very late this year, we don't  
18 have any intention of closing the fishery for spiny lobster. Based  
19 on, obviously, the discussion we just had, we will reevaluate the  
20 need for a closure based on the scientific discussions and advice  
21 from the Science Center, but also the SSC going forward.  
22  
23 The other thing I mentioned, I would like to have a *motion to*  
24 *request staff to develop a presentation, or options paper for the*  
25 *April Council meeting discussing spiny lobster accountability*  
26 *measures.*  
27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're writing that up.  
29  
30 Okay. The motion is to request staff to develop a presentation  
31 paper for the next Council meeting for the spiny lobster  
32 accountability measures. Is that right?  
33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You need a second.  
35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second.  
37  
38 **SENNAI HABTES:** I second the motion.  
39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Open for discussion. Hearing none, all in favor,  
41 say, "Aye."  
42  
43 **GROUP:** Aye.  
44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? *Hearing none, motion*  
46 *carries.*  
47  
48 Thank you, Andy, for all that you've done here for us.

1  
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Thank you. And sorry I can't attend the meeting  
3 any longer. I appreciated the time this morning.

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we will take a quick break. Only about  
6 5 or 6 minutes because we're way back.

7  
8 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. We're going to get started again.  
11 Everybody, have your seats.

12  
13 Okay. So, next we're going to have María López with the IBFMP  
14 Amendments.

15  
16 **UPDATE NMFS/COUNCIL ACTIONS AND IBFMP AMENDMENTS - MARÍA LÓPEZ**  
17 **MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO**

18  
19 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is María López  
20 with NOAA Fisheries. I'm going to be talking about the Caribbean  
21 amendments in action, their status, and also talk about priorities  
22 for the Council to consider for 2025. This is a presentation that  
23 we give at every Council meeting, so that the Council knows where  
24 what's the status of each one of the actions that they've voted  
25 on, and the different stages.

26  
27 So, you're going to see that this is going to look different from  
28 what we have presented in the past. Sarah and I have been working  
29 on a different way of presenting this information to you. If you,  
30 at the end of the presentation, if you have any comments on how to  
31 improve this or maybe you don't like it and you want to go back to  
32 what we had before, we are more than happy to accommodate that for  
33 you.

34  
35 Okay. So, this is what the Council and staff has been working on  
36 during 2024 and the different stages.

37  
38 So, in 2024, as you know, there was Framework 2 to all of the  
39 island-based FMPs to update the spiny lobster, based on the updated  
40 assessment from the SEDAR. So that became effective on May 30<sup>th</sup> of  
41 this year.

42  
43 We also have Amendment 2 to all the island-based FMPs, and this is  
44 for the trawl, net gear, and descending devices amendment. So,  
45 this amendment had the notice of availability of the amendment and  
46 the proposed rule published in the spring and through the summer,  
47 and so that comment period ended in October. So, right now, we are  
48 developing the final rule. The amendment was approved by NOAA

1 Fisheries, and the Council Chair was informed that the amendment  
2 was approved. So, the last thing to do in this one is the  
3 development of the final rule and publication of the final rule.  
4 Now on this one, if you recall, this is the one that prohibits the  
5 use of trawl gear.

6  
7 What what's up? Oh, okay. Oh, the pointer. I don't have it. She's  
8 presenting. Sorry. Excuse me. So, I'm in the second row.

9  
10 So this is the amendment that prohibit the use of trawl, purse  
11 seines, trammel nets, extended the regulations of the provisions of  
12 the trammel nets to all fisheries in the EEZ, and also prohibits  
13 the use of gill nets for other fisheries because it was already  
14 prohibited for spiny lobster in reef fish since 2005, but there  
15 were some exceptions that the Council made for the harvest of some  
16 species that are not under the Council management as long as  
17 they're compliant with certain requirements that are related to  
18 the size of the mesh, the tending, and quantity. Okay? So that  
19 proposed regulation is published. It should be in the Council  
20 website. The amendment should be on the Council website as well.

21  
22 So, the other action that was included in this amendment is a  
23 requirement to have descending devices available and ready for use  
24 in case it's needed when fishing for reef fish in the EEZ. So, the  
25 Council had requested that that part of the regulation that sets  
26 that requirement to have the descending devices available was  
27 delayed. So, we are working on developing the final rule and make  
28 a determination as to how much time the regulation will be delayed.

29  
30 The reason that this regulation was requested to be delayed is to  
31 give time for the Council's outreach and education to conduct more  
32 outreach and more education to fishers, recreational fishers,  
33 charters, commercial fishers on the use of the descending devices,  
34 how to create them, what are the indications for their use, and  
35 what is barotrauma. The descending devices are meant to be used  
36 when a fish is exhibiting signs of barotrauma.

37  
38 There's some confusion from fishermen in terms of what are the  
39 requirements, etcetera. So, all of those things the Council will  
40 be working on and clarifying those, what are the requirements for  
41 the use of descending devices, through their outreach and  
42 education. Any questions on that one for now? And I will be  
43 updating everybody during the next April meeting on decisions.

44  
45 I think we have a question. Nelson?

46  
47 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON AMENDMENT 2**

48

1 **NELSON CRESPO:** The quest the question is not for you, exactly.  
2 It's for Ricardo López. In the amendment of the net gear, is the  
3 local government considering establishing compatible regulations,  
4 especially for the trammel nets?  
5

6 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Not officially, until that is requested.  
7

8 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Ricardo. Any other comments?  
9 Miguel?

10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** One question, María. Does the Council need to do  
12 something at this time or just receive the information?  
13

14 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for that question, Miguel. So, at  
15 this time there's nothing for the Council to do other than continue  
16 supporting the Outreach and Education Panel and their Council  
17 liaisons on their efforts to increase awareness and education on  
18 the use of descending devices. Also, collecting information about  
19 the questions that the fishermen have regarding their use, and if  
20 there's any request for sources of additional information that we  
21 can assist with.  
22

23 The other thing is I would like to, perhaps when we have the  
24 outreach and education participation later, hear some about what  
25 the needs in terms of the areas are. Like, for example, one of the  
26 things that they said is that perhaps more efforts are needed in  
27 the charter sector to talk about the descending devices or more  
28 efforts on the recreational so that more efforts can be focused on  
29 those sectors.  
30

31 Okay. I'm going to move on to the next action.  
32

33 The next action. The next action is Amendment 3 to all FMPs  
34 Management Measures for dolphin and wahoo. The comment period for  
35 the proposed rule for this action is ending in October and right  
36 now the staff is developing the final rule. This is the amendment  
37 that establishes management measures for dolphin and wahoo. It  
38 establishes bag limits for the recreational harvest of those  
39 species and also size limits. So, NOAA Fisheries is addressing  
40 comments that were received during the proposed rule period and  
41 the notice of availability, and the response to those comments are  
42 going to be available in the final rule. This amendment has been  
43 submitted also for approval by NOAA Fisheries, and we will be  
44 expecting that determination soon. So, once the final rule is  
45 developed and published, the regulations will become effective 30  
46 days after that publication of the final rule.  
47

48 So, this is another area that would benefit from increased outreach

1 and education because these are new regulations that would apply  
2 to two of the most harvested species by the recreational sector.  
3 So, this will be something that perhaps the outreach and education  
4 panel can address as well and determine what are the needs to  
5 increase those efforts for education on these regulations.

6  
7 Okay. So, moving on, the next action is Framework 3 to the Puerto  
8 Rico FMP. This is the updates to the management reference points  
9 for the triggerfish stock complex based on SEDAR 80. So, right now  
10 we're in the process of waiting until the proposed rule is  
11 published. It has already been submitted to NMFS headquarters for  
12 publication. Once that rule is published, we will send out a  
13 fishery bulletin in both English and Spanish indicating that the  
14 comment period is open so you can all submit comments to this  
15 proposed rule through the methods listed in the notice. So, it's  
16 very important that if you have comments not just for this proposed  
17 rule, but for other proposed rules or any other documents that we  
18 are requesting, if there's a federal notice announcing comment  
19 period, those comments should be provided in the methods that are  
20 indicated so that they can be included in the record and addressed  
21 properly.

22  
23 Okay. So, the next action that we have been working on is Amendment  
24 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP to reclassify the rainbow runner as a  
25 pelagic species under the pelagic species group. So, the IPT was  
26 developing the amendment. We will have a presentation on this  
27 amendment later. During the August meeting we were going to bring  
28 up the amendment for discussion. The August meeting was canceled,  
29 as all of you know. So, in the notice announcing this meeting, it  
30 was announced that there was a possibility that the Council will  
31 take final action on this amendment. However, we still have to  
32 work on some comments and work on some edits and reviews. So, the  
33 document is not ready for final action at this time. We will be  
34 discussing that later today. I just wanted to mention that Mr.  
35 Chair, for the record, that this is not going to be ready at this  
36 meeting for final action.

37  
38 Okay. The next action. As you can see, we have been very busy this  
39 year. We're still not done. It's, Framework 3 to the U.S. Virgin  
40 Islands Fishery Management Plans. This is the queen triggerfish  
41 modification of management reference points based on SEDAR 80. So,  
42 during the period between the April meeting and now the IPT has  
43 been developing the framework action, obtaining all the reviews,  
44 etcetera. So, at this meeting, Sarah is going to be giving a  
45 presentation on the amendment, and the Council can select the  
46 preferred alternatives and can also decide if they want to move  
47 forward with an amendment and take final action. So, this can be  
48 discussed after that presentation when Sarah goes on.

1  
2 Let's go to the next slide, please.

3  
4 Okay. So, these two are two actions that we haven't really taken  
5 any further action on after the April meeting or before that.

6  
7 So, this is Amendment 4 to the Saint Croix FMP. Modified seasonal  
8 closure for pelagic fishing. So, as you know, before the April  
9 meeting there were some discussions on the action. During the April  
10 meeting there was further discussion. However, it was also  
11 determined at that meeting that more information was needed to be  
12 able to continue developing an action. So, during the summer there  
13 was a plan to continue that during a DAP meeting or in other  
14 activities to scope, right, to collect information on what the  
15 action would be. And this is, to remind you, this was a request to  
16 open the water column of the Lang Bank area during the seasonal  
17 area closure for fishing for pelagic species. So, we were going to  
18 discuss that at the August meeting to bring it back, but the August  
19 meeting was canceled.

20  
21 So, the status of this action, right now, is pretty much unchanged  
22 since the last discussion that we had. So, this would be a good  
23 time for the Council to discuss and see what the next steps would  
24 be. If they want to move forward with this, if they want to continue  
25 gathering information, so we can give some guidance to staff as to  
26 what to do next for 2025.

27  
28 Before I move to the next one, Carlos, maybe this will be a good  
29 time to talk a little bit about this one.

30  
31 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON AMENDMENT 4**

32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Thank you, María. Yeah. I do believe that  
34 we need to gather more information. The Saint Croix Fisheries  
35 Advisory Committee had this on their agenda a couple of meetings  
36 months ago. We got some tasks from Sennai of some information we  
37 needed to gather, and we haven't had a chance. So, I'd like to put  
38 that off for now until we have more information.

39  
40 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, based on what you're  
41 saying, you are requesting this action be tabled for now until  
42 Saint Croix is able to collect additional information and bring it  
43 back to the Council to see if there's further interest in pursuing  
44 this. Is that correct?

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

47  
48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Noted. Thank you. Any other comments on

1 this action?  
2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos, when do you think that we will have the  
6 information? 2025 sometime? By the end of the year?  
7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I think it would be-- we meet once a  
9 month, so I would say the middle of 2025 if all goes well. If it  
10 doesn't, we'll just discontinue the idea for now, for a while.  
11  
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, that the decision, probably, will be taken  
13 after the summer, at the August meeting? Are we not going to  
14 discuss it at the April meeting?  
15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. Right. No, we won't discuss. Gerson, that's  
17 going to take a while for us to come up with that Lang Bank fishing  
18 during the closed season. It's going to take a while in the FAC?  
19  
20 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** As I told you a couple weeks ago, we need to  
21 concentrate in one subject at a time because we have been putting  
22 so much effort in too many things and so we are just prolonging  
23 the time frame in doing stuff. So, we need to modify our agenda  
24 for each meeting so we can stick to just one subject and get it  
25 out of the way. That way, we can move forward in a lot of things.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Alright. I think we'll table it all  
28 through 2025. I don't think we'll be ready for that.  
29  
30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We will remove this  
31 from the list of actions that we're going to be taking action  
32 during the next month or year, whatever, and whenever you are ready  
33 to bring it back or you have an update for the Council, we just  
34 can do that. Thank you.  
35  
36 Okay. So, the next action that we discussed throughout the year  
37 was the development of federal permits. There was some discussion  
38 which was brought by NMFS staff during-- I believe it was, I'm not  
39 sure if it was during the April meeting or the December meeting  
40 last year, right? So, at this time NMFS is not able to provide  
41 information on the federal permits, however, we would like to  
42 request the Council to give us space during the April meeting to  
43 continue this conversation. What we were going to bring to the  
44 Council is an example of a permit or how a permit would look, under  
45 different scenarios. By no means does that mean that this is the  
46 permit or what you guys should do, it is just to show an example  
47 of how it would look and the things that can be done and also where  
48 there are information gaps. Okay?

1  
2 So, this is meant more for the Council to think about how they  
3 want to move this into the future. Any questions about that?  
4 Graciela?

5  
6 **QUESTIONS COMMENTS ON DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERAL PERMITS**

7  
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just-- María? You're saying that then we can put  
9 it on the agenda for April?

10  
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes.

12  
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.

14  
15 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, if the Council agrees, we can put that in  
16 the agenda for discussion in April.

17  
18 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I think that would also give us an  
19 opportunity to have the local governments, the ones we've already  
20 started looking at the permitting system that they have in place.  
21 So, I think that perhaps include a short presentation from each of  
22 the local governments on the strategy for licensing and permits  
23 that they have in place.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

26  
27 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. If I recall correctly at the April meeting,  
28 we did have some discussion on this. And I know that we were  
29 supposed to have a meeting with the DAP for Puerto Rico and the  
30 government to discuss how we would do it. I think Gerson and myself  
31 were supposed to attend, but that meeting never took place.

32  
33 So, if we can have that before we go into next year's April meeting,  
34 that would give us something to walk in with.

35  
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. The other way, the other way. We need to--  
37 okay. Go ahead, María.

38  
39 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Julian. Yeah. Thank you for the  
40 reminder. So, when we talked about this last time, there was a  
41 recommendation to have that meeting after NMFS was able to provide  
42 more information about some of the questions that you all had on  
43 how the federal permit system could work, because we were afraid  
44 that we would not have answers to your questions if we had that  
45 DAP meeting before we were able to put everything together. So, by  
46 no means, at the April meeting, will we be requesting the Council  
47 to take any action. This is informative at this point, so I think  
48 it would benefit, in my opinion, from having the discussion or

1 having the presentation conducted by NOAA Fisheries.  
2  
3 We have Dr. Jessica Stephen; she's an expert on permits. Bring the  
4 questions that you all have and then we can bring all of those  
5 answers as best as we can when we meet at the DAP. The reason for  
6 this is that we don't want the DAP members to go, basically, empty-  
7 handed and we're not able to answer your questions because we have  
8 to get a little bit creative with this permit. This is something  
9 that it's new and we need to ensure that the way that is created  
10 it's suitable for the realities in the Caribbean.  
11  
12 So, if, Mr. Chair, if you agree with that, or if you would like to  
13 have the DAP meetings before then, you know, we can accommodate  
14 that, but then that means that, you know, the DAPs, they need to  
15 be convened before or after the April meeting. That should be in  
16 the schedule and the agenda.  
17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. This is something related to the budget.  
19 It's a chicken and egg thing, but I agree with Julian, that's what  
20 we wanted to do. So, probably for this meeting, we can have the  
21 presentation made at the Council meeting but then allow  
22 participation for the three DAPs. We can convene a virtual meeting  
23 so they will be able to hear the presentation and then discuss it.  
24 That is one way of doing it.  
25  
26 The other will be-- remember, we are not going to take any action  
27 at that time. Following the Council meeting, we can have a virtual  
28 meeting of the DAP where we are going to include not only this but  
29 also the EEJ and other considerations that we postponed from last  
30 year. I will ask the 3 Chairs, Julian, Nelson, would you prefer to  
31 have the meeting after the Council meeting once you have this and  
32 be able to thoroughly discuss it and then present whatever  
33 discussion you may have at the August meeting? So that way you  
34 have ample opportunity to discuss it because maybe a member of  
35 your group may have an idea that is good, and you can move that  
36 forward for the discussion to the Council.  
37  
38 So, if we do that--  
39  
40 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I agree.  
41  
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Excellent. So, we do that, María. We are  
43 going to have a virtual meeting of the DAPs after the Council  
44 meeting.  
45  
46 **NELSON CRESPO:** I agree, too.  
47  
48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for that. And, again, any

1 information that the DAP Chairs would like to provide to us, you're  
2 more than welcome to submit that information to us, in terms of  
3 interest, in terms of anything. We know that we can communicate  
4 with you if we have any questions when we are creating this  
5 presentation and putting it together.

6  
7 Okay. So, that's all we have that we have been working on, or we  
8 were planning to work on in 2024. We discussed earlier the next  
9 item that is in there. This presentation was supposed to be-- oh,  
10 go ahead. I'm sorry. Julian, sorry. I couldn't see you.

11  
12 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Sorry to interrupt again. Can we scroll back up to  
13 amendment-- I think it's amendment number 3 with the nets or 2.

14  
15 Yeah. Amendment 2. So, Nelson had a question earlier to Ricardo  
16 about compatibility. He says that his response was that it hasn't  
17 been requested yet. Now, I know that Nelson has been pushing for  
18 this for a long time because of the issue with the harvesting of  
19 lobsters and bycatch and all of that in territorial waters. How  
20 does the Council request or can they request that at this meeting,  
21 for compatibility with this amendment that it would be both local  
22 and federal? Similarly, to like how we have seasonal closures.  
23 What are the steps? What are the steps that need to happen to make  
24 the request to the Puerto Rican government to make it compatible  
25 so this net thing can really work?

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Usually, it's not an official request, but  
28 at every meeting that we present an amendment to any plan, we  
29 include this for the record. That's why they are here, by the way.  
30 The Council desires to start working on compatibility  
31 possibilities for compatible regulations, and that's the way it  
32 works. Actually, the local government does not have to wait until  
33 we finish the whole thing.

34  
35 They can have their own regulations that move forward. The  
36 compatibility could be from the shoreline to the edge of the 3-  
37 miles in the case of the Virgin Islands, 10.35 in the case of  
38 Puerto Rico, to the EEZ. So, both ways.

39  
40 So, usually, in the past, what we have done is, the Chairman sends  
41 a letter to the local government. We have these regulations  
42 approved in the EEZ; we would like you to consider compatible  
43 regulation that will enhance the enforcement of this important  
44 management measure. That's the mechanism that we have.

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Katherine?

47  
48 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, from NOAA Office of General

1 Counsel for the record. I was just going to kind of get to that  
2 part that Miguel just said that if the will of the Council is to  
3 communicate to the Puerto Rico DNER, like, a desire that they work  
4 on compatible regulations, I think a letter is an appropriate venue  
5 for doing that. That way, you know, you've got a record of that,  
6 but it would require, you know, a Council vote to determine whether  
7 or not to draft such a letter.

8

9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes.

10

11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, on the subject of compatible regulations,  
12 both the Saint Croix and Saint Thomas Fisheries Advisory Committees  
13 have already reviewed all the spreadsheets that we did with our  
14 compatibility with the EEZ and local waters. I know that Puerto  
15 Rico has what they call the Junta. It's like a Fisheries Advisory  
16 Committee. Now, I don't know if they have done the same thing over  
17 here. Well, we've already completed our assignment, and we've  
18 already prioritized how we want to go about compatibility and what  
19 we have determined will be able to go compatible and what may not  
20 be compatible.

21

22 But I think Puerto Rico might not have gotten that far yet. Nelson?

23

24 **NELSON CRESPO:** I belong to the Junta de Pesca too in Puerto Rico,  
25 and we have been requesting for many years, you know, we need to  
26 do something regarding the nets. You know, because we think it's  
27 necessary to protect our resources. That type of gear is really  
28 dangerous. I've said it here many times. So, it's so frustrating  
29 that nothing comes forward on this issue and you can see year by  
30 year the same thing again and again. All the dead fish, all small  
31 lobster that come to the market with the trammel net.

32

33 Because if you are a diver or you fish with traps, you have the  
34 ability to select what you're going to bring. But with the trammel  
35 net, it's impossible. Now what most of the trammel netters are  
36 doing is they pull the trammel net and if they got a bunch of  
37 lobsters, they bring the net to the shore in the boat, put it in  
38 a trailer, take the net to the house, grab a new net, put it in  
39 the water, and then come back to take all the lobsters out. Do you  
40 think they are going to put all of the small lobsters, lobster  
41 with x, back to the water? That's never going to happen.

42

43 I suggest the Council request the local government to have  
44 compatibility regulation regarding this issue.

45

46 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** To the point of Nelson Crespo, I was a gillnet  
47 and trammel net fisherman in Saint Croix for many years until we  
48 banned it. A bycatch of the trammel nets is the turtles, and that's

1 a federal protected species. So, if you guys are looking for a way  
2 to grasp the opportunity to ban that way of fishing, that's the  
3 way to go, through accidental catch of turtles, which a trammel  
4 net will catch. And the amount of time that a net is left in the  
5 water is probably killing a good amount of turtles because we used  
6 to set the nets and go with them home the same day. These guys are  
7 setting those nets and leaving them in the water for x amount of  
8 days. I don't know the exact process, but it's x amount of days  
9 for them to catch.

10  
11 Look into it, maybe somebody will open their mouth and say it's  
12 true they're catching turtles. I used to do it, and accidental  
13 catch does happen for the turtles.

14  
15 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for that information. And precisely,  
16 bycatch impact of nets to endangered species is one of the reasons  
17 why it was so important for this Council to regulate the use of  
18 these nets. So, at this time I would like then to request the  
19 Council for us to pass a motion, so the Council can prepare a  
20 letter to the Puerto Rico DNER and, the U.S. Virgin Islands DPNR,  
21 to request compatible regulations with amendment 2, which  
22 prohibits the use of certain net gears.

23  
24 I do want to make the distinction that there are going to be  
25 regulations that are already compatible, particularly in the U.S.  
26 Virgin Islands. They do have regulations that are compatible, so  
27 not everything that is in the amendment will be applicable, but we  
28 can determine that in the letter. We can specify what are the  
29 things we are going to be requesting compatibility with.

30  
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, would you like also to suggest including  
32 the amendment 3 because it will be published in December too. So,  
33 one letter could cover both. Or do you want to keep them separate?

34  
35 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Miguel, for that. I think, I would  
36 like to treat this as a separate issue, and then we can move and  
37 discuss the amendment 3, which is the amendment for the dolphin  
38 and wahoo after we have a discussion with the Council, but we  
39 should focus right now on the request for the trawl. I think Kate  
40 has a comment.

41  
42 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yeah. Kate Zamboni, if I may, Chair. I agree  
43 with María. I think it would be important to have the vote, as to  
44 whether or not the Council's going to send a letter regarding  
45 compatible regulations, separate Amendments 1 and 2, but if there  
46 are two motions and they both pass, I think those could be combined  
47 in a single letter to reduce workload. But for the purposes of the  
48 vote, I recommend keeping them separate issues.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai.  
3

4 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, if I may, Mr. Chair. I do think we need to  
5 create something more formalized in terms of regular working  
6 towards compatible regulations. Doing it as a one off where we  
7 have something like the trawl amendment passed creates what's the  
8 easiest way to say this, an inefficient workload at the territorial  
9 level. Because anytime we need to do something through a  
10 commissioner declaration or, God forbid, something that has to go  
11 to the senate or the legislature to be passed, it is at a point  
12 where we do not have the resources generally to do so within an  
13 annual basis. I think if we created a larger structure where we  
14 are regularly reviewing changes that we make here at the Council  
15 level and put in place a process that allows that to continually  
16 move forward at the territorial level, we will have a lot more  
17 success in developing, you know, the necessary rules and  
18 regulations that govern our fisheries.

19  
20 I'm not saying I'm opposed in doing this letter currently, but I  
21 think we can use this as a starting point for a framework to do a  
22 better job of creating changes to the regulations in concert,  
23 meaning, you know, across DNR, DRNA, DPNR, and with the Council?  
24

25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We have to be careful with that too because we  
26 are talking about two jurisdictions that we don't have a say so as  
27 to how you do it. So, I agree with you, but that has to come from  
28 local government.

29  
30 In the case of Puerto Rico, they did that. They created the famous  
31 Junta. The problem is they don't meet the darn thing, and I belong  
32 to La Junta and Nelson and others. We have been waiting for a year  
33 or two. Actually, Ricardo, has been very frustrated with this  
34 because we have a bunch of ideas and we bounce it here and there,  
35 and then nothing happens.

36  
37 So, I agree with that, but in the in this case, the Council needs  
38 to-- I believe that you already, Mr. Chairman, considered that  
39 Amendment 2 could be included-- to have a motion to send a letter  
40 to both local governments regarding that one. And then when we  
41 discuss Amendment 3, if we go the same route, you can have the  
42 motion for that one. And as Kate suggested, probably we can combine  
43 in one letter both items, but we need to discuss Amendment 3.

44  
45 So, where are we, Mr. Chairman? Do we need the motion for the first  
46 one? María?

47  
48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. Thank you. And thank you, Sennai, for

1 the suggestion. I think as part of the Council process when the  
2 actions are discussed, and the Council Members or representative  
3 of each one of the agencies, I think, when we're discussing the  
4 actions I think that's something that, as representatives of the  
5 agencies you should, you know, think about what are the  
6 possibilities of compatible regulations in your own territories  
7 and maybe that will be a good time to talk about that. But keep in  
8 mind that when we are discussing regulations, not all things that  
9 are discussed in here end up being final actions. Right? There are  
10 things that we started discussing and then, you know, move and do  
11 something else.

12  
13 So, the process that we are doing right now is that we are going  
14 to take final action and then we want to officially request the  
15 state agencies to adopt compatible regulations. I think it would  
16 be appropriate given the process that we are taking here. As you  
17 said, it may be difficult to implement things based on what you  
18 said, you know, if there are changes in government, if you have to  
19 wait until there's meetings, etcetera, but at least the process is  
20 started.

21  
22 But I do want to bring back a conversation that we had with Carlos  
23 about compatibility with regulations. You remember the U.S. Virgin  
24 Islands we have been in conversations with you guys about doing an  
25 analysis of what regulations are different between the U.S. Virgin  
26 Islands and federal waters. There's going to be regulations that  
27 will benefit the Council to be compatible with you and then there  
28 will be other regulations that you would like to be compatible  
29 with us.

30  
31 So, in a conversation with Carlos, that's something that can be  
32 brought up and then that could be a way of starting this process  
33 saying, "Okay. So, these are the regulations and the areas that  
34 have been identified that could benefit from that." That's  
35 something that we tabled for a while, but this could be a good  
36 moment. Maybe when I go to the next slide, if the Council would  
37 like to bring that back to the table, if the U. S. Virgin Islands  
38 is ready to discuss that, then we can bring it back and then start  
39 that process.

40  
41 Okay. So, I want to go back to the motion. I would like to make a  
42 motion regarding the letter for compatible regulations with  
43 Amendment 2. *The motion would read, to request the Council prepare*  
44 *a letter to the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Environmental*  
45 *Resources and the U. S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and*  
46 *Natural Resources to request compatible regulations with Amendment*  
47 *2 to the Island-Based FMPs, trawl, net gear and descending devices.*  
48 Anything else?

1  
2 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** We don't need the last part of the sentence.  
3 We don't need the last part of the sentence. Okay. So, no. I would  
4 recommend just removing where it says, "which prohibits the use of  
5 certain net gears." Because the amendment already includes all  
6 that information and then when the letter is created, we can  
7 specify what are the things that we will be requesting  
8 compatibility on.  
9  
10 Okay. So, that's my motion. I will read it.  
11  
12 I'm going to read the motion for the record. Motion to request the  
13 Council prepare a letter to the Puerto Rico DNER and U.S.V.I. DPNR  
14 to request compatible regulations with Amendment 2 to the Island-  
15 Base FMP, trawl, net gear, and descending devices.  
16  
17 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.  
18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. So, the motion reads, "to request the  
20 Council prepare a letter to the Puerto Rico DNER and U.S.V.I. DPNR  
21 to request compatible regulation with Amendment 2 to the IBFMPs,  
22 trawl, net gear, and descending device. Discuss. Julian?  
23  
24 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just a clarification, María. Yep. Should that say  
25 "trawl" and then "common net gear" or is it "trawl, net gear?"  
26  
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Julian, this is the title of the amendment.  
28  
29 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay.  
30  
31 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, so the title of the amendment is-- let me  
32 look it up. So, Amendment 2 to the Puerto Rico, Saint Croix, and  
33 Saint Thomas, and Saint John Fishery Management Plans, trawl, net  
34 gear, and descending devices. That's just the title of the  
35 amendment.  
36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** For a discussion? I have one. Because I  
38 understand that Puerto Rico has this issue with their gill and  
39 trammel, which we have prohibited for years now. But we do have  
40 certain types of nets that they use in territorial waters,  
41 especially to catch the bigeye scad and I don't want a confusion  
42 when it comes to the net gear wording in that. Miguel?  
43  
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, the amendment is just that. That doesn't  
45 mean that the local government will do exactly what the federal  
46 government has done. You have to have a rationale as to why you  
47 are going to have compatible regulations.  
48

1 The point is that whenever a fishery is shared by the two  
2 jurisdictions, then the compatible regulations should be as close  
3 as possible. When it's mostly in the federal water, the regulation  
4 goes to the federal water, and they can even preempt the local  
5 water if the fishery is in jeopardy for some reason.

6  
7 By the way, preemption is the word that Roy Crabtree hated for  
8 many, many years because it's not easy. So, that's why it's so  
9 important that when we write a letter and it's received by the  
10 local government, in this case it will be the Commissioner of the  
11 Regional Alliance, Department of Planning and Natural Resources in  
12 the case of Puerto Rico, the Secretary, with a copy to both of  
13 you, then you can look at what the amendment has and what do you  
14 have that can be compatible. In the case of Puerto Rico  
15 specifically, you had to go to the Junta and discuss it and follow  
16 the procedure.

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

19  
20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Carlos. So, just to clarify, so  
21 what the letter will be requesting is compatibility with the  
22 actions that are included in the amendment. There are specific  
23 actions that are going to be implemented in the final rule, and  
24 that's what we're going to be requesting. There may be, as Miguel  
25 said, you know, the jurisdiction can take their own actions. We  
26 are requesting it, and it will be ideal, right, to be compatible  
27 so we can have the same protection for the resources, but that's  
28 up to the state agencies to make the decision. So, our job would  
29 be to just request that.

30  
31 If there are other things that need to be brought to the attention  
32 to the Council because they're occurring in the EEZ, then that's  
33 something that the Council can definitely discuss, and, you know,  
34 put it into for consideration for the future. If it's something  
35 that just occurs in state waters but doesn't occur in the EEZ,  
36 then it will be jurisdiction of the state agencies.

37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Ricardo?

39  
40 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. This is Ricardo López from DNR for the  
41 record. It's just a suggestion. When you write the letter to the  
42 Secretary, please add that as an attachment, all the information  
43 about Amendment 2, so the Secretary can read that from the  
44 beginning.

45  
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Ricardo. Oh, sorry, Miguel.

47  
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. Usually, we send the final rule with the

1 letter with the timing, but we can send any document that you think  
2 is appropriate. I'll send it to them, you know, a whole book,  
3 because that will help because I know that it will end up in your  
4 lap anyway. So, that's a good suggestion.

5  
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, just a quick thing. I know in our V.I. code,  
7 we have something that says except for nets specifically used for  
8 catching bait. So, I just want to make sure that that stays in.

9  
10 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. I just want to remind the Council that  
11 when the decisions were made regarding the specific gillnets, they  
12 use as a model the U.S. Virgin Islands, and that is something that  
13 should be compatible already with the U.S. Virgin Islands. However,  
14 there's always, you know, space for modification, like, if there's  
15 anything that, in the language, needs to be modified, etcetera. We  
16 do have some differences in the U.S.V.I. regulations, you have a  
17 specific species that you are listing, we do not have it like that.

18  
19 But my understanding is that the size of the mesh and all of the  
20 other requirements are compatible with the U.S. Virgin Islands and  
21 that was done on purpose.

22  
23 Mr. Chair would like to suggest moving to the next-- oh, you have  
24 something else. I'm sorry.

25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. That's what I was telling-- We have a contract  
27 with the hotel, so my suggestion is that we break for lunch after  
28 the vote and come back at 1 o'clock rather than 1:30 so we continue  
29 this discussion. It's important that the Council have, for the  
30 record, the same way that you have done it now, do it for the other  
31 amendments. So, we need a vote for this one and then we can go to  
32 lunch and come back at 1 o'clock, not 1:30.

33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we're going to go ahead-- I guess discussion  
35 is over. So, go ahead and vote for this. Everybody in favor, say  
36 "aye."

37  
38 **GROUP:** Aye.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, *motion*  
41 *carries*. We're going to break for lunch. Be back at 1.

42  
43 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on December 04, 2024.)

44  
45 - - -

46  
47 DECEMBER 04, 2024

48

1 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

2 - - -

3  
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're getting back to the agenda, and  
5 we're going to have María finish up her work.  
6

7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome back. This  
8 is María López with NOAA Fisheries. We're just going to finish the  
9 discussion of the action status and priorities for 2025. We were  
10 when we took the break for lunch, we had just passed a motion to  
11 request the Council prepared letter for DNER and DPNR requesting  
12 compatible regulations with Amendment 2, which is the trawl and  
13 net gear.  
14

15 The next thing that we wanted to do is, do the same motion for  
16 Amendment 3, which is the amendment for dolphin and wahoo. So, I  
17 would like to pass a motion on that.  
18

19 But before that, I would like to also bring back what was discussed  
20 before about having some sort of process to request compatibility.  
21 We were discussing a little bit about this, and we think that  
22 perhaps the Council may want to say it as, "consider doing this  
23 every time that we have an action that we're going to be taking  
24 final action," like, for example, we bring it to the Council to  
25 discuss and the Council votes. Maybe that will be a good  
26 opportunity for the Council to prepare that letter requesting  
27 compatibility and providing supporting documentation to DPNR and  
28 to DNER so they can send those requests to their agencies, to  
29 consider compatibility.  
30

31 So, maybe, Mr. Chair, if that's something that Council Members  
32 agree with, maybe that's something that can be set up as a process.  
33 I don't know if we would need a motion for that or just requesting  
34 Council--  
35

36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Maria, can you repeat what the process will mean?  
37

38 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, this is in response to Sennai's request  
39 that there be a more formal process for basically communicating  
40 what the Council is doing with the state agencies. I'm sorry. I  
41 wasn't listening entirely, but I think what María was suggesting  
42 is that the Council could make it more of an instituted process  
43 where after there's been final action taken on either framework or  
44 an amendment, that the executive director or the Council Chair  
45 could send a letter to those 2 agencies sharing that document, you  
46 know, as a "For your information. The Council just took final  
47 action... and NMFS hasn't implemented these things yet, but we'll  
48 be starting that process." And then that would give them some time

1 if they wanted to work on compatible regulations to work on it  
2 while NMFS is working on it.

3  
4 I don't know that you would need a motion to institute that, but  
5 I would defer to Sennai on how he feels about it, because he seemed  
6 to have strong opinions about whether or not this should be  
7 instituted and if you did it via motion, it would be maybe a little  
8 bit more formal and maybe that's the will. But--

9  
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We don't need have a motion for that. I've been  
11 doing that sort of thing forever.

12  
13 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I agree. You don't necessarily need a motion  
14 to do it, but if you want it in your record that this is what the  
15 Council's going to do, this is how it's going to be handled, then,  
16 you know, that would be a good way to keep track of it.

17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But there are two things. That will be sort of  
19 a heads up. This is what's happening and then allow them some time  
20 to discuss it. But the other letter, I'm going way back to when  
21 Ray Crabtree was here, we're talking about a formal letter after  
22 the Federal Register publication of the final rule. So, we have  
23 two steps.

24  
25 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** That's right.

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah.

28  
29 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yeah. So, it would not be in lieu of doing,  
30 you know, a second letter after the final rule is out. But I think  
31 what María is reacting to is, you know, just as NMFS has a process  
32 that takes time to implement regulations, the state agencies can't  
33 just turn around on a dime and implement something new. They need  
34 time.

35  
36 So, by sending them a copy of the final amendment or framework,  
37 it's just giving them that heads up of, "Look, NMFS is going to  
38 start working on this. Maybe you want to start thinking about it  
39 or not." You know, it would be up to them, but it would give them  
40 a little bit more time.

41  
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But if I may, Mr. Chairman, I believe that the  
43 record, right now, is enough for us to go ahead and have that first  
44 step. And that will be a letter to both local governments and we  
45 will include the documentation that we discussed, maybe the  
46 amendment or whatever document. So, they will have an opportunity  
47 to go through that and probably in the future, they will be  
48 prepared.

1  
2 Anyway, the other thing that we have to be careful of is because  
3 the lawyer has been telling us all the time that we have to be  
4 mindful about the two jurisdictions, but I will rely on Sennai and  
5 Ricardo. How do you see this moving forward?

6  
7 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. So, just to clarify, I think what María was  
8 alluding to and what I was kind of making a statement on is the  
9 fact that there's a lot of data and information that goes into  
10 making the decision at the Council that then is not seen when just  
11 a letter is sent to the state agencies. While we are, often, you  
12 know, here when the decisions are getting made, like, then I go  
13 back to the Virgin Islands, and I have 50 other things that I'm  
14 pushing forward, and I forget the information. But I then have to  
15 make that same argument to my director and the commissioner or  
16 sometimes the governor or the senate.

17  
18 So, what we were saying is it's best to, when you send the letter,  
19 to include that justification and rationale along with the  
20 amendment framework, so that all of it is there and available, and  
21 I don't have to go back and search. And I say "I" because,  
22 generally, it's me and a few of our staff that are going to be the  
23 ones that are going to work on compatible regulations and  
24 developing it. You know? And there's a lot of other stuff going  
25 on.

26  
27 I'm sure the same is the case for Ricardo. There's only a few of  
28 us in these state agencies that do this kind of stuff. So, if we  
29 can create a framework by how we're going to do this going forward,  
30 and the reason I was making the point that I think it does need to  
31 be something where there's a motion or it's more formalized in the  
32 record, is then what if I'm gone? Right? Like, if I leave my  
33 position or Ricardo leaves his position, there really needs to be  
34 something where we've described the framework by which we're going  
35 to be moving these things forward, so it stays in perpetuity.

36  
37 You know? Like, we have a great working relationship now, but, you  
38 know, God forbid somebody else comes in and doesn't want to do  
39 that. You know, if we have it as a motion where it's been on  
40 record, then there's a clear reason why they would have to continue  
41 to do that.

42  
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's exactly my point. If you change the  
44 administration and the person doesn't want to do that, there's no  
45 way in hell the Council can do it or even NMFS can force them to  
46 do it. So, I agree with you. At least this way, everybody will be  
47 on the same page, have the same documents, and everything. Because  
48 in the case of Puerto Rico, they may have to go to the Junta, which

1 is similar to the fishery advisory committee that you have.  
2  
3 So, Kate, do you think that, either way, a motion will be stronger  
4 at this time, or we just leave it as it is.  
5  
6 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I think it's the will of the Council in  
7 terms of whether or not you want to memorialize this as a motion,  
8 but I think Sennai has made some really good points as to why doing  
9 it via motion makes sense.  
10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, I think Sennai can do the motion.  
12  
13 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I would like to make a motion or propose a  
14 motion that the Council creates a framework by which any final  
15 action that is being taken by the Coun-- am I making it too  
16 complicated, Kate? Yeah. Okay.  
17  
18 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yeah. Yeah. You don't need the word frame-  
19 - So, don't use the word framework because that's going to get  
20 everyone confused because we described somethings that are not  
21 amendments to the FMPs as framework actions, but just--  
22  
23 **SENNAI HABTES:** Any amendment that is being taken is--  
24  
25 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** And any final action by the Council will be  
26 shared with the relevant,  
27  
28 **SENNAI HABTES:** State agencies. Territorial agencies.  
29  
30 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** State agencies. "To include" though, like  
31 you said, "the final document and the supporting information."  
32  
33 **SENNAI HABTES:** Okay. So, *any final action being taken by the*  
34 *Council shall be shared via a letter that includes any*  
35 *justification and data used to make that decision by the Council*  
36 *with the territorial and state agencies in the U.S. Caribbean.*  
37  
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Can you repeat it slowly?  
39  
40 **SENNAI HABTES:** No. There's no way I can remember it. "Any final,"  
41 alright, "any final action taken by the Council will be shared"  
42 "shall be shared with, the state or territorial authorities. It's  
43 just we can just do territorial.  
44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Local government authorities.  
46  
47 **SENNAI HABTES:** Alright. "Local governmental authorities." Thank  
48 you, Miguel. "And include any justification and data used in making

1 that decision.”  
2  
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I rather than “data,” you should say, “and  
4 include any appropriate documentation” because include more than  
5 that.  
6  
7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Sennai, would you take a recommendation on  
8 modification?  
9  
10 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. Have at it.  
11  
12 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, we talked about removing the framework.  
13 “Motion for the Council to create--” no “to share any final action  
14 taken by the Council--” what? Remove the “shall be shared” “with  
15 the DNER and the DPNR.” No? Yeah. Yeah. No. No. Yeah. “DPNR and  
16 the DNER and include any justification and supporting information  
17 used in making that decision.”  
18  
19 Does that work for you, Sennai? Just remove that. Yeah. “DPNR and  
20 DNER and include,” yep, “any justification and data used in making”  
21 not “data” Sorry. “Supporting documentation.” Yep.  
22  
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Sennai, you agree with the language?  
24  
25 **SENNAI HABTES:** I do.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a question about that.  
28  
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. You need a second antes de discutirlo.  
30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second on that.  
32  
33 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** I second.  
34  
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. It's open for discussion. This word  
36 “motion for the Council,” shouldn't it say, “the Council shall  
37 share”? Or you want that same word “motion for the Council to  
38 share”?  
39  
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, “Motion for the Council to” they dropped the  
41 “shall.”  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more discussion, María? Alright. The  
44 motion is “Motion for the Council to share any final action taken  
45 by the Council with the DRNA and DPNR and include any justification  
46 or supporting documentation used in the making of that motion.”  
47  
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** DNER

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Okay. Motion by Sennai and seconded by  
3 Ricardo López. Any further discussion? Sabater?  
4  
5 **ROBERTO SABATER:** This is really an open letter from here on now  
6 forever and ever 'till death do us part. Right?  
7  
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Right. Okay.  
9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more discussion? Okay. We'll take it to a  
11 vote. All in favor, say "Aye."  
12  
13 **GROUP:** Aye.  
14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And before I forget, I have James Kreglo online.  
16 Would you want to make a vote, Kreglo? We keep forgetting about  
17 you.  
18  
19 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Aye. Thank you.  
20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Any nays?  
22  
23 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo. Aye.  
24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We got you. Any nays? Any abstention?  
26 Hearing none, *motion carries*.  
27  
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I'm going to continue. We had a specific  
29 motion that the Council wanted to make in regard to Amendment 3.  
30 This is different a little bit different because we're already in  
31 the final rule for this one, and the Council wants to request  
32 compatible regulations. So, we talked about that earlier, so I  
33 would like to present a motion or to request a motion.  
34  
35 The motion will read to prepare a letter *for the Council to prepare*  
36 *a letter to the Puerto Rico DNER and the U.S. Virgin Islands, DPNR*  
37 *to request compatible regulations with Amendment 3, Management*  
38 *Measures for Dolphin and Wahoo.*  
39  
40 Just to remind everybody, this is what we discussed earlier today,  
41 about the final rule that is going to be published soon, and the  
42 Council would like to request compatibility, again, as applicable.  
43 There will be-- there are already regulations that are already  
44 compatible, we will specify that in the in the letter. But there  
45 are others that are not, so. And we'll provide the supporting  
46 documentation.  
47  
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You need a second.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second for the motion by María.  
3  
4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.  
5  
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion?  
7  
8 "Motion to request the Council to prepare--" Why not just say  
9 "prepare"? "Motion to request the Council to prepare a letter to  
10 the Puerto Rico DNER and U.S.V.I. DPNR to request compatible  
11 regulation with Amendment 3 to the IBFMPs, Management Measures for  
12 Dolphinfish and Wahoo."  
13  
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You don't need the first "request." "Motion for  
15 the Council to prepare." Quítale el primer "request" si quieres.  
16 Quítale el "request" y le pones "for the Council to." No, quítale  
17 el "request."  
18  
19 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. The way we had it is match.  
20  
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** "Motion for the Council."  
22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Read it again?  
24  
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mhmm.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** "Motion for the Council to prepare a letter to  
28 the Puerto Rico DNER and U.S.V.I. DPNR to request compatible  
29 regulation with Amendment 3 to the IBFMPs, Management Measures for  
30 Dolphinfish and Wahoo." Any discussion?  
31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Motion by María and second by Vanessa.  
33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. No discussion? I'll take it to a vote. All  
35 in favor, say "aye."  
36  
37 **GROUP:** Aye.  
38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kreglo?  
40  
41 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Aye. Thank you.  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Kreglo. Any nays? Any abstention?  
44 Hearing none, *motion carries*.  
45  
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. So, this is going  
47 to be the last part of this section. Can we go back to the  
48 presentation to the last slide? Okay.

1  
2 So, this is very important because this is a list of potential  
3 actions that the Council could take in 2025. So, the idea with  
4 this action, I was just in conversation with the Chair, is that  
5 some actions are going to be here, and the Council can discuss if  
6 they would like to pursue them and what the steps are. And also,  
7 if there are other actions that they would like to be taken in  
8 2025.

9  
10 So, the idea here will be to, throughout the day, hearing the  
11 discussions and presentations tomorrow, etcetera, to bring this  
12 back to the Council, to the table, so the Council can work,  
13 finalize working on the list, take things out, put things back in  
14 and set priorities 1, 2, 3, so staff can plan accordingly so that  
15 all the activities that need to be associated with this can take  
16 place.

17  
18 So, these are some of the things that have been identified. Some  
19 of this we have talked about before. They either come from the SSC  
20 meetings or from previous conversations during Council meetings or  
21 processes that are ongoing such as the SEDAR. Okay. So, this is  
22 not in any particular order.

23  
24 So, this is the SEDAR 84. It's the yellowtail snapper in Puerto  
25 Rico in Saint Thomas and Saint John and stoplight parrotfish in  
26 Saint Croix. So, this is a SEDAR, this is an assessment. So, these  
27 are assessments that are ongoing. So, what happens after the  
28 assessment, if there are recommendations to move forward with the  
29 results from the assessment, then that needs to be put into actions  
30 and into regulations so that they are effective. So, that means  
31 that there could be potential amendments that are based on those  
32 outcomes.

33  
34 So, where are we related to SEDAR 84? So, in terms of timing, the  
35 expectation would be that is something that would come back to the  
36 Council for their consideration around the summer. Graciella, do  
37 you have a comment regarding this?

38  
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, SEDAR results will go-- I was looking  
40 for Kevin. --will go to the SSC before they come to the Council.  
41 Because, in effect, if there is a need to change the ABC for any  
42 of the species that are going through the process, then the SSC  
43 would have to get back to it. Whether the SEDARs result in  
44 management advice, then that's another story.

45  
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for the clarification. Yeah. So,  
47 let me talk a little bit more about that.

48

1 So, as we have done with other stock assessments, so for example,  
2 for the queen triggerfish and the spiny lobster, there's the SEDAR  
3 process which is taken to the SSC and then the SSC brings  
4 recommendations with the Science Center to the Council for their  
5 consideration and then that can result in management actions. For  
6 example, such as adjusting the ABC, other reference points,  
7 adjusting ACLs, etcetera.

8  
9 So, this is listed in here for your consideration because once  
10 this SEDAR process, SEDAR 84 is finalized and this goes to the SSC  
11 and the SSC meets and brings recommendations to the Council, the  
12 Council can decide to take action on the results of this stock  
13 assessment. So, that means that there are amendments that are going  
14 to be prepared. Okay. So, that's one thing. And we are looking  
15 perhaps into the summer, if everything goes as planned.

16  
17 The other SEDAR, the other assessment that is happening this next  
18 year, it already started with the data workshop, is the spiny  
19 lobster for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix.  
20 This process has started, so we are looking into, potentially,  
21 late in 2025. The same thing. If there are management  
22 recommendations-- or I'm sorry. If there are SSC recommendations,  
23 and then management actions that the Council would like to do,  
24 then that's something that will come, probably, late in 2025.

25  
26 Okay. So, we also talked this morning about the SSC reviewing  
27 accountability measures of the overages for a spiny lobster and  
28 also for pelagic species and what to do with the AMs.

29  
30 So, one thing that the Council, we, talked about was about staff  
31 bringing, preparing an options paper related to the AMs. So, that's  
32 listed in there to address potential changes to the AM. So, that's  
33 something that we discussed this morning, I'm bringing it back to  
34 your attention because it's something that we're going to be  
35 working on in 2025.

36  
37 Another thing that we have mentioned before during past Council  
38 meetings and SSC meetings is to revise catch limits for stocks  
39 that may continue to exceed their ACLs due to enhanced reporting,  
40 and this is in all FMPs. This is because we have stocks that the  
41 information that was used to create the ACLs is newer or there are  
42 other stocks, for example, pelagics, that we didn't have  
43 information before. So, there's going to be stocks that are going  
44 to, continuously, every time we do the monitoring, they're going  
45 to exceed their ACLs because of that enhanced reporting, so that  
46 needs to be revised. So, this is something that came up too when  
47 the SSC was reviewing the rainbow runner, the data available, and  
48 there was a recommendation, more like a general recommendation to

1 take a look at those stocks that the ACLs would benefit from a  
2 revision.

3  
4 One thing to consider in here, and I think the Council should take  
5 into consideration, sorry for the redundancy, is that we don't  
6 have recreational data being collected or monitored at the moment,  
7 so that means that in Puerto Rico the ACLs that are applied to all  
8 the harvest, right now, is the commercial. Because we don't have  
9 recreational data. So, those landings, those stocks that have a  
10 lot of recreational harvest, it's important for the Council to  
11 review those, because that ACL of the stock that is going to be  
12 monitored is the commercial. So that's very, very important. It is  
13 one of the things that we saw also with the rainbow runner. You  
14 know, this is a species that is mostly recreational. However, we're  
15 not monitoring, and the ACL for the commercial sector is set low.

16  
17 Okay. So that's one thing for the Council to consider. And, again,  
18 these are things that would need to be tasked to the SSC. Okay. We  
19 talked about federal permits already. The plan was to have a  
20 presentation, start the process again in April, and then also have  
21 the DAP meet to discuss and to clarify concerns.

22  
23 And there's another thing that we have to bring to your attention.  
24 It's regarding the management of sea cucumbers, corals, and sea  
25 urchins. This is a potential amendment where the Council will have  
26 to update SYLs or consider moving the species to ecosystem  
27 component species. And this is because there are a few stocks or  
28 stock complexes in each one of the three FMPs that did not have a  
29 sustainable yield level number specified because the landings  
30 during the reference period were 0. And these are stocks that have  
31 prohibited harvest. So, that's a problem because we need to be  
32 able to compare landings to that number, to determine if the stock  
33 is likely to be undergoing overfishing. So, basically for status  
34 determinations, which we have to do every year.

35  
36 So, Sarah's going to be giving a very short presentation on what  
37 this means, and this is something that the Council may want to  
38 discuss and send to their SSC as well so they can review and come  
39 with a recommendation. But Sarah will have more details about that.  
40 So, I'm going to-- Sarah, you want to do that right now and then  
41 I'll come back really quick to discuss any other things. So, we  
42 don't lose track.

43  
44 **STOCK STATUS UPDATES FOR SELECT STOCKS/COMPLEXES UNDER THE**  
45 **ISLAND-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS - SARAH STEPHENSON, NMFS-**  
46 **SERO**

47  
48 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Is the presentation status-- okay. Thank

1 you. Thank you. Can you go ahead to the next slide? María gave a  
2 pretty good introduction, so I'm going to just try to be pretty  
3 brief here.

4  
5 We, NOAA Fisheries, the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, posts a  
6 quarterly fish stock status update that includes the status of  
7 each stock that's managed, they're overfished status and they're  
8 undergoing overfishing status. And there's a link to the report if  
9 you'd like to see it and they compile that and present it to  
10 congress every year. And so, those definitions include the  
11 overfishing and overfished, and they're based on information that  
12 we put in the FMPs. There's also the rebuilt one, but we don't  
13 have that one to worry about today. So, next slide, please.

14  
15 Here's what it looks like. If you went to it, you would go find  
16 the jurisdiction for our Council and then they have every single  
17 stock or stock complex for each FMP listed. So, for instance, Saint  
18 Croix, squirrelfish, the surgeonfish complex and you can see down  
19 the list. And then the two columns to the right, lists the status  
20 update. So, is it undergoing overfishing? No. Is it overfished?  
21 Unknown. Next slide, please.

22  
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Question. How can that be? Something that is not  
24 overfishing and then you don't know if it's overfished.

25  
26 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** So, the unknown is usually because we don't  
27 have a stock assessment. That's usually where those determinations  
28 get made. So, here, stock assessments and reference points are  
29 used to determine whether it's overfishing or overfished. And in  
30 the island-based FMPs, we do have the clause that says, if you  
31 don't have a stock assessment, then we compare landings to the  
32 overfishing limit, which for most of our stocks, we've created  
33 this sustainable yield level, which is the OFL proxy. So, we would  
34 want to go compare landings to that number to determine if  
35 overfishing is occurring.

36  
37 If we have a stock assessment, the stock assessment will report if  
38 overfishing is occurring. So, we have 2 methods by which to  
39 determine if overfishing is occurring or not. So, for-- yeah. So,  
40 for Tier 4 stocks, which is most of our stocks, except for spiny  
41 lobster and queen triggerfish, which have now, through the process,  
42 moved up to Tier 3 stocks and have an OFL, for all those other  
43 Tier 4 stocks, we use the SYL to determine if overfishing is  
44 occurring.

45  
46 So, the issue is that for these prohibited stocks that María  
47 mentioned, which are the cucumbers, urchins, corals, there's also  
48 a couple other fish species, the prohibited parrotfish in the Saint

1 Croix and Saint Thomas and Saint John, as well as Nassau and  
2 Goliath grouper in those two island districts, they did not have  
3 the actual number established. Instead, it was put as NA. That's  
4 because landings during the reference period that was used were 0.  
5 So, it was put as NA when it really should have been enumerated.

6  
7 So, there's all of them listed in blue, so you can see it. It  
8 totals up to 15 stocks. So, without that number, we don't have a  
9 target to compare the landings to know if overfishing is occurring.  
10 So, it gets listed as an unknown, which is problematic going back  
11 to those annual recordings. Next slide.

12  
13 So, the Council today, Mr. Chair, could consider tasking your SSC  
14 by evaluating whether these stocks or stock complexes should be  
15 moved to ecosystem component species. These are species that a  
16 Council requires do not require conservation and management, but  
17 they are included in an FMP to achieve ecosystem management  
18 objectives. They do not require the status determination criteria,  
19 so they would not need to set the SYL or OFL number. And so, that's  
20 kind of one method forward for these species.

21  
22 Management measures can be adopted for these species. For example,  
23 if you want to collect data on them, minimize by catch. And so,  
24 that's why you would choose to keep them in your FMP as an EC  
25 species to get some of this information. And perhaps for us, this  
26 last one is the most important. That's because they play a valuable  
27 role in the ecosystem, especially as it impacts other species that  
28 we do manage.

29  
30 So, there's two routes forward for these species. They both kind  
31 of require tasking the SSC to take a look at it. The SSC could  
32 determine that they don't really want to go the route of an  
33 ecosystem component species, and they would feel more comfortable  
34 just setting that sustainable yield level. But that's the method.

35  
36 So, Mr. Chair, if it's okay, the Council could consider tasking  
37 the SSC to look at this, and we could help prepare any  
38 documentation and give a similar presentation to them to outline  
39 the issue.

40  
41 I believe that's the last slide. Oh, there you go. Next steps.

42  
43 So that's pretty much what I just said. If they are able to discuss  
44 it at their next meeting and they bring back any recommendations  
45 to your next Council meeting, and if the Council determines at  
46 that time that they're interested in moving forward with whichever  
47 option, either setting an SYL number or moving some of these  
48 species to ecosystem component species, then the Council, at that

1 time, could direct us to begin an amendment. And that's going back  
2 to María's list of priorities. that's why I wanted to just give  
3 this little update to put it on your radar to help prioritize what  
4 we work on next year. And that is the last slide, so thank you.

5  
6 Any questions?

#### 7 8 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

9  
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Can we postpone this until 2026, or we'd have to  
11 do it in 2025?

12  
13 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** You can postpone it. This is Sarah. You can  
14 postpone it. If it's more appropriate, based on our workload, to  
15 do it in 2026, we can do it then.

16  
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. The question, Mr. Chairman, is because  
18 given the budgetary constraint that we are going to have in the  
19 next 4 years, after we discussed it yesterday and María mentioned  
20 it, probably, at the end of this meeting, we should revisit this  
21 list and compare the list with the priorities of the Council, with  
22 the amendment, etcetera, and see how much budget we have and the  
23 people that we need to allocate.

24  
25 The list that María presented and with Sarah's explanation now,  
26 you have some elements here for you to make a decision on the  
27 priorities. It is very important to put those priorities in place  
28 for next year, because, just to give you an example, the outreach  
29 and education group has a lot of things to do for next year. We  
30 only have \$20,000. So that would be only to pay for the  
31 reproduction of one of the manuals that we have.

32  
33 So, that's why it's so important for the Council to consider this  
34 presentation and the next, for today and tomorrow so we can go  
35 back to the list and provide the staff guidance as to where to go.  
36 In the meantime, I believe that the appropriate way of doing this  
37 will be to consult with the SSC and then get the input from the  
38 SSC. Even though some of us will have an idea of how we can go  
39 about this, it is important that we follow the procedures that  
40 were established. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

43  
44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, can we go back to the listing of the  
45 species that we're talking about?

46  
47 So, a couple of things. One, nassau grouper is under ESA also, so  
48 we should have conversations with them, and we think we should

1 also talk with the Outreach and Education Panel regarding  
2 descending devices and things like that that could be done, you  
3 know, that are already ongoing. The process that the Council  
4 followed to put these species in the list of species to be managed,  
5 really, for most for the parrotfish, the urchins, the cucumbers  
6 are because of their valuable presence, in terms of maintaining  
7 the health of the ecosystems and the fisheries that we know as  
8 coral based fisheries. And corals are also under the ESA, at least  
9 some of them. So, we have two groups that we can start talking,  
10 you know, and collaborating with protected resources, etcetera,  
11 and maybe finding some funding, some additional funding to bring  
12 that to the Outreach and Education Panel for the things that need  
13 to be done.

14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Let me tell you something about Outreach and  
16 Education Panel. You're asking too much about the Outreach and  
17 Education Panel. The outreach and education for the descending  
18 devices is going to be done by the liaison officer. They already  
19 have workshops, and they are going to give you a report of the  
20 meeting they had this summer that was supposed to be brought at  
21 the August meeting that we canceled.

22  
23 So, the important thing is, what is the question that we are going  
24 to address or that we are going to send to the SSC? And parallel  
25 to that, look at what the outreach and education material that we  
26 have regarding the nassau grouper, all the things that we need to  
27 discuss, especially the descending devices.

28  
29 In the case of the descending devices, fishers, the question they  
30 have is, how can I comply with that regulation if you put it in  
31 place? Will it be enough just to have it in my boat? What will be  
32 the form and shape of the descending device? All those questions  
33 are going to be addressed by liaison officers somehow. And then  
34 also, they will have feedback for us regarding the concerns of the  
35 fishers, recreational and commercial, regarding these descending  
36 devices.

37  
38 So, we need to be very clear as to-- and Graciela can help us with  
39 that one and Vance, Dr. Vance Vicente.

40  
41 What is it that we would like to ask the SSC specifically at the  
42 next meeting before April?

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

45  
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. And I wanted to add a little bit to  
47 what Graciela is saying. I think when the SSC is tasked to look  
48 into these stocks for purposes of determining if a number for the

1 SYL can be determined or put in an ecosystem, I think that  
2 conversation about, is the species listed as an endangered species,  
3 as a threatened species, or has a status critical habitat, all of  
4 those things have to come into the conversation because, you know,  
5 one of the reasons that this stocks were added in there is because  
6 of, like Graciela says, the role that they play in the ecosystem.  
7 So, when the SSC is looking at all of this, I think it is super  
8 important to consider that, so we can determine the need for  
9 conservation and management, or continuing conservation and  
10 management for this species.

11  
12 So, I think at this time, again, this is a list of things that  
13 need to be done. Sarah mentioned that not necessarily this has to  
14 be done in 2026. We already have a bunch of things that, as a  
15 Council, we would like to task the SSC to look at. At this time,  
16 I'm not going to suggest tasking the SSC or consider tasking the  
17 SSC to looking into this unless tomorrow the Council decides this  
18 is a priority for 2026 and then perhaps that can be tasked to the  
19 SSC. Sarah, I don't know if you agree with that. Okay.

20  
21 So, any other comments and questions on what Sarah presented? We  
22 will be providing more information about this. This was just kind  
23 of like a preview, so you know what's coming our way. We can answer  
24 any other questions outside of this if you have them, but this is  
25 something that will be brought back to the Council, of course, for  
26 further discussion.

27  
28 Okay. So, the last thing regarding the actions before we move on  
29 to something else is the other. So, in the slide with the  
30 Caribbean--

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a--

33  
34 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah, go ahead, Carlos. Sorry.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a question about that. How come in  
37 Grouper 1 and Parrotfish 1, Puerto Rico is not included in that?

38  
39 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Sarah has the answer for that question.

40  
41 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** For Puerto Rico, for those three parrotfish  
42 species, there were actually landings during the reference period,  
43 so they were able to set a number.

44  
45 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Thank you, Sarah. So, going back, "the  
46 other." The other is other actions that the Council would like to  
47 consider for 2025. And I think, Carlos, you had some ideas that  
48 you discussed yesterday about compatibility or regulation or--

1 Remember, there are going to be further discussions of other topics  
2 throughout these two days, so that's why we're bringing this list  
3 back for priorities, but we'll take note and then we'll share the  
4 list with everybody, all of the Council Members, so they can make  
5 determinations on that.

6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. On the other, I wanted to bring up the  
8 discussion on compatible regulations, since Puerto Rico and Saint  
9 Thomas have already done their homework on the territorial part of  
10 it. In discussing that at our last Fishery Advisory Committee,  
11 Sennai suggested that we bring this up to the Council to at least  
12 jump start the discussion with NOAA and the territory. Right?  
13 Ricardo?

14  
15 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes. Ricardo López from DNER. Just to  
16 clarify, we don't have any fishermen with permits to harvest sea  
17 urchin or sea cucumbers, neither coral. In fact, it is illegal to  
18 do that without a permit, so we don't have any data about how much  
19 the illegal fishermen are taking out of the ocean. But having said  
20 that, it's very important for us to have a study about this. To  
21 study it with fisheries independent methods. To make a stock  
22 assessment of sea urchins and sea cucumbers. So, if you are  
23 planning to do that, please let me know because we'd like to help  
24 with that.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

27  
28 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Good afternoon. Thank you for your  
29 presentation. Regarding the issue item and specifically regarding  
30 the sea urchin complex and fisheries. Well, there is very heavy  
31 fishery pressure on tripneustes esculentus, which is the white  
32 urchin. But that's almost strictly to the Lesser Antilles, like  
33 Martinique, Saint Lucia, and everything.

34  
35 In fact, they're protected now because they have been overfished.  
36 That's the latest I have read about it. But there is a potential  
37 for the exploitation of the white urchin, definitely. Because they  
38 are fished and sold as uni, which are the gonads that are used in  
39 Asian restaurants and so on.

40  
41 Regarding the coral complex and fisheries, the only coral that I  
42 might be concerned about is black coral because there is an  
43 industry of black corals in other areas in the Antilles. In Puerto  
44 Rico, not yet that I know of. I know that black coral is fished  
45 illegally, and it is sold as jewelry and collars and other types  
46 of jewelry, particularly on the West Coast, which I know. But there  
47 is potential for fisheries of black corals in Puerto Rico.

48

1 And regarding sea cucumbers, there was a time in which there was  
2 a demand for sea cucumbers, and they were fishing for it and drying  
3 them up. But that was like a pulse. I do not know if they're being  
4 extracted or fished for any other purpose recently. That's my  
5 comment. Thank you.

6  
7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for your comment, Vance. Yeah. And  
8 if you recall, for the sea cucumbers and sea urchins, we changed  
9 management for those to prohibit the harvest, and I believe Puerto  
10 Rico did the same with an administrative order, because, as you  
11 mentioned, there was some harvesting activity occurring. Before,  
12 we used to have the species as part of, what is it, invertebrates,  
13 aquarium trade. Right? And that was not-- that was something that  
14 needed to be adjusted because this was clearly not aquarium trade.  
15 Right?

16  
17 So, the Council was proactive. The state agencies were proactive  
18 in managing the species. So, the plan here is not to remove harvest  
19 prohibitions on this species. Right? This is something that the  
20 Council has already decided, the state decided, and there's really  
21 good rationale for this. This is about how we are going to be  
22 making decisions about the status, in terms of overfishing  
23 overfished, which is something that we have to do for all the  
24 species that we manage. Right?

25  
26 So, the information about harvesting demand, which kind of species  
27 are, for example, look for in Asian markets or in other markets  
28 for, for example, like you were saying, for black coral, etcetera.  
29 I think that's really good information that can be discussed when  
30 this is brought up to the SSC. Because that will help determine  
31 what are the needs for continuing conservation and management under  
32 different forms by the Council. Either as an ecosystem component  
33 species or included as part of a unit inside the fishery management  
34 plan. Okay?

35  
36 So, we will be talking about that later on. Carlos, you were  
37 talking about compatibility of regulations. Would you be able to  
38 give us a little bit more information on what you would be wanting  
39 to do?

40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, I think what we want to do is present the  
42 list that the U.S.V.I. has come up with to what we felt can be  
43 compatible with the EEZ and what we would like the EEZ to be  
44 compatible with us. We have already done all that work and  
45 sometime, during '25 or '26, we can present that.

46  
47 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Carlos. Okay. So, with this, I'm  
48 done. Again, we're going to bring this back to the Council's

1 attention tomorrow.

2  
3 Mr. Chair, I'm done with this part of the presentation. I know  
4 we're a little short on time. We have the Framework Action Number  
5 3 for the U.S. Virgin Islands, the queen triggerfish outcomes from  
6 SEDAR 80. If you are ready for that, Sarah will be presenting it.

7  
8 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** One thing in the other business, is there any  
9 update on the conch?

10  
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. At this time, we don't have any  
12 updates on the queen conch rebuilding plan, because we are waiting  
13 for research that is ongoing that will be collecting information  
14 that could be used to evaluate the status of the stock in the U.S.  
15 Virgin Islands and in Puerto Rico, which is what we need to  
16 evaluate as part of the rebuilding plan. So, at this point we don't  
17 have any updates.

18  
19 We have protected resources, Jennifer Lee, she's going to be with  
20 us tomorrow giving her update of activities. So, related to the  
21 ESA, she may be able to provide some updates on that. But regarding  
22 the Council with the rebuilding plan, which I believe that's what  
23 you're asking, at this time we don't have any updates because,  
24 again, we are waiting for this research that is ongoing right now  
25 to provide the information that we will be needing to be able to  
26 determine what is the status of the stock, like, what is the  
27 progress that has been made with the rebuilding plan that was set  
28 for the queen conch?

29  
30 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Okay. Thank you very much. Because a lot of my  
31 fishers were asking, at least I can carry that information back to  
32 them. Thank you.

33  
34 **REVIEW AND FINAL ACTION FOR FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT 3 TO USVI QUEEN**  
35 **TRIGGERFISH FRAMEWORK ACTION TO ESTABLISH MANAGEMENT REFERENCE**  
36 **POINTS BASED ON SEDAR 80—SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA**  
37 **FISHERIES/SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE (SERO)**  
38

39 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. Thank you, Cristina. I'm going to walk  
40 through Framework Action 3 to the Saint Croix Fishery Management  
41 Plan, and it's also to the Saint Thomas/Saint John Fishery  
42 Management Plan for queen triggerfish, and this is based on SEDAR  
43 80.

44  
45 So, under both FMPs, queen triggerfish is managed just as an  
46 individual stock. Meaning it's not managed in a group with other  
47 species. In both FMPs, it's classified, currently, as a Tier 4a  
48 stock under the acceptable biological catch control rule, and that

1 means that it is data limited, so we don't have an accepted  
2 assessment yet, and it also has relatively low vulnerability to  
3 fishing pressure.

4  
5 So, as I mentioned a minute ago, that sustainable yield level is  
6 specified as the overfishing limit for those Tier 4 stocks. So,  
7 the ACLs currently are based on commercial landings, and the  
8 accountability measures apply to all fishing, meaning both  
9 commercial and recreational. And the accountability measures state  
10 that if those ACLs are exceeded, the accountability measures are  
11 fishing season closure reductions that are put in place to ensure  
12 that that catch limit, that ACL is not exceeded again in the  
13 following year. Next.

14  
15 These are the current reference points for queen triggerfish in  
16 both islands. So, you can see there that overfishing proxy, the  
17 SYL, the acceptable biological catch, and the current annual catch  
18 limit for queen triggerfish in both Saint Croix and Saint  
19 Thomas/Saint John. These values are in pounds whole weight. Next,  
20 please.

21  
22 So, the SEDAR 80 was conducted for queen triggerfish in both Saint  
23 Croix and in Saint Thomas/Saint John. So, those are 2 separate  
24 assessments, and that was completed in 2024. So, the assessments  
25 for both stocks indicated that overfishing was not occurring, and  
26 they were not able to estimate the overfished status. And so, those  
27 overfished statuses will just remain unknown going forward.

28  
29 So, the Council's SSC reviewed those results at their April 2024  
30 meeting and supported that the stock assessments were providing  
31 the best scientific information available and determined that each  
32 stock assessment was suitable for management advice. Next, please.

33  
34 The SSC in consultation with the Science Center supported that  
35 queen triggerfish under each FMP be reclassified from a Tier 4a to  
36 a Tier 3 stock, which means that it has an accepted assessment,  
37 and it is able to set an OFL that replaces that SYL. So, the  
38 Science Center coordinated with the SSC to set the overfishing  
39 limits and the acceptable biological catch values for queen  
40 triggerfish, and they did that for years 2024 to 2027, and they  
41 did it for both islands.

42  
43 The SSC presented that information and their recommendations to  
44 the Council at the April meeting. We were supposed to review this  
45 during the August meeting, but, as it got delayed, we're reviewing  
46 it now. The Council accepted those recommendations and directed us  
47 to develop the Framework Action to the FMPs to update the reference  
48 points. And I do just want to, again, stress that although it's

1 one document, it is modifying both FMPs. So, even though we only  
2 have one action and we're going to talk about alternatives, it's  
3 for the two different separate FMPs since we are managing by island  
4 now. Next slide, please.

5  
6 So, through this framework action that was developed, the Council  
7 would set new ACLs for queen triggerfish in both FMPs based on  
8 those recommended ABCs, reduced by the Council's management  
9 uncertainty. So, that's the uncertainty that we have to constrain  
10 the catch to the ACLs and the uncertainty in what's reported is  
11 quantified as the true catch amount. What was actually reported is  
12 what the actual catch was. So, that, kind of, you need to think  
13 about, are there any estimation errors in what's reported, as we  
14 start looking at these alternatives that are going to be based on  
15 uncertainty buffers.

16  
17 At this meeting, you'll review the draft document, which was  
18 included in your briefing book, and you can select a preferred  
19 alternative for setting the ACL for both islands. You can pick the  
20 same one or you could pick different ones. Next, please.

21  
22 This is the purpose and needs statement that's included in the  
23 framework action. So, the purpose is to update those reference  
24 points for the two queen triggerfish stocks to account for the  
25 SEDAR 80 stock assessments and application of the control rule.  
26 The need for this action is to update those management measures,  
27 and reference points based on best scientific information  
28 available to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield, which  
29 are consistent with requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery  
30 Conservation and Management Act. Next slide, please.

31  
32 So, there's only one action in it. And, again, as I mentioned, you  
33 could choose different preferences for the two different FMPs. And  
34 the action, although it's specific to ACLs, will also update these  
35 other reference points, maximum sustainable yield or its proxy,  
36 the maximum fishing mortality threshold, and the minimum stock  
37 size threshold based on results of the SEDAR 80. So, it's also  
38 going to update the overfishing limit and ABC values for these  
39 four years, which are going to be shown on the next slide, and  
40 you'll set ACLs from those ABCs for queen triggerfish in each  
41 island. Next slide, please.

42  
43 So, here's a look at the OFL and ABCs. You can see that the OFLs  
44 change from year to year, but the ABC is a constant value, and  
45 that was just a recommendation from the SSC meeting. So, next  
46 slide.

47  
48 So, here are the proposed alternatives in the framework action.

1  
2 Alternative 1 is always our no action, which means what's in the  
3 book stays the same. So, the reference Saint Croix FMP and the  
4 Saint Thomas and Saint John FMP would remain the reference points  
5 for queen triggerfish in each island. Alternative 2 sets a new ACL  
6 based on the ABC recommended, and it's equal to the ABC. So,  
7 there's no management uncertainty buffer in that alternative.  
8 Alternative 3 would have a 5% buffer, so the ACL would be set equal  
9 to 95% of the ABC that was recommended. And then alternative 4, is  
10 the most conservative, and it would set the ACL equal to 90% of  
11 the ABC.

12  
13 These are the standard management buffers that we see, kind of,  
14 from framework to framework or even the same ones that we used in  
15 the FMPs. So, I just wanted to let you know that that's where those  
16 numbers came from.

17  
18 So, here's what the ACLs would look like under each of those  
19 alternatives for the two islands. And again, they're in pounds'  
20 whole weight.

21  
22 So, you can see that, for Saint Croix, it would decrease slightly  
23 from alternative to alternative, as you go up, so slightly less,  
24 from Alternative 2, which is set equal to that ABC, all the way  
25 down to Alternative 4, which is the most conservative. For Saint  
26 Thomas and Saint John, Alternative 2 actually increases slightly,  
27 and then starts to decrease. Next slide.

28  
29 And here's just a look at the ACLs compared to the most recent  
30 landings that we have for queen triggerfish. This is for Saint  
31 Croix. So, you can see that the current landings are all well below  
32 all the proposed alternatives and the current ACL. And you can see  
33 the change there from alternative to alternative. So, the biggest  
34 difference would be a decrease of about 4,500 pounds. Next slide.

35  
36 So as part of the framework action, we kind of have to compare the  
37 effects of each action. So, how might the biological environment  
38 or human environment, so the economics, be affected from under  
39 each alternative. And so, this is kind of a summary of what's  
40 included in the action. So, for Alternative 1, the main take home  
41 is that that's not based on the best scientific information at  
42 this time. We now have SEDAR 80, which was accepted as best  
43 scientific information. So, selecting Alternative 1, wouldn't be  
44 - there's a word with MSA, it wouldn't be appropriate or consistent  
45 with the MSA. Thank you.

46  
47 So, we still looked at the biological ecological. There would be  
48 maybe long-term negative effects from the potential lack of

1 sustainability, using reference points that were set not based on  
2 the best scientific information. Then in the social ecological,  
3 there would really be no current change, but maybe long-term  
4 negative effects if there was decreased income or fishing  
5 opportunities based on that lack of sustainability. Administrative  
6 effects, there would be none, because we wouldn't have to do  
7 rulemaking to change anything.

8  
9 So, for Saint Croix, Alternatives 2 through 4 all have similar  
10 effects. So, for the biological, ecological, you would have maybe  
11 short-term positive effects from fewer fish being removed and long-  
12 term positive effects from managing to the maximum sustainable  
13 yield. And then, as you compare 2 through 4, 4 is the most  
14 conservative of those three alternatives. For the social economic,  
15 you'd maybe have short-term negative effects from reduced revenues  
16 and fishing opportunities, and that's assuming that fishermen are  
17 harvesting to the ACL, but as we've pointed out, the commercial  
18 landings are well below the proposed ACLs, so this isn't likely as  
19 much of an effect as it could be.

20  
21 You could also have, with the economic long-term positive effects  
22 from sustainably managing the stock. And, again, Alternative 4  
23 would be the most conservative or most restrictive out of those  
24 three alternatives. Administrative, there would be some effects  
25 because we have to create, administer and enforce these new  
26 regulations. And so, that would be the same under all three. Next  
27 slide.

28  
29 Here's the same kind of look for Saint Thomas and Saint John. You  
30 can see the landings, the most recent five years of landings on  
31 the right, and the ACLs under each of the alternatives, and the  
32 change in pounds going from Alternative 1 to Alternative 4.

33  
34 And the similar kind of effects. Alternative 1, again, is not based  
35 on the best scientific information, so all of those effects are  
36 going to be the same as what we just went through for Saint Croix.  
37 Alternative 2, as I mentioned, did increase, so it is based on  
38 best scientific information-- Sorry. It increased from Alternative  
39 1. It is based on the best scientific information, and so it would  
40 have an increase in ACL. So, the effects are going to be slightly  
41 different than they will be for Alternatives 3 and 4, which are on  
42 the next slide. But they are very similar to what we just looked  
43 at.

44  
45 So, you're going to have short-term negative effects from increased  
46 removals because they're allowed to catch a few more fish, and  
47 long-term effects from managing to the maximum sustainable yield.  
48 And so, out of the three, kind of, action alternatives, this one

1 is the least conservative for the biological environment. For  
2 social and economic, you're going to have short-term positive  
3 effects from increased revenues and fishing opportunities. Again,  
4 assuming that they fish to the ACL. And that's again because the  
5 number will increase slightly above the current number and you're  
6 going to have long-term positive effects from sustainably managing  
7 the stock. Administrative, similar, where you have to create,  
8 administer, and enforce these new regulations. Next slide.

9  
10 So, Alternatives 3 and 4 are going to have similar to each other,  
11 effects. The biological, again, short-term positive effects from  
12 decreased removals because now it is a smaller, a lower ACL  
13 compared to both Alternative 2 and Alternative 1, the current ACL.  
14 You're going to have long-term positive effects from managing to  
15 the MSY.

16  
17 Social and economic. You might have short-term negative effects  
18 from the reduced revenues. Again, assuming they fish to the  
19 current, or the proposed ACLs, but long-term positive effects from  
20 sustainably managing the stock. And then, the same administrative  
21 effects are based on creating, administering, and enforcing the  
22 new regulations. Next slide.

23  
24 So, the next steps for this action. Today, at this meeting, if the  
25 Council desires, they could select a preferred alternative for  
26 each island FMP, and those can be the same or they can be different  
27 based on your understanding of the management uncertainty for each  
28 of those islands. Are they different? Are they the same? How much  
29 buffer do you want to have between the ACL and the ABC?

30  
31 If you select preferreds today, the Council could also review the  
32 regulatory text which we provided. We can show that to you.  
33 Currently, since we didn't know what the preferred was going to  
34 be, we put the status quo number in there, so it matches the  
35 current regulations. But we can show that to you to see what it  
36 would look like. And then, of course, we could update it if you  
37 pick a preferred alternative. If you select preferreds, we can  
38 also approve moving forward with this Framework Action, so the  
39 Council could submit it to the secretary, allowing us to make any  
40 kind of editorial change, minor, non-substantial, which is what we  
41 typically do. We do need to fill in the chapters that are based on  
42 the economic analysis, so those would need to be completed, and  
43 then those could be sent back to the Chair to redeem.

44  
45 And then, so early next year, we could prepare that, we could  
46 finish that up. We would also include the necessary parts for the  
47 environmental assessment, which is the table of context and some  
48 other analyses. And then we would submit that back to the Council

1 Chair for review. And then, if it looks appropriate, the Council  
2 could submit the Framework Action back to NMFS. And then, at that  
3 point, our Marie and I would begin rule making, and then the public  
4 would have an opportunity to comment during the public comment for  
5 the proposed rule, which that would be announced in the federal  
6 register, and we would send out the fishery bullets in both in  
7 English and Spanish.

8  
9 I believe that's the last slide. Yeah. So, if you want to leave it  
10 back on the next steps just so that the Council could digest that.  
11 And then we could also, if you like, go back to any of the slides  
12 to look at the proposed ACLs, and you could discuss which, if any,  
13 you might prefer to move forward with these two FMPs.

14  
15 And, with that, I'll take any questions.

16  
17 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

20  
21 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Sorry. Just to clarify. So, you said that, in  
22 the presentation, for both Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John  
23 landings have been well under the new proposed ACLs under  
24 Alternatives 2 through 4, for both of them?

25  
26 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yes. That's correct.

27  
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we should pick an alternative here?

31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep.

33  
34 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Cristina, will you go back to the slide that  
35 has the alternatives? Keep going. Keep going. So, this one. Thank  
36 you.

37  
38 So, here's a look at what the alternatives would do. So, under  
39 Alternatives 2 through 4, all of the other reference points would  
40 be the same. So, the only thing that you're changing is the ACL,  
41 and that's based on your level of uncertainty in how we manage  
42 that stock. So, generally in the past, we've discussed uncertainty  
43 and there's some, but it's not a lot, for this stock where they're  
44 fishing under, maybe that gives you a little bit more comfort, and  
45 so, maybe you could set a higher one. But generally, we set the  
46 ACL equal to 95% for our stocks in the past.

47  
48 That's what we've done, just to put that out there for your

1 consideration.

2

3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Gerson and then Julian.

4

5 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Those numbers were always there according to the  
6 way we fish in the Virgin Islands. Alternative 2 will be the best  
7 one for us. We support Alternative 2. The reason is the numbers  
8 will never be the same. Saint Croix is evolving.

9

10 This morning, I heard Puerto Rico talking about the dropping prices  
11 because of so much product being caught of one species. Saint Croix  
12 is evolving to fish only what we have orders for. I was saying in  
13 the past, I was the only one, but speaking to my fishermen, my  
14 fishermen are doing the same thing. So, you will never see the  
15 same amount of catch per effort annually. In different years you  
16 will always see a [fair?] depending on what is in demand for that  
17 month or that season of the year.

18

19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

20

21 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yes. For the Saint Thomas/Saint John shelf, I would  
22 go with Alternative number 3 and take that 5% reduction. It's  
23 normally how we set-- I was giving ourselves a little buffer before  
24 we actually can reach that higher number, which would drive us  
25 into accountability measures. So, I'd rather have that little 5%  
26 buffer. So, Alternative 3, is what I recommend for Saint  
27 Thomas/Saint John.

28

29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

30

31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Usually, Alternative 2, when you have all the  
32 data of the world and you can manage the fishery to the dot, then  
33 you can have ACL equal to ABC. And by the way, the last line  
34 recommended by the SSC, they are referring to the ABC, which by  
35 law, regulations are given to us by the SSC.

36

37 So, if you trust that the information that we have would allow us  
38 to have ACL equal to ABC because there's no, well, everything is  
39 okay, that's fine. What Julian is doing is that, I mean,  
40 recommending, is that in the past, we had discussed that probably  
41 we should have a 5% buffer for the uncertainties on the data that  
42 we have. That's the idea that they discussed.

43

44 So, for the Council, you have to, in the discussion, if you pick  
45 one, you have to tell us, on record, why. And you have to pick  
46 one.

47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Pick one? But can each island have its own?

1 Right? Since we're-- okay. Alright. I have to agree with Gerson  
2 for Saint Croix.

3  
4 I eat a lot of queen trigger and many times when I go to the street  
5 to buy from the fishers, they say, "I don't shoot those things  
6 because they don't sell. If you want me to get you a queen trigger,  
7 put in an order and I'll bring you whatever you want, 2, 3, 4 of  
8 them." And they said they see them everywhere. They just don't  
9 shoot them because not many people are interested in purchasing  
10 it.

11  
12 Now I do know that in Saint Thomas, it's a big fishery, and the  
13 sizes are incredible over in Saint Thomas. And I have to agree  
14 with what Julian was saying about the 5% for a buffer for  
15 uncertainty because their restaurants sell them on the menu. In  
16 Saint Croix you will not find any restaurant, local restaurant,  
17 that has queen trigger on the menu. It used to, years ago, and for  
18 some reason now, I guess, because they don't have good interest,  
19 you don't see them in restaurants anymore. All you see in a  
20 restaurant on Saint Croix, local restaurant, not hotels and stuff,  
21 local restaurants, is the parrotfish. So, Vanessa?

22  
23 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. I also agree. I think  
24 that the DAP Chairs have made their point. They know, better than  
25 us, their fisheries because they are always in the ports, and they  
26 see the catch and sale. So, I would suggest also to the Council to  
27 think about selecting Alternative 2 for Saint Croix and Alternative  
28 3 for Saint Thomas/Saint John. Thanks.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That's a motion?

31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We have the language for the motions.

33  
34 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. So, Mr. Chair, I want to present the  
35 motion.

36  
37 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Mr. Chair, Anne Kersting, NOAA GC. This should  
38 be two separate motions, one for each FMP.

39  
40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So, I will present the number six motion. *The*  
41 *Council moves to select Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative*  
42 *under Framework Action 3 to the Saint Croix Fishery Management*  
43 *Plan.*

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We need a second.

46  
47 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I second.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the motion for Saint Croix is, Council  
2 moves to select Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative under  
3 the Framework Action 3 to the Saint Croix Fishery Management Plan  
4 for queen trigger. Right?  
5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Discussion.  
7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Should we put the word "queen trigger" on there?  
9  
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. Alternative 2 is for the Queen trigger.  
11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Alright. Any discussion?  
13  
14 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Could-- Mr. Chair?  
15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, sorry.  
17  
18 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Could we add queen triggerfish to the motion,  
19 please?  
20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** That's what I thought.  
22  
23 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. I'm okay with that.  
24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alternative 2 queen trigger. Clay?  
26  
27 **CLAY PORCH:** Yeah. Thank you. Clay Porch, Southeast Center. Just  
28 wanted to make the point that, as we've discussed many times, the  
29 data are highly uncertain for all these species. So, just by virtue  
30 of that fact, you would expect you would need some kind of  
31 uncertainty buffer. So, the only question here then, in the case  
32 of Saint Croix, are you really saying you're absolutely positive  
33 because the market demands are so low that you would never come  
34 near the ABC?  
35  
36 I mean, if you're really quite sure of that, then you could argue  
37 not to have any additional buffer. But based on the catch  
38 statistics themselves being uncertain, if you're really trying to  
39 manage the fishery and develop the fishery to reach the ABC, then  
40 with that kind of uncertainty you would want to have some kind of  
41 buffer at least.  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?  
44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I try not to stick my nose in these things, but  
46 now that Clay mentioned it, you know, if that is the situation  
47 that you have in Saint Croix, you can have a 25% buffer. It is not  
48 0 because you don't know. But at least in this case, if you have

1 that buffer, you will be able to prevent, somehow, going over the  
2 ABC, and you won't cause any damage to the situation that you have  
3 so far if you had that buffer. So, the risk that you take when you  
4 equal an ACL with an ABC is that by the time you realize that you  
5 went over the ABC, probably the fish is overfishing, and it will  
6 not be unknown. We will already know that the darn thing is  
7 overfished.

8  
9 But it will be up to you, you know. And the other thing that I was  
10 going to mention is that this is not set in stone. We need to  
11 revise this whenever the appropriate time comes up. But at least  
12 you have a vision of what could happen in the future, and you can  
13 adopt the same buffer for Saint Croix as you do for Saint Thomas  
14 and John. Thank you, Clay.

15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson.

17  
18 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** There's a saying that says in Spanish, "El árbol  
19 que nace doblao' nadie lo endereza" for people to change their  
20 habit of how they eat in the Virgin Islands is rare. I've had  
21 coolers of-- that's why we decided--

22  
23 **SENNAI HABTES:** Hold on a second.

24  
25 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** There's another mic on. Todavía tiene eco.  
26 Nelson, it is you.

27  
28 As I said, the habits of the people of the Virgin Islands are  
29 unique to the world. I was telling Dr. Sennai this morning that  
30 we're driving on the wrong side of the road. I've had coolers, one  
31 cooler of fish, because we bait our traps according to what we  
32 need. We had a cooler of old wife. We call it old wife, queen  
33 triggerfish, we call it old wife locally. And it took me almost  
34 two weeks to get rid of that fish.

35  
36 So, baiting up our fish spot, you can control what you're catching  
37 your fish spot. And when you're diving, shooting fish, you can  
38 control what you catch. So, we will not target unless Julian calls  
39 me and asks me for 100 pounds of queen trigger, I will not catch  
40 it.

41  
42 So, for us to change our habits, it has to be some restaurant that  
43 comes from the States or from another island that wants to eat  
44 that specific fish. I think those numbers will be the same as how  
45 they have been showing because the number of divers in Saint Croix  
46 is declining drastically. A lot of our divers left after the  
47 hurricanes. A lot of them died. So, we are the next endangered  
48 species.

1  
2 I am 51 years old now and I don't want to continue diving until I  
3 die. So, we move around our fisheries, but those numbers will not  
4 vary drastically from this year to next year because somebody  
5 decides to eat trigger. The main fish, as Mr. Frechette said, is  
6 our parrotfish. That's our number one seller over there. Not even  
7 the snapper sells more than a parrotfish.

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

10  
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, for the Saint Croix buffer, I intend to  
12 vote no, because I feel that, I think having that 5% buffer between  
13 the ABC and the ACL is important. It gives some cushion. Based on  
14 what Gerson is saying, they don't think the numbers are going to  
15 change much because of the way that the fishery is conducted.

16  
17 Sarah explained in the landings that the landings are well below  
18 the proposed ACL, one or the other. So, I think it would be  
19 important to keep that cushion in there. So, I don't think it will  
20 make much of a difference. I think in that way we can ensure that  
21 we include some buffer there because of some uncertainty in  
22 management, which is related to reporting.

23  
24 So, I that's our take on that one.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

27  
28 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. So, I mean, I think just looking at the  
29 landings alone for Saint Croix, the decline since 2013 is below  
30 the level of uncertainty anyway. Right? So even if you went with  
31 Alternative 4, where they are now in terms of landing is below 15%  
32 difference from what it was. And it's shown an average decline of  
33 about 16% since that time. So, the thing that I would say, for  
34 both fisheries that make it necessary that we put uncertainty in  
35 there is the lack of levels of port sampling that allow us to have  
36 a good understanding of what we are capturing in terms of self-  
37 reported landings versus what's actually out there.

38  
39 So, there is a level of uncertainty in the current reporting within  
40 the U.S.V.I. that we should take into account in making any sort  
41 of recommendation beyond simply the market structure, which both  
42 Julian and Gerson have told us, and I think they're both correct,  
43 that it is a very market derived fishery. They only catch what's  
44 needed for the market, and the market has kept it well below a  
45 level where we're going to even get to with the ACLs. But because  
46 of the fact that we don't have a good handle on the datasets, in  
47 both areas, I would recommend at least doing Alternative 2 or  
48 Alternative 3 where there's some level of uncertainty that we're

1 accounting for.

2  
3 I guess 3 was 5%, and 4 is 10%. So, I would recommend at least  
4 doing a 5% uncertainty in both.

5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I want to-- Anyway, remember, you are submitting  
7 something for approval. In the past, whenever you did something  
8 like that, it was rejected and they asked us to put a buffer, 5,  
9 10, or whatever. At that time, I remember Steve Monsanto was the  
10 Chair, and he asked, "Well, how much can we get away with without  
11 getting into much trouble with the ecosystem and the management?"  
12 So that's the reason why we have the buffers.

13  
14 As Clay mentioned before, this situation could be true at this  
15 time, and maybe in a few years we will go over it without knowing  
16 it. At least that buffer will give us some opportunity to adjust  
17 whatever we need to adjust.

18  
19 **SENNAI HABTES:** Point of clarity. Can we make an amendment to the  
20 current motion, or do we have to vote on this motion and then--  
21 Yeah. So, I would recommend making an amendment to create  
22 Alternative 3 for both Saint Croix and Saint Thomas/Saint John.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?

25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. Before Gerson. No. The mechanics of  
27 it is, remember, each plan is separate.

28  
29 So, we should have a motion for each. Even if they are identical,  
30 a motion for Saint Croix will be, let's say that you think about  
31 the whole thing and now you want 5%, the owner of the motion can  
32 say, "Okay, let's go for the 5%." And then, for Saint Croix, that  
33 will be it.

34  
35 And then, the second motion will be for Saint Thomas/Saint John,  
36 and that's something that I discussed with Clara, and that's the  
37 way they prefer it. But we need to hear from Vanessa whether she  
38 wants to change it or not.

39  
40 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I'm maintaining select Alternative 2 because as  
41 we already know and hear, it's not a hard target, this species.  
42 So, seeing the numbers and seeing that this will not make much  
43 difference because as Gerson already explained to us, it's really  
44 low the harvest of these species, and they are just by order. They  
45 don't have a lot of fishermen doing this harvest also. So, I don't  
46 think that it's necessary to have that 5%, with Alternative 3.

47  
48 So, for me I'm maintaining Alternative 2.

1  
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chairman, in that case you should vote  
3 on it. And if the motion is approved, that's the way it is. If  
4 this isn't approved, then you have to offer a substitute motion,  
5 but you need to vote and get it over with.  
6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Let's take it to a vote. I guess we'll go  
8 individually. A roll call vote.  
9  
10 We're going to do a roll call vote. I'm going to start with Kreglo.  
11 Can you hear us?  
12  
13 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Yes. For a number 6, Alternative 2.  
14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Sennai?  
16  
17 **SENNAI HABTES:** I'm going to vote, no.  
18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?  
20  
21 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes.  
22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Who else do I have? Sabater?  
24  
25 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Yes.  
26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes. Ricardo?  
28  
29 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Abstain.  
30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, María?  
32  
33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** No.  
34  
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have 2 two nays, 1 abstention.  
36  
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. You have 3 nays, y tienes a James Kreglo.  
38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Kreglo, myself, Vanessa. 3, yays. 4, yes.  
40  
41 Okay. Okay. So, *motion carries*.  
42  
43 Next one would be the Saint Thomas.  
44  
45 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I want to present the next motion. *The Council*  
46 *moves to select Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative under*  
47 *Framework Action 3 to the Saint Thomas/Saint John Fishery*  
48 *Management Plan - Modification of Queen Triggerfish Status*

1 *Determination Criteria and Reference Points.*

2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second. Sabater, second. Open for  
4 discussion. Hearing none, I want to start with Kreglo. Oh, I'll do  
5 roll call again. James Kreglo?

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

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, James. Sennai?

10  
11 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yes.

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

14  
15 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes.

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

18  
19 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes.

20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

22  
23 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

26  
27 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Yes.

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, yes. No nays, no abstention,  
30 *motion carries.* Sarah?

31  
32 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, for this Framework  
33 Action, is the Council also willing to make a motion to submit the  
34 action to the secretary and allow staff to make editorial changes  
35 to the action and to the codified text?

36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. We need a motion for that. Right? Another  
38 motion.

39  
40 So, the motion is that *The Council moves to approve Framework*  
41 *Action 3 and submit the action to the Secretary of Commerce for*  
42 *review. We thereby allow staff to make editorial, non-substantive*  
43 *changes to the Framework Action3. We give the Council Chair the*  
44 *authority to deem any modifications made to the proposed rule and*  
45 *regulations as necessary and appropriate for implementing*  
46 *Framework Action 3.*

47  
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. "Council Chair" es en mayúsculas.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a motion. Motion by, Vanessa?  
3  
4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I want to present the motion. Do I have to read  
5 it?  
6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No, that's good.  
8  
9 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay.  
10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second. Nobody wants to--  
12  
13 **SENNAI HABTES:** Second.  
14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Seconded by Sennai.  
16  
17 Any discussion? Hearing none. All in favor say-- Oh, Sabater?  
18  
19 **ROBERTO SABATER:** This includes-- does it show reading there that  
20 this includes both motions, both prior motions, or is it not  
21 necessary?  
22  
23 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** To answer that question, this is asking you  
24 to approve Framework Action 3, which will include what you just  
25 did, both motions, and it is Framework Action 3 to the Saint Croix  
26 FMP and to the Saint Thomas and Saint John FMP.  
27  
28 Can we also, Cristina, put the codified text on the screen just so  
29 you can see what it'll look like when we update it with the new  
30 numbers?  
31  
32 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Sorry. Anne Kersting, NOAA GC. I'll briefly  
33 explain the text and the revisions. Paragraph 2, this is just  
34 referring to the regulations for the Saint Croix FMP, and this  
35 speaks to the revisions that will be made to the table, the  
36 labeling and the data that will be included.  
37  
38 The first table, this will set the ACL for queen triggerfish under  
39 the Saint Croix FMP. So, Alternative 2, those numbers will be  
40 included in there once we make the edits. The codified text in  
41 paragraph 3, this is just referring to the regulations for the  
42 Saint Thomas/Saint John regulations, and this just speaks to the  
43 revisions that will be made to that table.  
44  
45 And then the second table, this sets the ACL for queen triggerfish  
46 under the Saint Thomas and the Saint John FMP, and those numbers  
47 will be revised to reflect Alternative 3.  
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Alrighty. So, all in favor say,  
2 "aye."

3  
4 **GROUP:** Aye.

5  
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, **motion**  
7 **carried.**

8  
9 Okay. So, next on the agenda is a Community Climate Change  
10 Vulnerability Project for U.S. Caribbean. Tarsila Seara, NOAA  
11 Fisheries.

12  
13 **TARSILA SEARA:** Hello. Can you hear me okay?

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

16  
17 **TARSILA SEARA:** Okay. Am I able to share my screen? Let me check.

18  
19 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Hi, Tarsila. Yes. You can.

20  
21 **TARSILA SEARA:** Okay. So, give me one second. Let me know if you  
22 can-- oops. --if you can see. Let me just go back.

23  
24 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes, we can see.

25  
26 **COMMUNITY CLIMATE CHANGE VULNERABILITY PROJECT FOR U.S.**  
27 **CARIBBEAN-TARSILA SEARA, NOAA FISHERIES, NORTHEAST REGIONAL**  
28 **OFFICE**

29  
30 **TARSILA SEARA:** Alright. Well, thank you so much for the  
31 opportunity to present today. I wish I could be there in Puerto  
32 Rico, but I am speaking from freezing Connecticut today.

33  
34 The goal of the presentation is to talk about an F in Effort  
35 initiative and Matt McPherson is also, I believe, online, so we're  
36 both leading this project. So, he is also available to answer any  
37 questions or please feel free, Matt, to jump in.

38  
39 So right now, just to give a little bit of context, the indicators  
40 that I'm going to talk about, so the indicators at the community  
41 level to understand climate change risk in fisheries have been  
42 developed, I think, a decade ago. We started developing these  
43 indicators for the northeast. And, currently, Matt and I are co-  
44 leading an effort that's being funded with IRA funds to implement  
45 these indicators nationally.

46  
47 So, the idea is we are, essentially, communicating with all regions  
48 to develop these indicators at the community level. And so, I'm

1 here today to talk about or to discuss efforts to include the  
2 Caribbean in this national effort to develop these indicators of  
3 climate change risk.

4  
5 So, just for a little bit of context, I mean, I don't think I need  
6 to spend too much time here, but we know our fisheries are being  
7 impacted by a number of oceanographic changes, and the studies  
8 show that particularly in the tropical latitudes there's increased  
9 change in catch and ecological impacts that will impact our  
10 fisheries. So, understanding the risk for fishing communities of  
11 these changes, it becomes really important so that we can support  
12 adaptation initiatives for fishing communities. And as I  
13 mentioned, essentially, our goal for this particular presentation  
14 is to talk about this one particular method that we are using to  
15 understand risk and how we could include the Caribbean in this  
16 national effort.

17  
18 So, again, just for a little bit of context in terms of the  
19 importance of looking at this in the Caribbean, I just wanted to  
20 very quickly show, some results from a couple of studies that I  
21 led in the in Puerto Rico and also in the U.S.V.I. a few years ago  
22 that stress that fishers in in the Caribbean region are concerned  
23 about the changes that they are observing and changes that the  
24 fishers themselves have attributed to oceanographic changes that  
25 can be linked to climate change.

26  
27 Here is just showing, in Puerto Rico we compare perceptions of  
28 concern about climate change in 2016 and 2018 after the storms,  
29 and fishermen had significant levels of concern about the changes  
30 they were observing, and their concern increased significantly  
31 after those major hurricanes.

32  
33 Also, for both Puerto Rico and the U.S.V.I., in surveys that we  
34 have conducted, in Puerto Rico fishermen are concerned about  
35 changes that they have attributed to things like coral bleaching,  
36 water temperature, which are associated with the climatic changes  
37 and particularly with some of the factors that these indicators  
38 that I'm going to talk about today, particularly, get at.

39  
40 So, just for a little bit of context, I mean, there is a concern  
41 and an interest in looking at risk to climate change in the  
42 Caribbean. So, what I want to do in this presentation is talk about  
43 the indicators, present the indicators that we have developed.

44  
45 I put a link here to this tech memo for the South Atlantic, Florida  
46 Keys, and Gulf of Mexico that has the methodology outlined and the  
47 results for that region. So, if you're interested in looking in  
48 more detail, you can access this tech memo. So, I'll talk about

1 the indicators. I will use one community in the Northeast region.  
2 I'll use New Bedford as an example, just to show how these  
3 indicators can be used and how these indicators can be visualized.  
4

5 And then I'm going to talk about what are the steps that we would  
6 need to take to develop these indicators. Because step one is to  
7 develop a biological assessment. So, I'll talk a little bit about  
8 what that means in order for us to develop these community level  
9 indicators for the Caribbean. And then, very last slide, the idea  
10 is to talk about what we would essentially ask in terms of your  
11 support for hopefully developing these indicators for the U.S.  
12 Caribbean.  
13

14 So, let me start by showing you an example of how these indicators  
15 can be visualized and interpreted before I jump into the biological  
16 assessment. So, bear with me. I'll walk you through what this looks  
17 like using New Bedford as an example, and it will become,  
18 hopefully, clear once I get to the steps that go into the  
19 biological assessment, but please feel free to stop me and ask any  
20 questions.  
21

22 So, what we're looking at here is New Bedford in Massachusetts as  
23 an example, and we're looking at trends through time for three of  
24 the indicators that we use in this assessment. So, one of them  
25 looks at risk of a community to temperature, risk to ocean  
26 acidification, and risk associated with stock size and status. So,  
27 if you look at the scores, the actual scores for these different  
28 indicators, they are on a scale of 1 through 4, 1 low, 2 moderate,  
29 3 high, and 4 very high. So, these are a qualitative measure of  
30 risk, and these scores consider all the landings in the community.  
31

32 So, the value, the contribution of different species to total value  
33 that's landed in the community is weighed by the species scores in  
34 the biological assessment in terms of their climate vulnerability.  
35 And this is going to become clearer as we go through the  
36 presentation. So, just to give you one--  
37

38 New Bedford is a great example. So, for instance, if you look at  
39 what's happening in New Bedford in terms of its risk to ocean  
40 acidification, so that is that blue line that I'm highlighting  
41 there. You can see this increasing trend in risk, to ocean  
42 acidification in this particular community. When we look at the  
43 composition of landings in New Bedford, if we pay attention to  
44 just the blue bars, the light blue bars, that's the contribution  
45 of scallops, of sea scallops to landing in New Bedford. And we can  
46 see that the contribution of this particular species has been  
47 increasing over time. It was from the beginning, here, of the  
48 period that we're analyzing from about 55% to 85% contribution to

1 total landings value.

2  
3 Sea scallops have a very high vulnerability to ocean acidification.  
4 So, when we look at what's happening overall, even considering all  
5 the landings in New Bedford, this dependency on sea scallops, which  
6 is a species that has high risk to ocean acidification or high  
7 vulnerability to ocean acidification, is increasing the risk of  
8 that community since they are highly dependent and highly  
9 specialized on that one particular species that presents high risk.

10  
11 So, how do we get to these numbers? Right? How do we calculate  
12 these scores? The very first step is to calculate biological  
13 vulnerabilities. So, calculate the species vulnerability, which is  
14 what we call the climate vulnerability assessment, and this is an  
15 effort that has been done nationally. It started in the northeast  
16 using this methodology that was developed by John Hare, and that  
17 was published in 2016. And what they did, and this has now been  
18 done for all the other regions, pending, I believe, the Bering Sea  
19 that they're still working on, in Alaska and the Caribbean who we  
20 have not yet started this process for the Caribbean.

21  
22 So, for an example here, since I'm using the Northeast as an  
23 example. In the northeast, they classified, or they scored 82  
24 species that were considered to be of commercial and ecological  
25 and recreational importance for the region. Each species was  
26 assessed and on 12 exposure factors and 12 sensitivity attributes.  
27 All of these relate to different aspects of climate change and  
28 characteristics of the species that will increase or decrease their  
29 vulnerability. So, each one of these species was scored by a panel  
30 of experts and there is a very detailed methodology for how to go  
31 about scoring these species.

32  
33 And here's just one very, sort of, high-level overview of this  
34 climate vulnerability assessment process that starts with  
35 essentially identifying those species for the particular region,  
36 identifying what are the exposure and the sensitive attributes  
37 that make sense, and then identifying experts. After all of that  
38 has been identified, then you create species profiles and look at  
39 climate projections and distributions of the different species  
40 that have been identified, and then you get to the scoring process.

41  
42 And here is just, you know, an example since we were talking about  
43 scallops and just using scallops here as an example. So, each  
44 species is scored by a series of all of those sensitivity and all  
45 of those exposure factors, and the data quality is also taken into  
46 consideration in weighing those scores. And then, each species  
47 ends up with a series of scores for all of these different  
48 attributes and a total score as well for its vulnerability and

1 sensitivity to climate change. So, with the species scores, we  
2 then take that information, take that data, and we develop or  
3 calculate the community level scores based on the landings of these  
4 different species.

5  
6 So, for our purposes for the community level assessment, we focused  
7 on Three sensitivity attributes that I showed you before for New  
8 Bedford. Just the stock status, ocean acidification, and  
9 temperature. So, those are just three out of all the 12 sensitivity  
10 attributes, but we also use a total sensitivity score that takes  
11 into consideration all of these sensitivity factors and a total  
12 vulnerability that takes into consideration sensitivity and  
13 exposure factors as well.

14  
15 So, with those species scores, we can then get to what I just  
16 showed you before. The way we calculate these numbers for the  
17 communities is essentially by taking the contribution for value  
18 landed for each species, multiplying that by its score for that  
19 particular sensitivity factor, and then we sum everything to get  
20 a score for the community that also falls in the 1 through 4,  
21 range, of low to very high for a community.

22  
23 So, what we're looking at here is, again, the same example for New  
24 Bedford with those scores calculated. So, again from 1 through 4  
25 with 1 being low and 4 being very high, we can then look at trends  
26 through time. We can look at cross sections for what's happening  
27 in one particular year. We can map. We can look at what's happening  
28 spatially and temporally, in terms of risk that a community has to  
29 climate change based on what it is that they're landing and the  
30 vulnerability of those species to climate change based on those  
31 biological assessments.

32  
33 So before-- well, actually, we can talk about this and then maybe--  
34 - I was going to ask if there were any questions there, but I only--  
35 - This is my last slide? So, I'll just go through it and then I  
36 can go back if there are any questions.

37  
38 So, today, essentially, what we're hoping for is to discuss if  
39 there's Council support to develop these indicators for the  
40 Caribbean. So, the very first step for that would be to develop  
41 the biological assessment, and we know that there are efforts,  
42 current efforts to develop biological assessments of climate  
43 change for the Caribbean, but for this particular set of indicators  
44 and to make sure that it fits in with what we're doing nationally,  
45 we need to make sure that an effort that follows the methodology  
46 that was developed by Hare et al., is also used for the Caribbean  
47 to maintain that consistency and for these indicator to be  
48 comparable to what's being done everywhere else.

1  
2 So, the very first step would be to conduct climate vulnerability  
3 assessments for the Caribbean. Matt and I would like to offer our  
4 assistance with coordination, you know, technical support and some  
5 funding from the national effort to support this effort in the  
6 Caribbean. And we have already sort of touch base with the  
7 Caribbean branch, just to gauge how much, you know, support and  
8 how much involvement there could be. We had positive conversations,  
9 so we would work closely, of course, with them. Essentially, the  
10 support we need from the Council would be in terms of creating a  
11 list of species, identifying experts, and assisting us with some  
12 of the logistics and, of course, communication.

13  
14 So, all of this, of course, is open for discussion, but we just  
15 wanted to outline and just make clear what we could bring to this  
16 effort and what would be very helpful if there is agreement and  
17 there is support, what would be helpful for us in terms of how  
18 this collaboration could evolve.

19  
20 So, I believe this is my last slide. Yep. I will open up for  
21 questions and also, Matt, if I left anything out and you would  
22 want to add, please feel free to jump in. But I will just open up  
23 for questions if not.

24

#### 25 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

26

27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Tarsila. Any questions for Tarsila?  
28 Graciela?

29

30 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, this is not a question. Thank you,  
31 Tarsila. Some of the IRA funding that the Council received is going  
32 towards the climate vulnerability analysis for a number of-- well,  
33 for most of the species under management and for queen conch and  
34 nassau grouper. So, there is also one for scenario planning for  
35 lobster and red hind. So, these are all the efforts that will, you  
36 know, should be leading us in the same direction.

37

38 It's not only the collaboration with the Science Center and the  
39 Regional Office because all these CVA started in 2012 or something  
40 like that. María tracked down all the records from way back when.  
41 So, anything that we already have and anything of the Lenfest work  
42 and the database that the Science Center has put together, I mean,  
43 I think that we are all wanting to move in the right direction.  
44 And so, you know, anything that we can do regarding improving  
45 funding availability and that kind of thing would be very  
46 worthwhile. Thanks.

47

48 **TARSILA SEARA:** Thank you, Graciela. That's very helpful. I think

1 it's fantastic that there are a number of different efforts, and  
2 I think all of that will be very helpful in us not starting from  
3 scratch. The one thing that I will stress is that for us to be  
4 able to implement these same indicators that we're using  
5 nationally, that the CVAs need to be developed using the same  
6 methodology that has been used elsewhere.

7  
8 So that's just the one thing that I wanted to stress. So, we do  
9 need to have a conversation about, you know, how much comparability  
10 there is between these efforts and what we would need to see to be  
11 able to implement these indicators.

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

14  
15 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. Hi, Tarsila. Great presentation.  
16 Unfortunately, I was called out of the room for a few minutes, so  
17 I may have missed this bit. So, apologies, if I'm asking you to  
18 repeat yourself.

19  
20 So, we get the CVAs. You were talking about indicators. Did you  
21 provide an example that I missed about how you take that indicator  
22 and actually use it to inform management? And, again, apologies if  
23 I missed that critical moment.

24  
25 **TARSILA SEARA:** Yeah. No. That's an excellent question. I was  
26 trying to keep this presentation as short as possible to open up  
27 for questions and discussion. So, I can give you, you know, just  
28 a couple of examples.

29  
30 So right now, for the Northeast, these indicators are being  
31 included in the state of ecosystem report that's being presented  
32 to the Council. So, these indicators are right now helping to  
33 provide a big picture, right, in terms of impacts on communities.  
34 And one of the things that we've been discussing in that context,  
35 with these indicators, is that they're providing good support for  
36 ecosystem-based management, especially, ideas being put forward in  
37 terms of informing management with portfolio theory and a lot of  
38 discussions that are happening in that sort of arena.

39  
40 Because with this, we can look at the linkages between catch  
41 composition or landings diversity and landings composition and  
42 impacts to community that becomes an important part of the  
43 conversation when you're looking at different management actions  
44 that are impacting the ability of fishermen to diversify or that  
45 they are limiting the ability of fishermen to catch species that  
46 would increase their ability to adapt to change. So, that is one  
47 context that we're, you know, that's going into, for instance, now  
48 with the state of the ecosystem being one example.

1  
2 Another kind of analysis that we're doing right now with these  
3 indicators. So, I've I started to look at them at the fleet level.  
4 So, again, I'm going to give you another Northeast example because  
5 that's where, you know, we have done most of the analysis, but I'm  
6 looking at the groundfish fishery in the Northeast and looking at  
7 different fleet characteristics. So, for instance, vessels that  
8 have stayed in the groundfish fishery, vessels that occasionally  
9 fish for groundfish, and vessels that have completely exited the  
10 groundfish fishery. And we're looking at their levels of risk and  
11 diversification specialization in fishery, and that's giving us a  
12 whole, you know, sort of a lot of contexts for characterizing risk  
13 and catch diversity related to adaptation in these particular  
14 fleets. So, for instance, vessels that exited the fishery tend to  
15 become more specialized and their levels of risk tend to be higher.

16  
17 So, there are a number of different ways that we can then look at  
18 this. But we are in the, you know, sort of the initial stages of  
19 using this information to inform or to provide context for  
20 management, but I think there's a lot of potential and a lot of  
21 opportunities there.

22  
23 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks, Tarsila.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

26  
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi, Tarsila. Thank you for the presentation.  
28 So, in your slide, you said that you are requesting support from  
29 the Council to create a list of species and experts for biological  
30 assessment and assisting with other efforts. Can you provide a  
31 little bit more information as to what your specific needs are and  
32 the timing and what which resources you're going to be needing.  
33 And the timing of this project? Like, when did you expect to have  
34 some results that you can share with us, and also I just wanted to  
35 reiterate the importance of sharing results with the Southeast  
36 Regional Office with our socioeconomic branch because they are the  
37 ones that conduct the analysis that are included in the amendments  
38 and the management actions, and it's very important that there are  
39 resources available for them to include as part of their analysis  
40 that we have access to those. Thanks.

41  
42 **TARSILA SEARA:** Yeah. Absolutely. I mean, to the second part of  
43 your question, I will let Matt, chime in. But, just for the first  
44 part, María. Yes, I think initially what would be most helpful, I  
45 mean, since we're taking this from step one, and to create that  
46 list of species, we would want to create a list that resonates  
47 with the stakeholders. We want this to be something that's done in  
48 collaboration with the Council and the DAPs and to make sure that

1 this list reflects a list of species that are commercially and  
2 recreationally important. But also, the list will be limited with  
3 regards to expertise, right, or how much we know about the species.  
4

5 We know that for several species, regardless of their importance  
6 to fishery, we may not know enough to be able to assess them as  
7 far as their climate change vulnerability. So, we will need to  
8 then compile list of experts, of people, you know, and by experts  
9 here, what I mean is just experts in the biology of these species  
10 that we are, that we compile, to then go through the process of  
11 scoring the species based on their biological vulnerabilities.  
12

13 So, the list of species and the list of experts would be sort of,  
14 you know, the very first step to this. And then, one thing that we  
15 have briefly discussed with Miguel, the assessment occurs through  
16 meetings. Right? Experts would have to meet, so we would need just  
17 some logistical organization for getting people together to do the  
18 scoring. But all these meetings can be done virtually. These don't  
19 have to necessarily be in person, so it would be some help with  
20 the organization and sort of the logistics of getting experts  
21 together just to score the species.  
22

23 Those would be the top, essentially, requests or where the Council  
24 could really help us. And, Matt, I don't know if you are still  
25 here, but I don't know if you want to speak to the second half of  
26 María's question.  
27

28 **MATTHEW M. MCPHERSON:** What was the second half of the question  
29 again?  
30

31 **TARSILA SEARA:** It was about coordination with your group. So,  
32 since you're here and you are a co-lead, I figured you would-- I  
33 don't know if, María, if you want to repeat your question.  
34

35 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. This is not that much of a question,  
36 but just a comment because I think the information that will come  
37 out of this is going to be very useful for analyzing the effects  
38 of our management actions. And then, as you know, the Council's  
39 economist, the Council of social scientists, and also in Southeast  
40 Regional Office, they're tasked with evaluating the effects of  
41 different management actions, and this is what ultimately is  
42 brought to the Council so they can make their decisions.  
43

44 So, I was just commenting on how important it is to, you know,  
45 keep this in mind in this project, so when there are outcomes that  
46 can be shared that we can use, just for us to coordinate Science  
47 Center with SERO so we can access to all of that. So, it's not  
48 really a question. It's just more like a comment. Thanks.

1  
2 **TARSILA SEARA:** Okay.  
3  
4 **MATTHEW M. MCPHERSON:** Yeah. Absolutely. We definitely will-- we  
5 definitely will coordinate. We want to make sure that these results  
6 are used as much as possible, you know, in management. So, we're  
7 not trying to do this as merely an academic exercise.  
8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Clay?  
10  
11 **CLAY PORCH:** Yeah. Thank you for the presentation, and definitely  
12 excited about making progress on putting together an ecosystem  
13 status report for the Caribbean. Could you give us, just to help  
14 us catch the vision, some ideas of the kind of indicators you might  
15 include in an ecosystem status report for the Caribbean?  
16  
17 **TARSILA SEARA:** So, I think there's a number and maybe Matt would  
18 be a better person to chime in here, because I know Mandy has been  
19 working on the ecosystem report for the Caribbean. So, I think  
20 there's a number, a very extensive number of ecosystems and  
21 socioeconomic indicators that have been considered for that. So,  
22 these indicators would be one set of indicators that could be used  
23 for that purpose. So, they would complement, right, a set of  
24 indicators, and sort of tell a more extensive story.  
25  
26 So, for what we are presenting, the indicators that we would add  
27 to a potential report would be indicators of risk to temperature,  
28 ocean acidification, stock size status, and then total sensitivity  
29 and total vulnerability indicators. And we are also exploring how  
30 we can analyze these indicators in relationship to other  
31 indicators. So, for instance, we have the community social  
32 vulnerability indicators that we have recently also developed for  
33 the Caribbean, and that is a set of indicators that would be  
34 included in something like the ecosystem report. And so, by looking  
35 at these different indicators at the community level together, we  
36 could paint a more extensive picture to understand impacts at the  
37 community level. So, that would be, you know, one example of how  
38 these indicators would communicate.  
39  
40 But I don't have, off the top of my head, a list of indicators for  
41 the state of ecosystem report for the Caribbean, but they exist,  
42 and that can be made available.  
43  
44 **MATTHEW M. MCPHERSON:** I was going to say, there's a lot of progress  
45 that's been made on the ecosystem status report for the Caribbean.  
46 It's been automated. So, you'll be seeing that pretty soon. Like  
47 Tarsila, I don't remember off the top of my head, right now, what  
48 socioeconomic indicators were included in that ecosystem status

1 report. But this would definitely be another set of indicators  
2 that would be added, you know, to add to that report to complement.  
3  
4 I mean, we do have the social, the community vulnerability  
5 indicators that have been recently developed for the Caribbean. We  
6 have things like revenue, you know, landings, I think, at the port  
7 and community level. And there are some other things that I just  
8 do not remember off the top of my head right now.

9  
10 **CLAY PORCH:** Thank you.

11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

13  
14 **SENNAI HABTES:** Hey. Clay, I believe the last time it was presented  
15 to us, they had five larger categories, like point source  
16 pollution, recreational opportunity, tourism, disturbances, and  
17 coastal development. So, like, we kind of separated those into,  
18 like, biological, ecological. I'm trying to go back through my I  
19 have, like, an amalgamated list, like, some from the ESR, some  
20 from the conceptual models, but let's see. Yes.

21  
22 Let me go through it, and I'll send it to you as soon as I-- I  
23 have to separate out the ones [inaudible] versus the conceptual  
24 model ones. There's about 25 in total that we evaluated from the  
25 EBFM TAP through those two groups of indicators that all are  
26 available at some level for regional scale for the U.S. Caribbean.

27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Tarsila? Hearing none.  
29 Okay. Thank you, Tarsila.

30  
31 **TARSILA SEARA:** Thank you.

32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So next, we have the Review and Final Action  
34 Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP Reclassification of The Rainbow  
35 Runner as a Pelagic Fish. María?

36  
37 **REVIEW AND FINAL ACTION-AMENDMENT 4 TO THE PUERTO RICO FMP:**  
38 **RECLASSIFICATION OF THE RAINBOW RUNNER AS A PELAGIC FISH-MARÍA**  
39 **LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES/SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE (SERO)**

40  
41 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to clarify, we're  
42 not going to be requesting the Council to take final action for  
43 this one, but we are going to review what has been done to date  
44 with Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP. Reclassification of  
45 Rainbow Runner as a Pelagic Species. If Cristina can share the  
46 screen. Cristina, look at the-- Thank you, Cristina. You can go to  
47 the next slide. Okay.

48

1 So, we have talked about this in the past, but it's a good time to  
2 review it. So, during the development of the Puerto Rico FMP, all  
3 the species that were going to be managed under the FMP were  
4 classified into descriptive categories, meaning they will be reef  
5 fish or pelagic fish or rays or corals or sea cucumbers, etcetera.  
6 At that time, the rainbow runner, which is, also known as in  
7 Spanish as salmon, the *elagatis bipinnulata* is the species name,  
8 was classified as a new species included in the Puerto Rico FMP  
9 and was classified as a reef fish along with other jack species.  
10 So, that happened during the development of the Island-Based FMP,  
11 and therefore, the species is subject to management measures that  
12 are applicable to reef fish. For example, seasonal closures that  
13 are specific to reef fish and recreational bag limits, among  
14 others.

15  
16 So, the rainbow runner is a species that belongs to the family  
17 carangidae, and this is mostly fish that are considered to be  
18 pelagics. So, this is a species that is important for recreational  
19 fishing. There are different fishing techniques that are used to  
20 catch this species. So, for example, the use of trolling or using  
21 light bait or jigging or using poppers, etcetera.

22  
23 So, this species is managed with annual catch limits for each of  
24 the commercial and recreational sectors. There's also a reef fish  
25 specific accountability measure, and it's also managed in an  
26 aggregate recreational bag limit that is applicable to reef fish.  
27 So, in addition, there are other regulations that are applicable  
28 to reef fish such as the ban on the use of certain gear types and  
29 the prohibition of reef fish harvest and possession in the Bajo de  
30 Sico seasonal area closure during October 1<sup>st</sup> to Mar March 31<sup>st</sup> this  
31 year in federal waters. So, all of that applies to the species.  
32 Next slide, please.

33  
34 Okay. So, in terms of reporting, the rainbow runner is not and has  
35 not been a specific species of fish identified on the Puerto Rico  
36 commercial catch report form. That is, for a fisherman to report  
37 landings of rainbow runner on the catch report form, they have to  
38 either include those landings within the broader list category of  
39 jacks or write in rainbow runner and its landings on the form. So,  
40 it's not specifically there.

41  
42 There's also a similar issue with eReporting. Fishermen who land  
43 rainbow runner have to search for rainbow runner and mark it when  
44 using the app or can include its landings under the broader  
45 category of jacks. So, consequently it is suspected that the  
46 reported commercial landings of rainbow runner do not really  
47 represent all catch of the species and that reported commercial  
48 landings of jacks include catch of rainbow runner as well as other

1 species. So, this is the way that it is right now, but it's  
2 something that could change in the future, for example, if the  
3 species were to be directly added to the catch report forms. Next  
4 slide.

5  
6 So, this is not a new action. We have been discussing it for a  
7 while, but I think it's a good time to review with the Council the  
8 things that have been done. This is the action timeline.

9  
10 So, in the Council meeting of April 2023, the Puerto Rico District  
11 Advisory Panel requested reclassification from a reef fish species  
12 to a pelagic fish species based on life history characteristics  
13 and fishing methods for the species. The Scientific and Statistical  
14 Committee was tasked to review information and make a  
15 recommendation to the Council.

16  
17 The SSC met in May 2023. They reviewed the background information  
18 and determined that a reclassification to a pelagic fish was  
19 warranted. At the August meeting of 2023, the Council meeting, the  
20 SSC recommended the Council reclassify the rainbow runner as a  
21 pelagic species under the Puerto Rico FMP. At that time, the  
22 Council asked staff to develop an amendment to reclassify the  
23 species.

24  
25 Moving on to the December 2023 Council meeting. The Southeast  
26 Regional Office staff presented a summary of management changes  
27 for reclassification to a pelagic species. The Council, with the  
28 DAP input, discussed concern with the current commercial and  
29 recreational ACLs for rainbow runner. Some of the points that were  
30 brought up during that meeting were that there were some reports  
31 of high commercial landings on certain occasions, and they also  
32 discussed the potential for exceeding ACLs and triggering AMs.  
33 They also talked about whether there was a need to revisit ACLs.  
34 Go to the next slide, please.

35  
36 So, during the March to April 2024 SSC meeting, the SSC discussed  
37 those concerns from some Council and DAP members, but did not have  
38 specific recommendations that could be immediately addressed. The  
39 recommendations were for future actions such as revisiting ACLs  
40 for several stocks including the rainbow runner and if you recall  
41 we talked about that earlier this morning and we were talking about  
42 the SSC potentially looking about revisiting ACLs for species, new  
43 species or species that consistently exceed their ACLs, based on  
44 enhanced reporting.

45  
46 So, at that time, the SSC requested to have only one, like, one  
47 recreational and commercial ACL for rainbow runner. We also talked  
48 this morning that recreational landings are not being collected

1 and monitored at this time, and that it's problematic in many  
2 aspects. So, one of the things that the SSC discussed at that time  
3 is that the Council could recommend the rainbow runner be added to  
4 the Puerto Rico commercial catch report form so that landings could  
5 be directly collected for the species and that will definitely  
6 bring some enhancement and more information about what's really  
7 going on with the species. And they also recommended, or noted the  
8 need for collection for recreational fisheries, particularly for  
9 this one, right, because this is a species that it's not  
10 necessarily of importance for the commercial sector, but it's an  
11 important species for the recreational sector.

12  
13 So, at the April 2024 meeting, the Council meeting, there were no  
14 additional motions or guidance from the Council in modifying the  
15 current purpose for the rainbow runner amendment. There were, you  
16 know, the option was to either not do anything, that means leaving  
17 it as is, or just to reclassify it as a reef fish. So, those are  
18 the only options. The Council decided that they were going to  
19 continue pursuing the reclassification of the species as a pelagic  
20 fish species.

21  
22 Okay. So, at that meeting, the Council decided that they wanted to  
23 move forward with Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP, and this was  
24 going to be done with a categorical exclusion, which is actions  
25 that fall under a certain category, which are not significant and  
26 can be taken with a different kind of NEPA analysis, National  
27 Environmental Policy Act. So, we're still going to analyze the  
28 facts as part of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, what are the economic,  
29 social effects, etcetera. But for the purpose of the National  
30 Environmental Policy Act, the requirements would be complied with  
31 because it falls under one of the categories of categorical  
32 exclusion. So, we discussed that during the past, but if anybody  
33 has any questions, I can answer those later.

34  
35 So, the objective was presented by the Council; this has not  
36 changed. It is to ensure that rainbow runners are managed in  
37 accordance with their life history characteristics and fishing  
38 patterns, which are consistent with Council-management of pelagic  
39 species. The option was to reclassify it from the reef fish group  
40 to the pelagic fish group.

41  
42 What will be the outcome of this reclassification? Those  
43 regulations that apply to the reef fish, such as the recreational  
44 bag limit, the seasonal area closure in Bajo de Sico and the reef  
45 fish specific AM would not apply to the species any longer. Now,  
46 specific regulations that apply to pelagic fish would be applicable  
47 to the rainbow runner, and that includes the specification of an  
48 annual cash target that will be equal to 90% of the current ACL

1 for the species and also pelagic fish specific AM. And we're going  
2 to go through that soon.

3  
4 Okay. So, with that, I want to clarify that the ACLs that have  
5 been established for the species are not changing. Those were  
6 established through the Puerto Rico FMP, and the AMs that were  
7 developed for the pelagic species, which we talked about them this  
8 morning, which are related to-- we have an ACT and if there is an  
9 exceedance, the Council will meet with the SSC and Science Center  
10 decide what are the options an, also review why are the reasons  
11 for that exceedance.

12  
13 So, this is what would happen. So, these are the accountability  
14 measures for pelagic stocks that will be applicable to the species.  
15 For pelagic stocks/stock complexes, the Council will establish an  
16 ACT as a percentage of the ACL to serve as the AM triggers. The AM  
17 trigger, which means the reference point compared to landings. In  
18 the event of an overage of the ACT, the Council in consultation  
19 with NMFS would assess whether corrective action is needed.

20  
21 So, the proposed option, something that will happen in this  
22 amendment, is that because the species is going to be reclassified,  
23 then we need to specify an ACT. So, an annual catch target will  
24 establish commercial and recreational ACTs for rainbow runner that  
25 would be equal to 90% of the commercial ACL and recreational ACL  
26 respectively. So, those are the numbers. The commercial ACL, 913  
27 pounds, the recreation are 8,091 pounds, and then the proposed ACT  
28 is 90% of that, so we're ending up with 822 pounds and 7,282  
29 pounds.

30  
31 So, this is part of the analysis that is included in the amendment.  
32 So, as I mentioned, as part of the analysis we have to evaluate  
33 what the effects of taking this action are. So, there are four  
34 things that, as I mentioned, would happen with this change. Number  
35 one, establishing that ACT. So, pelagic species under the Puerto  
36 Rico FMP are managed with an ACT set at 90% of the ACL for each  
37 sector. Establishing an ACT in addition to an ACL is a  
38 precautionary management measure to address uncertainty in the  
39 management of pelagic species. This is the way that the Council  
40 set it up in the FMPs, Puerto Rico FMPs and the U.S. Virgin Islands  
41 FMPs.

42  
43 Also, the application of AMs for pelagic species. So, while the AM  
44 for reef fish compares the sector specific ACLs, that is the  
45 commercial and recreational, to the available sector specific  
46 landings, and if the AM trigger, that is that the applicable ACL  
47 was exceeded due to increased catch, then efficiencies and  
48 reduction is calculated and applied to the current fishing year to

1 prevent a similar exceedance of the ACL. If landings for one sector  
2 are not available in comparison to the sector specific ACL, as is  
3 the current situation for recreational landings, then the sector  
4 specific ACL for the sector with available landings is the  
5 applicable ACL for the sector. Meaning that if there's no landings  
6 to compare, like, for example, recreational, because they're not  
7 being collected and monitored, then the applicable ACL will be,  
8 for all the stock is the commercial, for all the sectors.

9  
10 Now, the AM for pelagic fish, which will be the one that we would  
11 be applying to the rainbow runner, compares the sector specific  
12 ACTs to available sector specific landings. And similarly, if  
13 landings for one sector are not available, then the ACT for the  
14 sector with available landings is the applicable ACT for the stock.  
15 For pelagic fish, if the AM is triggered, then NMFS in consultation  
16 with the Council will determine appropriate corrective action. A  
17 fishing season reduction could result, but it's not an immediate  
18 consequence like it is for reef fish. Okay? So that's one of the  
19 things to keep in mind. But that doesn't mean that that's not  
20 something that could happen. That will have to be a decision made.

21  
22 So, the other thing that happens is, when you reclassify the  
23 rainbow runner as a pelagic fish, as I said, you remove the AM for  
24 fishing season reduction and that reduction is designed to protect  
25 against future overages of the stock. So, as of now there have  
26 been no reductions in the length of rainbow runner fishing season.  
27 I mean, this is a new species. We have just recently started  
28 monitoring. In this year when we monitored landings, when the most  
29 recent commercial landings of rainbow runner, which was 1,177  
30 pounds in 2022, this is commercial, where compared to the  
31 commercial ACL, you know, with the reef fish AM, which is the one  
32 that is currently applicable, that ACL was exceeded by 264 pounds.  
33 There was no AM implemented or no reduction in fishing season  
34 because NMFS determined, following the process that is in our  
35 regulations, that the commercial ACL was exceeded because of  
36 enhanced and improved data collection and monitoring rather than  
37 by an increase in landings.

38  
39 Now, if you compare the 2022 landings to the proposed ACT, if it  
40 were to be a pelagic fish under the pelagic fish AM, that would  
41 result in an overage of 355 pounds from the proposed ACT. But under  
42 the pelagic fish AM, if NMFS estimates that landings have exceeded  
43 the applicable ACT, NMFS, in consultation with the Council, will  
44 determine appropriate corrective action. At that time, no  
45 corrective action may be needed if exceedance is the result of  
46 enhanced and improved data collection and monitoring. If  
47 corrective action is appropriate, then NMFS could apply management  
48 measures, such as a closure or a trip limit, this is just an

1 example, which would help protect the long-term sustainability of  
2 the resource.

3  
4 Now, the Council can always revisit the ACLs and ACTs for the  
5 rainbow runner or any other species to address any changes in  
6 effort. For example, something that is constantly mentioned,  
7 changes in market demand or changes in reporting. Let's assume  
8 that the species is added to the commercial catch report forms. We  
9 will see changes in reporting, so that's something that ultimately  
10 can lead us to make adjustment to the catch levels. Next slide.

11  
12 Okay. So, the other change would be related to the Bajo de Sico  
13 seasonal area closure, related to the restrictions that are  
14 specifically for reef fish harvest that do not apply to pelagic  
15 fish. So, if the species reclassify, commercial and recreational  
16 fishermen could legally fish for rainbow runner in the Bajo de  
17 Sico management area during the seasonal closure, as is the case  
18 with other pelagic species and non-managed species. What this means  
19 is that during the Bajo de Sico seasonal closure in federal waters,  
20 the limitation for fishing is for reef fish, not for pelagic  
21 species or for other non-managed species. So, it will be similar  
22 to what is already allowed for other pelagic species in the area.

23  
24 So, this action then is not expected to change how rainbow runner  
25 is currently fished. This is something that we discussed in a  
26 previous meeting. And those landings would still continue to be  
27 constrained by the applicable ACL and corresponding ACT. Now,  
28 because there is no recreational data collection monitoring, the  
29 commercial ACL is going to be the applicable ACL. So, commercial  
30 fishing for rainbow runner occurs in the water column with  
31 techniques and gear used to fish for pelagic species. So,  
32 commercially rainbow runner is usually not directly targeted but  
33 is caught as bycatch when targeting other pelagic species, which  
34 are allowed to be harvested during the Bajo de Sico seasonal area  
35 closure.

36  
37 So, based on this commercial fishing effort for rainbow runner is  
38 not expected to increase during the seasonal closure period, and  
39 this is part of the analysis that is included in the document. It  
40 is suspected that recreational fishermen would catch a similar  
41 amount of rainbow runner as they did before the species was  
42 federally managed. And if you can see in the amendment when we did  
43 the analysis there was less than one fish per day.

44  
45 So, I mean, this is what we have based on information. And again,  
46 the Council can always adjust, you know, ACL or make changes  
47 depending, right, if there are changes in effort in the future.  
48 And many of these things are very difficult to predict at this

1 time, but this is based on the information that we have, and the  
2 fishing patterns and how the species has been historically  
3 harvested in the area.

4  
5 And I'm almost done with this part. The last part would be the  
6 removal of the rainbow runner from the reef fish recreational bag  
7 limit. Removing the species from any protection afforded by the  
8 aggregate bag limit could result in an increased rate of catch of  
9 the species by the recreational sector, though they will still be  
10 constrained to the recreational ACL. Although, in the absence of  
11 recreational landings, as I mentioned before, commercial ACT and  
12 ACL would be the one that's applicable.

13  
14 Now, it is suspected that if the rainbow runner is removed from  
15 the recreational bag limit, recreational fishermen would continue  
16 to catch a similar amount of rainbow runner as they did before the  
17 species was federally managed, which is less than one fish per  
18 day. So, how does this affect the other species that are included  
19 in the aggregate? It's probably not going to change very much  
20 because the species is really not being harvested as reef fish, so  
21 they're mostly harvested with other pelagic species. So, we don't  
22 expect that removing the species from the recreational bag limit  
23 will immediately say, "okay, now we're going to harvest more of  
24 these other reef fish species because now we cannot harvest  
25 rainbow." We don't have a rainbow runner recreational bag limit;  
26 this is not how the species has been fished for. This is not how  
27 it's fished. So, we don't expect a change like that.

28  
29 So, in summary, removing management restrictions as a whole for  
30 the species by reclassifying them as pelagic fish will not result  
31 in an increase in fishing effort based on the analysis and  
32 discussion in the draft amendment. This is because the rainbow  
33 runner behaves as a pelagic species, and it has been historically  
34 targeted as a pelagic species with both commercial and recreational  
35 catches being infrequent and variable, and this is not really  
36 expected to change. Landings will continue to be constrained by  
37 the applicable ACL and the corresponding ACT. If the AM is  
38 triggered, then NMFS, in consultation with the Council, will  
39 determine appropriate corrective action.

40  
41 A fishing season reduction could result, but it's not the applied  
42 AM option like it is for reef fish. It's not something that it's  
43 immediate like it is for reef fish, but if this occurs again, we're  
44 going to be actively monitoring the species and if there are any  
45 changes that need to be made, they can be made. The Council could  
46 revisit the ACL and ACT for the rainbow runner to address any  
47 future changes in effort if they were to occur, for example, those  
48 related to market demand or changes in reporting.

1  
2 So, this is what we're developing. We have the amendment with one  
3 action. This is what we just went through. It includes a  
4 description of the fishery, and analysis of the biological, social,  
5 and economic effects. It also has a regulatory impact review and  
6 regulatory flexibility and analysis, which are the economic  
7 analysis. As I mentioned earlier, the type of document that is  
8 used to analyze through the National Environmental Policy Act is  
9 a categorical exclusion. This is a memo that we prepare, and this  
10 is done for activities found to not have individual or cumulative  
11 significant impacts on the human environment.

12  
13 The category is an action that is CE A1, an action that is a  
14 technical correction or a change to a fishery management action or  
15 regulation, which does not result in a substantial change in any  
16 of the following: fishing location, timing, effort, authorized  
17 gear types, or harvest levels.

18  
19 So, action items and next steps. So, from August to November, the  
20 IPT has worked to develop an amendment to the Puerto Rico FMP.  
21 This meeting in December, we provided an overview of amendment  
22 organization, the environmental review document, and schedule. So,  
23 in early 2025, the IPT would address some edits and comments from  
24 the document as it has been reviewed. For April 2025, we plan to  
25 bring the draft amendment back to the Council so they can finalize  
26 their review, review the codified text, and they can decide to  
27 take final action on this at the April meeting.

28  
29 And then, after that, NMFS will develop the proposed rule, publish  
30 the proposed rule, publish the amendment for comment. NMFS will  
31 also develop the final rule, address comments that are received on  
32 the amendment and on the proposed rule and the final rule. And  
33 then, after that, Amendment 4 becomes effective. Okay. So, that's,  
34 the plan for this one.

35  
36 At this time, we don't need anything else from the Council in terms  
37 of motions, but yeah. Open for comments.

38  
39 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, María. Any comments? Nothing? Okay.  
42 We're going to take a quick 5-minute break.

43  
44 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we're going to get started again. It's,  
47 getting late, and we still have a couple more things to do.

48

1 Okay. So, the next thing on the agenda is the-- Oh. Miguel?

2  
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to welcome  
4 the distinguished guest, Sam Rauch, and just to open the floor so  
5 you can say something. No? Just say hello. How are you? That's it.

6  
7 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Yeah. So, I'm Sam Rauch. For those of you  
8 who don't know me, I'm one of the deputy directors of National  
9 Fisheries Service. I oversee all the regions including the  
10 Southeast Regional Office and the Headquarters Offices of  
11 Sustainable Fisheries.

12  
13 Oh, you can't hear?

14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. You can talk now.

16  
17 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** You want to start over? Okay.

18  
19 I'm Sam Rauch. I am one of the three career deputy directors of  
20 the National Fisheries Service. I oversee the work of all the  
21 regions, including the Southeast Region and the Headquarters  
22 Offices of Sustainable Fisheries, Protected Resources, Habitat  
23 Conservation and Policy.

24  
25 And I think I'll be addressing the Council tomorrow morning, so  
26 I'm happy to take questions then. And I'm glad to be here.

27  
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And just for the record, the Southeast Region is  
29 behaving. They're helping us a lot.

30  
31 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Okay.

32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, next on the agenda is the SSC report  
34 by Vance Vicente.

35  
36 **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT--VANCE VICENTE**

37  
38 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Good afternoon. Thanks for the invitation,  
39 and thanks to the Council for allowing me and three other SSC  
40 participants to participate in the 8<sup>th</sup> National Meeting of the  
41 Scientific Coordination Subcommittee of the Council Coordination  
42 Committee. So, it was the 8<sup>th</sup> SCS Annual National Meeting, actually.  
43 Next slide, please. Okay. Thank you.

44  
45 Well, there you see a whole bunch of-- an amalgamation of people.  
46 Well, there's one very special person in there that I have to give  
47 particular mention, and that's Graciela García-Moliner. She was  
48 really, largely responsible for getting all the pieces of

1 information together for our presentation, especially when we were  
2 told that we only had five minutes for the Round Robin group  
3 meeting. So, thank you, Graciela. I also want to thank all the SSC  
4 participants, Walter Keithly, Tarsila Seara, and Juan Cruz-Motta,  
5 a.k.a. J. J.) They all provided very important and pertinent  
6 interventions during the meeting, during various aspects of the  
7 meeting.

8  
9 The workshop provided an opportunity for Council delegates to learn  
10 from each other as they work to address a range of shared  
11 challenges such as data gaps, limits of existing models and  
12 processes. Delegates acknowledge that social and economic data and  
13 expertise are limited and the role of SSCs in using this type of  
14 data are unclear or restrictive. Third, a limited, very limited  
15 actually, number of examples that were identified where reference  
16 points, rebuilding plants, and ABC control rules have been adapted  
17 to respond to climatic change, which was the main focus of this  
18 meeting.

19  
20 So, briefly, I'll go through the summary of the Round Robin  
21 Presentation of the eight Councils. One, Gulf of Mexico. Well, we  
22 were asked to provide an overview of what stocks are managed by  
23 their Council, what ABC control rules are used, and what are the  
24 challenges with performance of the ABC control rules in a changing  
25 environment. Regarding the Gulf of Mexico, the Council uses  
26 tiered ABC control rules to set catch for 40 species. Just three  
27 species have a quantitative assessment with MSY-inform estimates.

28  
29 In the Western Pacific, the Council also uses a tiered control  
30 rule based on data quality for setting catch levels of 44 species  
31 in its five fisheries ecosystem plans. 539 species are ecosystem  
32 component species without specifications. The P\* approach (p  
33 asterisk approach), is used for stocks with more quantitative  
34 assessments.

35  
36 In the mid-Atlantic, the region is relatively data rich with a  
37 model-estimated OFL and ABC set also at the p-asterisk approach  
38 for ten or 14 species managed by the Council. While the Council  
39 has been successful at rebuilding stocks with infrequent  
40 overfishing challenges, such as the noticeable degradation and  
41 more frequent interruption of survey data.

42  
43 Fourth. In the Caribbean, like, I will be more specific later,  
44 while the Council uses a tiered approach to set ABCs based on data  
45 availability. Just one stock, pretty soon there will be two, I  
46 guess, managed under Tier 3 using the MSY proxy. And the remaining  
47 88 stocks with catch limits are managed with Tier 4. So, therefore,  
48 the region is relatively-- well, not relatively. The region is

1 data limited, I would say.

2  
3 In the Pacific, the Council manages 100 stocks with thresholds or  
4 kinked ABC control rules. I tried to look up what kinked ABC  
5 control rules are and these are control rules that are very  
6 sensitive to climatic driven uncertainty and biomass changes. Sea  
7 surface temperature is another component for the control rule for  
8 one coastal pelagic species, although groundfish is-- sorry. For  
9 groundfish species, threshold-based rules provide inherent climate  
10 resilience.

11  
12 In the South Atlantic, the Council recently revised their ABC  
13 control rules with changes implemented in early 2024 for the  
14 snapper-grouper, dolphin-wahoo, and golden crab fishery management  
15 plans, but it has not been applied to any stocks yet.

16  
17 In the North Pacific, the Council manages 39 stocks with model-  
18 based control rules based on biomass and fishing mortality and  
19 about 16 stocks with empirical approaches. Current approaches and  
20 harvest control rules are generally successful at avoiding  
21 overfishing, but recent marine heat waves highlight increased  
22 risk. The big challenge is understanding how to adjust for non-  
23 stationarity in the system, including prevailing assumptions about  
24 stock dynamics and highly variable recruitment.

25  
26 Finally, in New England, the region has model-based assessments  
27 with control rules for about 44% of the stocks, but over half of  
28 the stocks are assessed and managed with empirical assessment.  
29 Climate impacts on these stocks are broadly recognized in the  
30 region, but very few stocks are assessed with models that integrate  
31 environmental conditions resulting in uncertainty about stock  
32 biomass and fishing mortality rates. Next slide.

33  
34 This summarizes the Round Robin Presentation, what their role was,  
35 and just a graph to give you an example of the P\* approach to  
36 setting ABC, where ABC is based on acceptable probability of  
37 exceeding the OFL.

38  
39 In the next slide, it's a summary of what Graciela and I put  
40 together, but mostly Graciela, I have to confess. So, we presented  
41 the fact there has been a complete change in management by the  
42 Council from a Species-Based Fishery Management Plan to an Island-  
43 Based Fishery Management Plan, acknowledging sociocultural  
44 differences. So, therefore, as a summary, there are three Island-  
45 Based Fishery Management Plans, 275 species and 89 stocks. Puerto  
46 Rico has 37 stocks with 265 species. Saint Thomas/Saint John has  
47 26 stocks that are being managed with 245 species. And Saint Croix  
48 has 26 stocks with 249 species.

1  
2 In the next slide, we show an example of the ABC control rules  
3 that are applied to the CFMC stocks. We're all familiar with that.  
4 So, I'm going to follow go through with the second slide or the  
5 other slide in which-- hold on a second here. Let me fix my computer  
6 here.

7  
8 Okay. We were also asked to present what our challenges were, like  
9 data limitations success in the Caribbean branches. Well, one, we  
10 definitely are lacking effort data. Two, we have very limited life  
11 history information. Third, the delays in the availability of catch  
12 data also hampers proper implementation of management plans. And  
13 four, there is, not very limited but rather limited or lacking  
14 recreational data. So, those are our conclusions regarding the  
15 challenges.

16  
17 We're also asked what the challenges with performance of the ABC  
18 control rules under climate change were. Well, we do not have time  
19 to give many examples or slides for each of the examples of the  
20 four major, what we believe are climate related factors. One, sea  
21 level rise, sea surface temperature, ocean acidification,  
22 evaluating climate changes to coral reef-based fish stocks.

23  
24 Also, for our synthesis, we prepared the following, information  
25 considered in the development of reference points and ABC control  
26 rules are heavily influenced by industry expertise since data are  
27 limited for the majority of species in the U.S. Caribbean. Second,  
28 the currently increasing effort on life history data. Is it too  
29 late? Third, monitoring highly diverse multi-species fisheries  
30 following a single species protocol. Is it a good idea? And lastly,  
31 increase effort from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
32 Caribbean Branch to find ways of evaluating the data limited  
33 stocks.

34  
35 So, let's talk a little bit about what sea level rise's influence  
36 may be on the fisheries populations. Well, one, there's no question  
37 that there has been an increase in sea level rise, and the  
38 projections are from 8 to 10 inches for the Caribbean through the  
39 year 2150. When we talk about sea level rise, we have to understand  
40 it from a geological standpoint because what has happened is that  
41 since the last maximum glacial period, which was the Wisconsin  
42 period back 20,000 years ago, sea level has been increasing. It  
43 has been increasing rapidly to about 5000 years followed by a  
44 slower rate. Actually, the end of the Wisconsin glaciation is the  
45 beginning of the-- what is it called? --the Holocene period. And  
46 since it looks, geologically, that the sea level rise is coming to  
47 a plateau. But actually, you know, with looking at more recent  
48 data, the plateau is already peaking. As you see, this peak is

1 related, well, it has been attributed to greenhouse gases and man  
2 induced factors which have enhanced atmospheric and sea level rise.  
3  
4 Sea level rise, recent data. We also show that there is this peak  
5 and that this peak in sea level rise is attributed, again, to  
6 anthropogenic events since the Industrial Revolution, specifically  
7 the increase in greenhouse gases. Regarding sea surface  
8 temperature, again, you know, if you look at it from a geological  
9 standpoint, the cores that have been taken, and published first by  
10 Emiliani in 1966, show that the sea surface temperature has,  
11 through the last five glacial periods, decreased and increased as  
12 expected. And if we look at the far left of the of the graph, it  
13 shows the Wisconsin glaciation and the present geological period,  
14 Holocene, during the Holocene. And it was expected, both the sea  
15 level to rise and sea surface temperature to increase. That was  
16 expected. But what we are concerned about is, the same thing, that  
17 this was corroboration of the previous analysis with a more recent  
18 study. But, if you look at the sea surface temperature from a  
19 historical standpoint, since the Industrial Revolution, you see  
20 that there's a peak between '40s and the '50s. And that, as you  
21 will see, is very relevant.

22  
23 Okay. That's regarding the sea surface temperature, the historical  
24 record, how the sea surface temperature in the Caribbean has varied  
25 in the last 500,000 years. And at the far left, you see the  
26 beginning of the Holocene since the last 2,000 years, and, you  
27 know, sea surface temperature is expected to increase.

28  
29  
30 Next slide. Next slide. I've already discussed it. Yeah. Ea rayo,  
31 something happened here. Well, anyhow.

32  
33 There has been an unexpected increase in the sea surface  
34 temperature-- and I thought I had-- ah, the thing is that I added  
35 this slide afterwards. Sorry. Okay?

36  
37 But there was a peak during the last-- since the Industrial  
38 Revolution there was a sea surface temperature peak between 1940s  
39 1950s. And, from there on, there has been a sharp increase in sea  
40 surface temperature up to the present. But these increases in  
41 temperature have caused some significant changes. So, one was  
42 during that recent positive, sustained thermal anomaly. Well, I  
43 found that there was a fishery of it in the Caribbean. It was the  
44 commercial sponge fishery, actually. And I attributed that to that  
45 significant anomaly. And this was based on scientific records,  
46 historical records, historical collections, and examination of  
47 specimens during the last expeditions during the last 100 years.  
48 So, that's one thing that I wanted to point out.

1  
2 The same pattern was found in the Mediterranean. The warmer  
3 southern Mediterranean region, there was also significant drop in  
4 the-- and local extinctions, commercial extinctions of commercial  
5 sponges, contrary to areas that have kept cooler because of their  
6 northern latitudes. Next slide.

7  
8 Also, the temperature has been strongly associated with bleaching.  
9 The first massive bleaching was published by Williams, Goenaga and  
10 Vicente in 1987. So, since then, it has been well established that  
11 coral bleaching is strongly related to high thermal positive  
12 thermal anomalies, but also, you know, through UV radiation. But  
13 the primary factor that has been attributed to causing bleaching  
14 has been temperature. On the other hand, there have been other  
15 factors, other than bleaching, which have not been given, I  
16 believe, enough attention, which has significantly altered the  
17 benthic community structure of coral reefs, and these are coral  
18 diseases.

19  
20 There has been a report that of increased coral diseases such as  
21 white plaque disease, dark spot disease, several of them. There  
22 are about 10 different coral diseases. But on top of that, there  
23 has been a recent disease, which is called the hard coral tissue  
24 loss disease. And this is a real serious one because when it  
25 attacks a colony, it doesn't cause bleaching. It kills the polyps  
26 without any recovery. Okay. And this is something serious, and I  
27 believe that it should be further looked at. Next slide.

28  
29 Then there's the ocean acidification that is happening and that's  
30 caused by increase in CO<sub>2</sub> by seawater, which increases the  
31 formation of carbonic acid, which breaks down into bicarbonate and  
32 the release of hydrogen atoms. The release of hydrogen atoms lowers  
33 the pH and, therefore, increases the acidity. And this affects  
34 most of the sea creatures that have a calcium carbonate deposit.  
35 But my most concern, of ocean acidification, is the larvae, veliger  
36 larvae of gastropods such as the queen conch and pelecypods, such  
37 as clams and oysters in their early ontogenetic stages, the larvae  
38 have very, very thin plates of calcium carbonate, which are very  
39 much more vulnerable to becoming dissolved than adult specimens.  
40 Like an adult queen conch, it would take a hell of a lot of acid  
41 to dissolve the skeleton. But when they're in the very early  
42 stages, they're much more vulnerable to ocean acidification.

43  
44 Here in the Caribbean, there hasn't been really much done. But on  
45 the other hand-- let's see here. Hold on a second. This is in  
46 another file. Hold on a second, please. Okay.

47  
48 On the other hand, experiments have been done both in Hawaii and

1 Florida where they are actually using a specific coral species, or  
2 mesocosms in the case of Hawaii, in which under very controlled  
3 conditions, they have been exposing these corals and these  
4 mesocosms, to projected changes in acidity of the pH as well as  
5 expected sea surface temperature for the next 100 years or so.

6  
7 So, before wrapping up, at least some other activities of the SSC,  
8 at least by myself and a few others, we have been participating in  
9 the Caribbean seminar series, which have been very instructive,  
10 and they're being coordinated by Kevin. And there was one very  
11 significant one, which was presented by Nathan Vaughan. He  
12 presented Quantifying Hurricane Impacts on United States Virgin  
13 Islands Reef Fishes Using Catchability in Variant Approach. In  
14 other words, using fishery independent survey data, he was able to  
15 evaluate the impacts of Hurricane Irma and María on the U.S. Virgin  
16 Islands. He found something very interesting that the impacts of  
17 these hurricanes on the U.S.V.I, varied depending on the island.  
18 Especially, Saint Croix was found to have been the most damaged or  
19 impacted by these hurricanes, and this was shown using fishery  
20 independent surveys. Another presentation which was presented by  
21 Mandy Karnauskas, which was An Overview of The First Ecosystem  
22 Status Report for the U.S. Caribbean.

23  
24 Also, I participated in the first CariCAN Ocean Acidification  
25 workshop. This is really interesting because what they've been  
26 doing is they've summarized a whole bunch of different studies  
27 that were being done. But one that was very particularly  
28 interesting is that right now in Florida, the coral population of  
29 Florida, they are also being studied in in-vitro conditions,  
30 exposing them to control acidity of the water column as well as  
31 increasing sea surface temperature. While at the same time, this  
32 is being done in Hawaii and with different results, of course,  
33 they have different species. But both of them are at the edge of  
34 the tropical region with lower temperatures than the Caribbean.  
35 These kinds of studies, the mesocosm studies, are believed to be  
36 necessary to be conducted in the Caribbean because the species are  
37 different and they're much closer to their upper thermal limit.

38  
39 Then on top of that, as the SSC Chair, I was asked to review 12  
40 proposals for the cooperative research program, which I kindly  
41 did, to find out that there was only one proposal submitted from  
42 the Caribbean. It was also sad to hear that the Cooperative  
43 Research Program will not be operating in 2025. I had plans to  
44 send a proposal to incorporate our local fishers into assessing  
45 fishing populations and doing benthic surveys, etcetera.

46  
47 So, anyway, I think I'm done with my time limit. And that's it.  
48 Thank you.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Vance. Any questions for Vance?  
3 María.

4  
5 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**  
6

7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi. Thank you, Vance. Just a question, maybe  
8 for the Council. For the next SSC meeting, do we have a date? What  
9 are the topics that are going to be discussed?

10  
11 I know we had two topics that we wanted to bring to the SSC's  
12 attention for the upcoming meeting. One being the-- let me see. I  
13 have it right here somewhere. So, Sarah, help me out. Yeah.

14  
15 So, we were going to be tasking the SSC with reviewing the actions  
16 to be taken, for the pelagic species, when they're over the ACT  
17 and also review the ACL overages for spiny lobster. But I believe  
18 there were other topics maybe related to SEDAR or something like  
19 that the SSC will be discussing.

20  
21 So, the question is when is the April-- Is it going to be in April  
22 before the Council meeting? I just want to know the date so we can  
23 prepare, accordingly, the materials that we need to provide.

24  
25 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Well, there are a couple of things. Also,  
26 the SEDAR information that comes out for SEDAR 84. SEDAR 91 is in  
27 the assessment phase, so that's not going to happen anytime soon.  
28 So, you also have the changing of the ACLs for the cucumbers, the  
29 urchins, and the corals.

30  
31 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Graciela, that's correct. We also talked,  
32 this morning, about depending on the list of tasks that the SSC  
33 has that potentially change the evaluation of the status for the  
34 sea cucumbers, corals, sea urchins, etcetera can happen at a later  
35 time. But that's something that the SSC hasn't really been directly  
36 tasked for at this time. So, it will be the SEDAR, the SEDAR--  
37 what is it? 84 and then the other two topics, spiny lobster and  
38 pelagic. That's what we have for now.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

41  
42 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thanks. So, when it comes time for that  
43 scheduling, just recall that these reviews of stock assessments  
44 are not trivial exercises. They will demand a lot of time, and we  
45 have three of them, right? So, just keep that in mind when it comes  
46 to scheduling. Thank you very much. Yes, but it is 84.

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anymore-- Graciela?

1  
2 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I cannot provide a date right now.  
3 I would have to go look at the calendars and the different--  
4 because we do have SEDAR coming up, and that's February. And I  
5 think that there are two meetings happening over the same period  
6 of time. We also have some of the CCC meetings that we have  
7 scheduled. So, I have to go back and check on the calendar.  
8  
9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you.  
10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?  
12  
13 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. And, Graciela, I would also say that  
14 they'll-- and I'll talk about this more tomorrow, but there'll be  
15 a combin-- to finish up the SEDAR process. Right? And then the SSC  
16 review is outside SEDAR, so let's not mistake that. Although the  
17 SSC plays a critical role throughout the SEDAR process. Anyway,  
18 there'll be a combined CIE SSC review. So, CIE is the Center for  
19 Independent Experts. So, these are outside reviewers that come in,  
20 but also SSC members sit on that panel. That's scheduled. This is  
21 for SEDAR 84, so yellowtail snapper and stoplight parrotfish. That  
22 is scheduled for February.  
23  
24 That generates a report that would be of great interest to the  
25 SSC, so we want to make sure that report is available to the SSC  
26 before they would then review the information for themselves. But  
27 certainly, having that CIE report is going to be beneficial to  
28 them. So, there's some lag there. I don't know how long the CIE  
29 has. We'd have to ask SEDAR how long they get to produce that  
30 report, but we want to think about that in the scheduling as well,  
31 I think.  
32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anymore comment for Vance? Questions? Okay. So,  
34 next on the agenda will be Sennai Habtes with the EBFM TAP update.  
35  
36 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Evan Tuohy from Isla Mar is asking for a  
37 turn to speak to make a comment.  
38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.  
40  
41 **EVAN TUOHY:** Hello. Can you all hear me?  
42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.  
44  
45 **EVAN TUOHY:** Yep. Okay. Perfect. Thank you very much for the  
46 opportunity to comment, but I'd like to bring to the attention of  
47 the meeting that, currently, we have a Council, a Caribbean  
48 Fisheries Management Council project that is in the process of

1 assessing the effectiveness of marine reserves in relation to red  
2 hind spawning aggregations. This year, we're working in the Lang  
3 Bank to estimate population densities using variable survey  
4 technologies.

5  
6 And it's also been brought to our attention that, occurring at the  
7 same time, there is a request for an EFP to collect red hind from  
8 that aggregation. So, that's kind of a conflict of interest for  
9 the two projects that are both occurring at the same time. One is  
10 estimating densities at an aggregation site, and the other one is  
11 potentially removing fish from the aggregation site. So, I was  
12 wondering if I could make a call to table the discussion to  
13 potentially discuss this further and reach an amicable resolution  
14 to this so that, you know, both projects can continue as best as  
15 possible.

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

18  
19 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi. This is María López. So, we have the topic  
20 of the exempted fishing permit that was submitted to the National  
21 Marine Fisheries Service. That topic is going to be discussed, I  
22 believe tomorrow at 11:30 AM. And at that time, if the Council  
23 wants to entertain comments from-- I think that will be a good  
24 time to address that.

25  
26 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Also, the public comment period on that  
27 exempt fishing permit remains open until December 9th, so anyone  
28 that's listening to this Council meeting and is interested in  
29 having their views considered by NMFS should submit their public  
30 comments through regulations.gov pursuant to that Federal Register  
31 notice.

32  
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, we want to make the distinction that the  
34 comments will be received to the Council for tomorrow. The other  
35 procedure will follow as--

36  
37 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, Miguel, there's two separate things.  
38 So, tomorrow the Council will talk about that permit application,  
39 and, you know, if the Council wants to entertain public comments,  
40 at that time, to inform anything that the Council may want to do,  
41 that would be appropriate. But if anybody else is interested in  
42 just submitting their viewpoints to NMFS directly, the appropriate  
43 way to do that would be through regulations.gov, pursuant to that  
44 Federal Register notice. But they could also present views to the  
45 Council tomorrow if the Council chooses to entertain public  
46 comments on that.

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Sennai?

1  
2 **EVAN TUOHY:** Thank you.  
3

4 **EBFM TAP UPDATE—SENNAI HABTES, EBFM TAP CHAIR AND LIAJAY RIVERA,**  
5 **CFMC STAFF**  
6

7 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone and thank you  
8 Mr. Chair for the opportunity to present an update for the  
9 Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management Technical Advisory Panel.

10  
11 Just as a reminder, the EBFM TAP was created back on October 23<sup>rd</sup>,  
12 2019. The purpose of the EBFM TAP is to assist in the development,  
13 collection, evaluation, and peer review of statistical,  
14 biological, economic, social, and other scientific information  
15 relevant to the Council's development of the fisheries ecosystem  
16 Ecosystems-Based Fisheries Management, under the Caribbean  
17 Fisheries Management Council.

18  
19 The TAP is composed of individuals that work on ecosystem research  
20 or are knowledgeable in conservation and management of ecosystems  
21 for managed fisheries in the U. S. Caribbean, and we provide expert  
22 scientific and technical advice to the Council on the development  
23 and preparation of a fishery ecosystem plan, which is the major  
24 focus of what the TAP was developed for.

25  
26 Our objectives are to provide the Council with ongoing scientific  
27 advice on ecosystem-based fisheries management, including  
28 recommendations for habitat status, social and economic impacts of  
29 management measures, and ecosystem-based impacts or stressors on  
30 sustainability of fishing practices.

31  
32 All of that is summarized through a mission for a fisheries  
33 ecosystem plan, which we are trying to develop currently, which is  
34 to promote ecosystem-based approaches to ensure healthy,  
35 resilient, and productive marine eco systems, and the fisheries  
36 resources dependent upon those ecosystems within the context of  
37 the unique biological, ecological, economic, social, and cultural  
38 characteristics of those fishery resources, and the communities  
39 dependent on them. That framework is bounded by these 14, I  
40 believe, goals to the right. I'm not going to go through all of  
41 them. Most of you have seen them before, and you can look at the  
42 multiple presentations I've given on this if you want to go through  
43 them. Those have not changed so there isn't much of an update on  
44 those. So, I will move on to the updates that we do have for this  
45 meeting.

46  
47 We held, an EBFM TAP meeting on August 1<sup>st</sup> through August 2<sup>nd</sup> this  
48 year, and we had presentations on the fisheries dependent data GIS

1 portal for the U. S. Caribbean for the CFMC by Martha Prada.  
2 Summaries on EBFM road map implementation efforts from Tauna Rankin  
3 and María López-Mercer.

4  
5 We also had a summary of the spatial planning data efforts being  
6 done within NOAA. And I believe within the U.S. Caribbean, this  
7 was mostly focused on offshore wind development for the U.S.  
8 Caribbean by Joe Serafy and Jennifer White. That's a similar  
9 presentation from Tarsila Seara, but it was focused on the work  
10 that her and J.J. had presented at SCS8. And then, both the summary  
11 on progress to date by Leigh Fletcher, who is our contractor, who  
12 is developing the risk assessment framework for the EBFM, and then  
13 a summary of where we are with the ecosystem status report from  
14 Mandy Karnauskas.

15  
16 The other things that we did at the meeting were to summarize the  
17 working group outcomes and synergistic project updates. As you  
18 know, the majority of the work that gets done through EBFM is done  
19 through grants written from partners that are working on this  
20 project and who sit on the EBFM TAP, but not directly through the  
21 Council. And so, we got outcomes on those as well as went through  
22 a lot of the work to draft the Fisheries Ecosystem Plan,  
23 summarizing the needs that we're going to put into strategic and  
24 operational goals, the writing and draft development schedules so  
25 we can hopefully get an FEP finished before the end of 2025,  
26 finalizing the risk assessment framework so that the contractor,  
27 Leigh Fletcher, can summarize it and develop a chapter for the  
28 FEP, as well as finalize the indicator list that will be presented,  
29 and develop a framework for FEP implementation for the CFMC to  
30 use.

31  
32 So, as you all know, we have these five working groups that are  
33 working towards what's going on. One update is that we have changed  
34 the data repository, the data management and coordination working  
35 group to focus on multi-species modeling and developing a road map  
36 for that. There are about five different groups that are working  
37 towards multi-species modeling for the U.S. Caribbean. I know  
38 because I'm in every one of the meetings for them, and so what  
39 we're trying to do is coordinate and use the EBFM TAP as a means  
40 to coordinate all of those towards the same goals that can benefit  
41 the U.S. Caribbean and, kind of merge, you know, the work that  
42 we're all doing so that we're not wasting efforts and resources.

43  
44 The rest, the conceptual models have completed their work. They  
45 provided a report, and we are taking the information from that  
46 report and putting it into the FEP and online where we're all going  
47 through it and editing and cutting out the important parts,  
48 summarizing the indicators. We are waiting for finalized ecosystem

1 indicators. Once the ESR, the Ecosystem Status Report for the U.S.  
2 Caribbean is completed, we can take the information from that and  
3 pair it with the indicators that were developed through our Lenfest  
4 project that J.J. and Tarsila headed up and create a summarized  
5 list that will go into the FEP, as well as an appendix that provides  
6 the areas as to where they can be found or used.

7  
8 The risk assessment framework, as I mentioned, is being developed  
9 by the contractor from BioImpact, which is Leigh Fletcher, and  
10 she's hard at work. We really sat down, hashed everything out in  
11 the last meeting, and identified the direction that we wanted her  
12 to go in, and we'll have an update, likely, from her, in February,  
13 and that can be put in directly into the FEP.

14  
15 So, here are the updates from the synergistic projects. We've had  
16 two technical writers hired through outside projects. The first  
17 was through funding from the Pew Charitable Trust. Katherine Tzadik  
18 had completed her draft, a first draft, for us that included the  
19 first four chapters, which are the introduction, vision,  
20 framework, strategic objectives, the synthesis of the U. S.  
21 Caribbean fishery system, and a list of the indicators summarized.

22  
23 We are currently going through that and providing more information  
24 from the other reports and other work that was done from the two  
25 projects that you'll see on the right. The Lenfest project, which  
26 was funded by J.J. Cruz, and Tarsila Seara, and then the other  
27 project, which was to develop the ESR that Mandy and Bill Arnold  
28 had put in, which both have since finished. We have most of the  
29 objectives completed from the Lenfest project, and I think the  
30 work for the ESR has been completed, but they've created a way to  
31 make it lasting, so that the datasets will be constantly compiled.  
32 Once that is finished, I think we'll have a finalized version of  
33 that that will be shared with us, and we can include that in our  
34 FEP in some form.

35  
36 The risk assessment is being done. That was funded by a grant that  
37 the Council and Tauna Rankin wrote, through MSA internal funding,  
38 through sustainable fisheries, and that hired Leigh and she's  
39 currently working on that chapter, which is really creating,  
40 basically, creating a risk assessment framework that everyone can  
41 understand and use, which is a lot harder than it seems. Every  
42 time we have tried to develop a risk assessment framework for the  
43 Caribbean, it either has too many steps or not enough data, but  
44 identifying one that meets both needs for the SSC to use, but that  
45 can be understood at the Council level. And I think she's really  
46 done a phenomenal job in trying to bridge those two gaps and  
47 develop a written report that we can add into the FEP.

48

1 And then last is the data repository and multi-species modeling  
2 roadmap. I head up that one. What we have done this year was put  
3 in that IRA proposal that you heard Martha talk about this morning.  
4 And the focus of that is really to develop a community of practice.  
5 We need a roadmap and a way to manage the data going forward. And  
6 that requires a new way of thinking about how we organize the data,  
7 how we work together consistently, and how we keep  
8 institutionalized knowledge because we are not doing that for the  
9 Caribbean. And so, really, what this was aimed at was developing  
10 an online hub that can connect all of the people doing this work.  
11 So, it's not just a data repository, it's more an information  
12 repository and an information sharing hub, which I think is really  
13 the only way forward for us here, given the low number of people  
14 and the high amount of work that we have to do.

15  
16 The other thing that we did was really fleshed out the strategic  
17 and operational objectives within the individual sections for the  
18 FEP. Those are broken out into the ecological, habitat, and biotic.  
19 The black is the strategic. The blue is the operational that fit  
20 under the individual strategic objectives. Because we're running  
21 low on time, I'm not going to go through them all. Take a look. If  
22 you have questions, you want to come see me after, I'm happy to  
23 talk more about them.

24  
25 This is where we are so far with the drafting of the FEP. We have  
26 five sections that we've really simplified this down from about 14  
27 sections two years ago when we started. We have an introduction,  
28 an ecosystems and ecosystem services chapter, an ecosystem  
29 indicators chapter, a framework for use of indicators and  
30 management, and then, the plan moving forward, how we're going to  
31 do this.

32  
33 We've got chapters 1 through 3 and a little bit of chapter 4  
34 drafted where we're kind of going back through it, adding some new  
35 things in there as things have changed, and we have an outline for  
36 4 and 5 and are populating that amongst the different working  
37 groups, online.

38  
39 All right, so what you've all been waiting for, where are we? We've  
40 completed the first draft. We've developed the goals and  
41 objectives. The synergistic projects, with the exception of risk  
42 assessment, have been completed. All models and model melding have  
43 been done. That is summarized in a report which we are now trying  
44 to draft into an individual FEP. Taking the information from the  
45 ESR and the conceptual models and putting that into a risk  
46 assessment framework with an example of how it's used is what's  
47 happening now through the risk assessment working group, which is  
48 led by-- Liajay, are you leading that? No. Leigh's leading that

1 one. No. Tauna's leading that one. Sorry. Tauna's leading that one  
2 working directly with the contractor, Leigh Fletcher, and we hope  
3 to have something finished by February for incorporation and full  
4 drafting into the FEP by June of 2025.

5  
6 We've completed the strategic objectives as well as the operational  
7 objectives and developed a vision for the FEP that we will use as  
8 a framework for the CFMC to consider. And so, what we have left is  
9 concrete action items under the operational objectives,  
10 performance measures, and a draft management strategy that can be  
11 used by the Council, a feedback management mechanism for adaptive  
12 management, and a final draft FEP document that we'll submit for  
13 review by November, well, which we'll finalize by November of '25  
14 and submit for review by probably March of 2025. Sorry for the  
15 typo at the bottom. Every year, I have to keep adjusting the year  
16 because there's more stuff that we keep shoving into the EBFM TAP  
17 for us to do, but that's okay. I'm happy about that.

18  
19 I think that's the last slide, so if you guys have any questions,  
20 I'm happy to take them.

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

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions for Sennai? Vanessa?

25  
26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Sennai, for this great presentation  
27 and all the points and details that you put in it. I really  
28 appreciate all the hard work that you are doing with the group on  
29 this. I am anxious to see the results at the end of 2025.

30  
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks. Appreciate it, Vanessa.

32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anything else? oh, go ahead, with the chat.

34  
35 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Elizabeth Ban, "Can you tell us which  
36 working group is dealing with the social, cultural, and economic  
37 aspects?"

38  
39 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sure, Elizabeth. That's a great question. That's  
40 actually through the conceptual model's framework. Part of the  
41 Lenfest project was to do all of these community meetings where we  
42 looked at the social, socioeconomic variables that needed to be  
43 incorporated, what was available, what's not, and both, J. J. and  
44 Tarsila did a really heavy lift in trying to tell us what the  
45 interests are from community stakeholders in those, and also  
46 identifying what's available versus what's not, and providing us  
47 a pathway forward for identifying how we can do this in the  
48 Caribbean.

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**CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anything else for Sennai? María?

**MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Sennai. And thank you for also taking care of the coordination of this effort. There's a lot of work, a lot of people working, a lot to manage. I just wanted to ask you; do you need anything in particular from the Council at this time?

**SENNAI HABTES:** I mean, I think I've been pretty clear all the time about what we need. Right? It's like we need a data management system. Right? And, like, I think, I've frequently-- you know, I write in almost all of the work that we're doing in grants to develop that kind of system.

It's clear that I don't think we're really at a point where we'll get, like, a fisheries information network for the U.S. Caribbean. But we have to realize, like, if we're not saying how limited in that capacity we are at everything that we're doing, people aren't going to understand that when we say we need a data repository, like, we actually have a plan now, a better way of using it, and that people are doing this already, but those efforts are going to get snuffed out if we don't continue it. And, like, there are small pots of money that we can go after, and that will only fund it for so long, but if we don't have a plan to keep it going, it won't keep going. And I think, you know, we really need to identify new ways of funding strategic efforts for this region. Like, that's the big thing, you know?

It's like we have not put in the time and effort to identify what strategic infrastructure needs we have. Whether it be from an academic standpoint or from a state and territorial government standpoint or from, I think, you know, we're doing that now from the federal within the Caribbean branch and that strategic planning process, but I need help. Like, you know, I have a great group of people that are working on it, but, you know, I'm also the Bureau Chief of Fisheries for the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources. There are a whole lot of things that I have to do there. So, I can't, you know, right now, I'm writing, like, seven grants probably a year trying to do focused efforts for the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council, and, like, I really only manage 0 to 3 miles. Like, that's my primary focus, you know?

So, I think if we can identify other people that can step in or train other people, like, that can sit with me and, like, learn how we're trying to manage all these things, that's really what I need. I need more students that are coming down here and working with us. I need sustained efforts for funding, you know, the data

1 collection that we need for socioeconomic and, you know,  
2 independent and fisheries dependent data collection. I need  
3 programs in perpetuity for, you know, how we do cooperative  
4 research with the fishermen. None of those are set up, and frankly,  
5 we have to do them at the local level, and all of that is a huge  
6 part of us getting to multi-species modeling and, you know,  
7 developing a concerted effort for ecosystem-based fisheries  
8 monitoring in the U.S. Caribbean.

9  
10 Are you glad you asked?

11  
12 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. Thank you for that. I think that is super  
13 important, and I'm glad that you were able to express that very  
14 eloquently. So, we're here to help.

15  
16 **SAFE FISHING ZONES—CARLOS FARCHETTE, CFMC CHAIR**

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Sennai. Anything else for  
19 Sennai? Alright. So, next on the agenda is, a request from the  
20 fisherman of Saint Croix that I have a little script to do here.

21  
22 Can you pull up the one yeah. The navigational chart?

23  
24 So, while that's coming up, I'm going to read the information I  
25 got from these fishers. So, the port of Gallows Bay in  
26 Christiansted Saint Croix will be relocating cargo vessels to the  
27 main container port on the South Shore. The plan is to transform  
28 the port in Gallows Bay to a mini cruise ship and mega yacht port.

29  
30 This relocation will increase cargo vessel traffic across Lang  
31 Bank in the Northeast of Saint Croix and across the Southwest  
32 portion of Saint Croix from Sandy Point to the container port. In  
33 addition, plans are being developed to build a network of passenger  
34 ferries and cargo vessels that will connect all of the Caribbean  
35 coming from South America, including Suriname and countries in the  
36 CARICOM community to the Virgin Islands.

37  
38 Representative of Connect Caribe and affiliated firms have joined  
39 in the signing of a memorandum of understanding to establish a  
40 major hub on the island of Saint Croix connecting additional ferry  
41 service to the Virgin Islands to improve food security and  
42 transshipment. This will increase shipping traffic around Lang  
43 Bank. This whole area here.

44  
45 For years, the underserved fishing communities of Saint Croix have  
46 complained about the shortcuts these cargo vessels take across  
47 Lang Bank and the fishing areas on the South Shore creating a  
48 safety issue to the fishing community. When these commercial

1 vessels cut through Lang Bank in areas as shallow as 38 to 40 feet,  
2 they inadvertently snare fish trap lines with their props and drag  
3 the traps across the ocean floor, damaging essential fish habitats,  
4 including soft and hard coral habitats until the line hole in their  
5 trap snaps. There have been reports by fishers that a string of 10  
6 traps has been snared by these vessels crossing, and one can only  
7 imagine the damage to habitat these vessels cause both in Lang  
8 Bank and on the South Shore of Saint Croix. If that cargo vessel  
9 or tanker is passing through here, it's sneering traps from here  
10 all the way up and going across.

11  
12 There have also been reports by fishers of instances where they  
13 have been trying to wave off these cargo vessels because they have  
14 divers down and the vessels are coming dangerously close to the  
15 fishing vessel. Divers have also reported that they have been  
16 tumbled underwater at depths of 35 feet from the cargo vessel's  
17 prop wash when they pass overhead.

18  
19 The fishing community of Saint Croix is looking for assistance  
20 from the Caribbean Council to designate a safe fishing zone at  
21 Lang Bank by requiring that the cargo vessels and ferries operate  
22 outside the 100-fathom contour. If the Council agrees to consider  
23 a safe fishing zone at Lang Bank, there is language for a motion.

24  
25 The Saint Croix Fisheries Advisory Committee has also been working  
26 on a safe fishing zone for the entire island of Saint Croix  
27 territorial waters from shore out to the 100-fathom contour by  
28 making a recommendation to the commissioner to implement a  
29 regulation through legislation. So, this is the 100-fathom  
30 contour, the squiggly line, black line you see there coming down.  
31 And that is the area that they want to stop these tankers and cargo  
32 vessels from crossing through here and through here, although this  
33 is a 3-mile limit.

34  
35 So, this area here is managed by the East End Marine Park. They  
36 have jurisdiction up to the 3 miles, but they only have regulations  
37 up to 100 yards from the barrier reef. From this barrier reef,  
38 they have regulations in place up to 300 yards out. But they have  
39 jurisdiction up to the 3 miles that they can implement a  
40 prohibition on these tankers from coming in this close. And they  
41 do cross this close. Gerson is here and he can tell you about what  
42 these tankers and what these cargo vessels do. Give me the other  
43 slide, please.

44  
45 This is one of the tankers that you see. It's not even a mile  
46 offshore and it's headed East. So, it's headed to cross Lang Bank.  
47 This is another tanker out here. You can't really see it, but  
48 that's where they need to be. They need to be outside in the deep

1 water. The next slide.

2  
3 So, I'm sure that he's dragged traps if they're out here somewhere.  
4 So, in 2011, a young employee of Fish and Wildlife by the name of  
5 Jonathan Brown was working with the FAC at that time to designate  
6 the 100-fathom contour for safe fishing zone. He met with the U.S.  
7 Coast Guard, and the U.S. Coast Guard explained that as long as  
8 you make the line as straight as possible, it would be easier for  
9 them to enforce. This is the 100-fathom contour line right in there  
10 going around. So, because they said it's very difficult for them  
11 to, you know, have to pinpoint every little squiggly. This is 100-  
12 fathoms here on the north side because the waters are very deep.

13  
14 So, the commissioner of DPNR had said that he would try and work  
15 with us to do legislation. I believe that the legislation is going  
16 to have to be involved from Sandy Point, this is Sandy Point here,  
17 to the container port, which is right about here. So, he's going  
18 to start with this portion to do a safe fishing zone here and keep-  
19 - because these fishermen are all in here diving, conch diving,  
20 lobster, setting traps all through here.

21  
22 And I've been with Gerson just about in here. I can't even hold  
23 this thing straight. Where a tanker came inside of our area, when  
24 we were fishing, it was inside of our area closer to shore. So, we  
25 were about 35, 37 feet of water. The tanker had to be, I mean, the  
26 cargo vessel had to be in about 30 feet of water.

27  
28 So that's what I have for Lang Bank, because Lang Bank is the only  
29 federal water that has a reef shelf that the fishermen want to be  
30 able to protect, which is out here. Everything else in this side  
31 is all very deep water the fishermen can't operate it or fish it.

### 32 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

33  
34  
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a question for  
36 Kate. Can we do anything here regarding establishing the safety  
37 fishing zone under the Magnuson-Stevens Act? Just recommend.

38  
39 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I probably would need to do a little bit  
40 more research, but I think part of what I'm hearing is, you know,  
41 you're interested in protecting a coral reef. I'm assuming that  
42 might or it's probably designated as Essential Fish Habitat under  
43 the Saint Croix FMP. I think you probably can designate a zone,  
44 you know, to protect that EFH. So, you know, that might be one way  
45 to get to it. The safety, you know, protecting human life, you  
46 know, is obviously one of the National Standards, so that's  
47 important as well.

1 But I think if we tie it to how that transit, vessel transit, might  
2 be affecting the Essential Fish Habitat, that might be something  
3 to look into.

4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Kate. Mr. Chairman, the point is that  
6 we need to have, to conduct more research, legal research, as to  
7 what can we do as a Council for this protection.

8  
9 With the local governments I worked twice on these issues. We even  
10 went to Washington to talk about it. I remember after two days of  
11 discussion working here, the last lawyer who came said, "well, the  
12 problem is that you cannot interfere with any navigational channel  
13 where you have a U.S. vessel." A navigational channel is where any  
14 vessel of the U.S. can travel without running aground. That was  
15 the end of our week there. That was a long time ago, 1980.

16  
17 We also tried with the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard told us the  
18 same. You know, they have regulations, and they have to follow.  
19 They only enforce. This point was also presented to us. For  
20 enforcement purposes, the straighter the line, the better. That's  
21 the way that they have the [inaudible?], and the regulation they  
22 have to follow, etcetera.

23  
24 So, I believe, Mr. Chairman, that probably we should allow Kate to  
25 do a little bit more research and she can come back to us about  
26 possible avenues that we can use. Essential Fish habitat is one of  
27 them, etcetera. But that way we keep the ball rolling. At the end  
28 we don't know what we are going to be able to do, but at least we  
29 have options, legal options that we can pursue under the Magnuson-  
30 Stevens Act.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, I do want to point out that, years  
33 ago, probably in the early eighties, when I was working in  
34 enforcement, the Port Authority printed a coast pilot that was  
35 issued to all vessels requesting that they stay outside of the  
36 100-fathom curve or contour before coming into the port. However,  
37 for some reason, you know, 5, 6, 7 years later, that was taken out  
38 of the coast pilot. It's no longer there.

39  
40 But when it comes to navigable waters and prohibitions, Buck Island  
41 Reef National Monument, which is up here, has 19,000 acres that  
42 they prohibit personal watercraft from operating in there. The  
43 East End Marine Park, which is 17 miles, prohibits personal  
44 watercraft from operating inside there.

45  
46 So, I think we can at least try something. I'm not sure if it's  
47 going to work.

48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos, just to clarify for the record, what  
2 you're interested is in the EEZ area outside to see whether we can  
3 use anything under Magnuson-Stevens Act to protect that area.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Graciela and Vance.

6

7 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the Council does have a coral reef  
8 conservation plan for this coming season in the Lang Bank area, so  
9 we will have instruments in the water. We already have them.  
10 They've been deployed. We'll have ROVs and divers in the area. So,  
11 this is a concern, in terms of safety, of the people who are  
12 involved in the in the data collection. In addition to the safety  
13 issue for the fishers that we've known about for a while.

14

15 So, I was going to ask if there was any mechanism through the coast  
16 guard, for example, to request that all cargo vessels or vessels  
17 greater than a certain tonnage or whatever remain outside the 100-  
18 fathom isobath. Because that area between the East End Marine Park  
19 and the Lang Bank, that's where they come crossing through that  
20 area, and that's the transiting area to go to the Lang Bank for  
21 the surveys that will be conducted every day for 5 or 6 days, every  
22 month from now until April. So, you know, for us, it's going to be  
23 a big concern because we're not dealing with very large vessels.  
24 These are small survey vessels with divers and ROVs on board.

25

26 So, is there any mechanism that the U.S. Coast Guard can help with  
27 that kind of--

28

29 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Thank you. So, one thing that comes to mind  
30 is our prevention department can set up a safety zone. That's  
31 something I'd have to bring to them and see kind of what tools we  
32 have available, but I'd say that's definitely something we've done  
33 in the past. So, I can get back to the Council with more information  
34 on that.

35

36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

37

38 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Also, have they taken into consideration the  
39 fact that Sandy Point is a critical habitat designated under the  
40 Endangered Species Act. Specifically, is says, "National Marine  
41 Fisheries Service determines critical habitat for the leatherback  
42 sea turtle (*Dermodochelys coriacea*) in waters adjacent to Sandy Point  
43 Beach, Saint Croix." Could that help in setting the navigation  
44 restrictions in the area?

45

46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kate?

47

48 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to answer that question.

1 That's a great point. And it is part of what I'm wondering in terms  
2 of whether there is a federal agency involved in authorizing this  
3 transit route. And if so, right, then there's, like, two potential  
4 consultations that would be required. One, potentially under the  
5 Endangered Species Act, to determine if it's having an effect on  
6 critical habitat, and the other under the MSA to consult with NMFS  
7 regarding effects on essential fish habitat. But it's not clear to  
8 me whether or not there is some sort of other federal agency  
9 involved that has either authorized or funded or in some way, has  
10 an influence over that.

11  
12 So, if the answer to that is no, there is no federal agency, then  
13 the critical habitat designation doesn't get you very far. And  
14 even if the answer is yes, you know, whether or not the fact that  
15 those vessels are moving through the critical habitat, does it  
16 have any effect on the features that have been identified as  
17 essential to that critical habitat? You know, I don't know, but,  
18 you know, there's the potential that there might be some sort of  
19 consultation required, but we would need to know, basically, who  
20 is who is authorizing these vessel routes.

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

23  
24 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** When we have discussed this in the past, it  
25 was brought up as a clear equity environmental justice issue for  
26 the U.S. Virgin Islands. And as part of that, it was included at  
27 one of the immediate or near-term actions for the EEJ  
28 implementation plan for the Southeast Region to assist the U.S.  
29 Virgin Islands in pursuing that safe fishing zone designation, and  
30 I believe that's by International Maritime Organization. And we  
31 wanted to assist you with consulting also with NOAA's National  
32 Ocean Service, to see what is the input that is needed for such  
33 designation.

34  
35 So, my recommendation would be just to outline the concerns in a  
36 letter to NOAA Fisheries to see how we can assist in starting the  
37 process. So, if you have, the information that's here, like,  
38 critical habitat and endangered species, safety for fishers then  
39 outline all of the issues, and then put that into the record and  
40 send it in a letter to NMFS so we can start the process of assisting  
41 you.

42  
43 Again, it's not something that is necessarily directly related to  
44 us. There may be things that we could do, but I think we should be  
45 able to assist, and we have it as one of the things that we said  
46 that we were going to assist you with.

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

1  
2 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Regarding again Sandy Point in Saint Croix,  
3 there's another federal agency involved, but that's the U.S. Fish  
4 and Wildlife Service. Although they are responsible for endangered  
5 species on land, those species that nest on land they're not  
6 airborne, you know. They need an interesting habitat, which is  
7 the waters, which are under the jurisdiction of the National Marine  
8 Fisheries Service.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

11  
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I suggest that the staff, Graciela and I, Vance,  
13 can meet with you and put together the letter suggested by María,  
14 and then we send it to Andy. We can explain what the issues are,  
15 and this is what we are seeking and see what we can do.

16  
17 There are other institutions that work here, even the Navy when I  
18 worked on this, and Maritime law is also applicable. At one time,  
19 in Puerto Rico, we were able, through the governor of Puerto Rico,  
20 that time we talked to a lot of people in the industry, people in  
21 Washington, and they came up with the idea of having a flyer that  
22 I was going to send to the different companies. They have boats  
23 that come around here.

24  
25 The idea was to have, on a voluntary basis, that they would stay  
26 away from the shoreline as much as possible. It lasted for 3 months  
27 only. So, the letter, Vance, I would like you to help us especially  
28 identifying the things that you mentioned and then Graciela and I  
29 can work with the Chair for that letter.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Sennai?

32  
33 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah, Carlos. I'm just curious. Have you guys ever  
34 tried reaching out to the Federal Maritime Commission and just  
35 asking, saying, "hey, you guys have ships?" You guys have the  
36 commission--

37  
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not as the Council. The governor of Puerto Rico  
39 did when we worked. And this is not the first time we have worked  
40 on this. I remember we used to have a fisherman; he used to come  
41 to every other meeting with a bunch of maps trying to establish  
42 those channels. And at that time, the Governor of the Virgin  
43 Islands and the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural  
44 Resources helped us, but we hit that wall.

45  
46 But the point is that, at this time what we are asking is to  
47 explore the possibilities of something that is happening and then  
48 what we have that can support us, like, the critical habitat, the

1 protection of coral reef, etcetera. And that's as much as we can  
2 do at this time.

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

5

6 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, I think, so the first thing will be, like,  
7 just to identify who are who are the responsible parties. Right?  
8 To see if we can go there first. And then, look at the different  
9 avenues that we may be able to use such as EFA, GSA, etcetera.

10

11 So, I think, you know, to start the process, just having that  
12 letter sent to us, and then we can initiate investigating. Also,  
13 the Coast Guard, if the Council wants to, perhaps the same letter  
14 and send it to them to see what other things they can do and maybe  
15 our colleague here can report in the next meeting if they have  
16 some additional information.

17

18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. That'll work. And I'm really concerned  
19 about Lang Bank because that's all in federal waters. The rest of  
20 the 100-fathom contour lies totally inside territorial waters, so  
21 we'll handle that through our senators. But Lang Bank, that's  
22 NOAA's jurisdictions.

23

24 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

25

26 Yep. So, alright. So, we have the public comment period up next,  
27 and we have Elizabeth Ban. Okay. That'll be tabled till tomorrow.

28

29 Alright. Any other one? Anybody? Public comment? No? Okay.

30

31 So, we're going to go and recess until tomorrow morning, 9 o'clock,  
32 and we have a closed session immediately following after everybody  
33 leaves, except the except the members. Yeah. 15 minutes.

34

35 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on December 04, 2024.)

36

37 - - -

38

39 DECEMBER 04, 2024

40

41 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

42

43 - - -

44

45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Good morning. We're going to get started. It's  
46 November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024. 185<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council  
47 meeting, being held at San Juan, Puerto Rico. And we'll start with  
48 a roll call.

1  
2 I'll start this time on my left with Cristina Olán.  
3  
4 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. Buenos días. Cristina Olán,  
5 Council Staff.  
6  
7 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Good morning. Graciela García-Moliner,  
8 Council Staff.  
9  
10 **SENNAI HABTES:** Morning, all. Sennai Habtes, Ecosystems-Based  
11 Fishery Management Technical Advisory Panel Chair, and Virgin  
12 Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources designee for  
13 commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriole.  
14  
15 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Good morning. Ricardo López-Ortiz, Council  
16 Member, Puerto Rico DNR.  
17  
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Good morning. Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.  
21  
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.  
23  
24 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Sam Rauch, Deputy Director of National  
25 Marine Fisheries Service.  
26  
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast  
28 Regional Office, designee for Andy Strelcheck.  
29  
30 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, NOAA's Office of General  
31 Counsel.  
32  
33 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Anne Kersting, NOAA's Office of General Counsel.  
34  
35 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Council Member.  
36  
37 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Good morning. Andrew Mcgraw-Herdeg, U.S.  
38 Coast Guard Sector San Juan.  
39  
40 **CLAY PORCH:** Good morning. Clay Porch, NOAA Fisheries Southeast  
41 Fisheries Science Center.  
42  
43 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning, Julian Magras, DAP Chair, Saint  
44 Thomas Saint John.  
45  
46 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días a todos. Gerson Martinez, DAP Chair,  
47 Saint Croix.  
48

1 **NELSON CRESPO:** Buenos días. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair, Puerto Rico.  
2  
3 **VANCE VICENTE:** Good morning. Vance Vicente, Scientific and  
4 Statistical Committee Chairman.  
5  
6 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Jannette Ramos-García,  
7 Outreach and Education Panel Chair.  
8  
9 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Buenos días. María Irizarry, Council  
10 Staff.  
11  
12 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning. Kevin McCarthy, Southeast Fisheries  
13 Science Center.  
14  
15 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Miguel Borges, NOAA, Office of law enforcement.  
16  
17 **MICHELLE SCHÄRER-UMPIERRE:** Good morning. Michelle Schärer, SSC.  
18  
19 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Buenos días. Martha Prada, CFMC IRA Coordinator.  
20  
21 **LAURA CIMO:** Good morning. Laura Cimo, NOAA Fisheries Office of  
22 International Affairs, Trade and Commerce.  
23  
24 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good morning. Sarah Stephenson, Southeast  
25 Regional Office.  
26  
27 **MICHELLE L. WALSH:** Buenos días. Mick Walsh, Southeast Regional  
28 Office.  
29  
30 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico  
31 Fisheries Liaison.  
32  
33 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good morning. Nicole Greaux, Saint Thomas/Saint  
34 John Fisheries Liaison.  
35  
36 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Good morning. Michael Funk, Saint Croix, FAC.  
37  
38 **VICTORIA VITAL:** Good morning. Victoria Vital, NOAA Fisheries.  
39  
40 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos Caraballo, Puerto Rico  
41 Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.  
42  
43 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Good morning. Colleen O'Brien, CMUS,  
44 University of Miami.  
45  
46 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Good morning. Jennifer Pytka, CIMAS.  
47  
48 **JENNIFER LEE:** Good morning. Jennifer Lee, NOAA Fisheries.

1  
2 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Good morning. James Kreglo, member of Saint  
3 Thomas/Saint John.

4  
5 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** We also have online, Grisel Rodríguez  
6 Ferrer, Refik Orhun, Sarah Stephenson, Jesús Rivera-Hernández,  
7 Carly Daiek, Elizabeth Ban Rohring, and Cynthia Grace-McCaskey.  
8 Also, Guillermo Cordero, interpreter, and Alberto Font and Alberto  
9 there.

10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, sometime throughout the day, Ricardo  
12 López has a next meeting to go to, so Daniel Matos will sit in his  
13 stead.

14  
15 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, now we are moving on with the agenda. NOAA  
18 Fisheries Action. Sam Rauch, the Deputy Assistant Administrator  
19 for Regulatory Programs. NOAA Fisheries.

20  
21 **NOAA FISHERIES ACTIONS—SAM RAUCH, DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR**  
22 **FOR REGULATORY PROGRAMS, NOAA FISHERIES**

23  
24 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said yesterday,  
25 I am Sam Rauch. I am one of the three career deputy directors of  
26 the National Marine Fisheries Service in Washington, DC. I oversee  
27 the work of the regions, including the Southeast Regional Office,  
28 and it's my pleasure to be here to talk with you today. I've been  
29 asked to give a few remarks about a presentation I gave to the CCC  
30 about some upcoming regulatory actions, and I will get to that.

31  
32 One of the things that I do want to provide some introductory  
33 remarks before that, first, I always enjoy coming down here, and  
34 the last time I came down here was in May, where this Council  
35 Chaired and is currently the Chair of the Council coordinating  
36 committee and hosted all the Councils from around the Country over,  
37 or closer to Old San Juan. That was a wonderful event. I said it  
38 at the time, and it still retains one of the best CCC meetings  
39 that we've ever done. And I think that I wanted to express again  
40 my thanks to Carlos and Miguel and the entire Council Staff for  
41 that.

42  
43 I just came down here yesterday from the New England Fishery  
44 Management Council, and they are the upcoming host next year. And  
45 they are very concerned because they do not think they can match  
46 what you guys did, and they did tell me that personally. So, you  
47 guys did a wonderful job there.

1 A couple of things I wanted to say before I got into the specifics.  
2 I always like to provide a little overview of the U.S. fisheries  
3 from a national perspective, because the Council system underlies  
4 everything I'm about to tell you. We could not do what I'm about  
5 to say we've done, without the hard work that you all do, and your  
6 colleagues do around the country.

7  
8 So, what I'm going to tell you is based on data from 2023. We don't  
9 have data-- I mean, from 2022. We don't have data from 2023 yet.  
10 And the 2023 data will be a little bit worse than what I'm about  
11 to tell you because Alaska, which drives a lot of our economic  
12 numbers, suffered a significant setback when the crab stocks  
13 disappeared, and they lost 38,000 jobs and over a \$1,000,000,000  
14 in value out of their fisheries last year. So, take this with a  
15 grain of salt.

16  
17 But in 2022, commercial landings in this country were 8,400,000,000  
18 pounds of fish across the country. And I'm talking about from here  
19 in San Juan up to Alaska and from Maine to American Samoa. That  
20 was valued at 5,900,000,000. That was slightly down from 2021, but  
21 2021 was a banner year, a really high year. So, this is still, the  
22 price per pound people are getting across the country is slightly  
23 above the long-term average when you account for inflation. Of  
24 course, it varies depending on which fish you're dealing with, but  
25 that's the national average.

26  
27 The five highest landing species, if you're interested, are salmon,  
28 lobsters, crab, alaska pollock, and sea scallops. Recreational  
29 fishing continues to be incredibly important. Both, as an economic  
30 driver, as an important pastime, and more clearly as a subsistence  
31 value where many people get a large portion of their weekly meals  
32 from recreational fishing, or fishing that we call noncommercial.

33  
34 In 2022, there were 201,000,000 recreational trips or  
35 noncommercial trips made. We landed on those trips 1,100,000,000  
36 fish, of which 62% of those were released back alive, and we  
37 harvested 356,200,000 pounds of fish. So that is a significant  
38 contribution. And in different parts of the country, the economic  
39 impact of recreational fishery is greater than the economic impact  
40 of commercial fishery.

41  
42 Overall, even though we landed 8,400,000,000 pounds we also  
43 imported 6,900,000,000 pounds of seafood and we exported total  
44 between those, we exported 2,500,000,000 pounds. And some of those  
45 imports are our own product that went out, was processed, and came  
46 back. So, we still are a net importer. We import more than we  
47 export. But we catch, domestically, more than we export and we use  
48 most of what we catch here.

1  
2 In terms of aquaculture, the United States is 19<sup>th</sup> in the world,  
3 in aquaculture production. There's 663,000,000 pounds of seafood  
4 nationally that was produced, or product that was produced with  
5 aquaculture, but only 80,000,000 of that was marine. And that was  
6 led by oysters, Atlantic salmon, clams, and mussels. Still, it's  
7 a small part of the global aquaculture industry and small part of  
8 the U.S. industry. But the fastest growing area in aquaculture is  
9 seaweed, which is increasing over a hundred-fold, but it's still  
10 a small product.

11  
12 And then the last, sort of, economic number in terms of seafood  
13 consumption. We all know how important it is to eat seafood as  
14 part of your diet. In 2022, the U.S. consumer, the average consumer  
15 consumed 19.7 pounds of seafood in 2022. That was slightly down  
16 from 2021, but 2021 was a record high in the last few decades. So,  
17 and it still is the second highest on record. So that's still good  
18 in that the U.S. is increasing or has a relatively high amount of  
19 seafood consumed, and that does also vary quite widely around the  
20 country, depending on where you are.

21  
22 So, that's the economic picture nationally and you all play a part  
23 in that, and it's hard to be a Council Member and to come to these  
24 meetings and spend the time and to prepare for that to ensure that  
25 we can maintain those, both, the important subsistence  
26 recreational cultural value of the fisheries and the commercial  
27 value of the fisheries. Nationally we manage 506 stocks around the  
28 country from here to Alaska and from Maine to the Pacific  
29 territories. Of those, only 18% are overfished and only 6% are  
30 subject to overfishing. This region is not subject to overfishing  
31 as of our last report but still has three of the 47 stocks on the  
32 overfished list. But still, we are making great progress in the  
33 country, and that's what overlies those numbers is that we can  
34 continue to maintain that, and we maintain the most open and  
35 transparent management process in the world.

36  
37 Meetings like this where we bring people in, we talk about the  
38 science, we talk about how we're going to manage in conjunction  
39 with the fishing industry, with the public, with the environmental  
40 community, with our states and territories, it's all very important  
41 to build a stable enduring fishery management process and you all  
42 deserve the credit for that, so thank you for that.

43  
44 Alright. I'm going to get to the things you asked me to talk about.  
45 So, you asked me to provide an update on a certain number of rules,  
46 I'm going to do that right now. These are the same updates, well,  
47 these are the same topics I spoke with the Council Coordinating  
48 Committee about, and I'm going to provide you with a little update.

1  
2 So, one of the rules was the confidentiality rule. So, under the  
3 Magnuson Act, we are allowed to collect data from the fishing  
4 industry in order to assist with management. Things like where you  
5 caught your fish, how you caught your fish. But in the statute, in  
6 exchange for that ability to collect their data, congress has  
7 required to keep some of that confidential, so that we don't  
8 provide individualized data and things like that. That has been in  
9 the statute since the beginning, but congress, every time it looks  
10 at the statute, it tweaks it a little bit. So, those changes in  
11 the statute have changed over time, most recently in 2007.

12  
13 We issued a confidentiality rule back in, I think, the eighties  
14 and we never amended it to account for the more recent  
15 congressional legislative changes. And so, we need to do that. So,  
16 our rule that is in the books is inconsistent with what the statute  
17 said. So, we proposed, earlier, a revision that would update it,  
18 that would account for these two statutory requirements. And the  
19 only other thing that it really does is it looks at how to deal  
20 with electronic monitoring. We had previously had some provisions  
21 that talk about observing data from observers, but electronic  
22 monitoring is a relatively new thing since we changed the statute.  
23 And so, there are provisions there on how that maps to certain  
24 statutory requirements.

25  
26 So, that proposal went out. One thing in there, though, we always  
27 get questions about, "well, what about my data?" This is a national  
28 rule, and it could not address every scenario that every Council  
29 or state or territory or fishermen has with their data. So, it  
30 sets a broad framework, but a lot of the details about your  
31 specific data and your specific region are left to be worked out  
32 through individualized procedures. We're going to try to  
33 standardize those as much as possible, but we can do it in this  
34 overarching national rule. So, this has some broad national  
35 guidelines but doesn't deal with many of the individualized  
36 questions we were getting. Those are going to be dealt with  
37 internal control procedures going forward.

38  
39 In terms of the Councils and workload, once we issue this rule,  
40 the Councils would need to, I would think, look at the relative  
41 MOUs they've got in data control procedures and see whether they  
42 comply with the rule. In general, I think that is not going to be  
43 a big lift because the Council, as I said, our rule has been not  
44 consistent with the statute for well over a decade and a half. The  
45 Councils, though, we've been following the statutory mandates. So,  
46 I think, in general, most of the actions that you and everybody  
47 else across the country does is in alignment with the statute and,  
48 therefore, would be in alignment with this rule, but you would

1 need to check.

2  
3 This rule is still in development. We still hope to issue this  
4 rule before the end of the year. I think it's close, but this is  
5 an odd transition time, and if it doesn't go out before the end of  
6 the year, it will have to be at some point next year when we'll  
7 talk to the next administration about it. But that is still the  
8 goal for this rule. Alright. That is the confidentiality rule.

9  
10 I'm just going to finish the presentation, then I'll take questions  
11 on any of this if that's okay. Alright.

12  
13 Next, I was asked to talk about the NEPA regulations that came out  
14 from the Council for Environmental Quality. So, one of the things  
15 that the National Fisheries Service and the Councils deal with is  
16 the National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA. Under that, there's  
17 a requirement to evaluate the environmental impacts of your actions  
18 through things like Environmental Impact Statements or EISs or  
19 Environmental Assessments, EAs. That has been around for a long  
20 time. At one point, congress required us to try to align the  
21 Magnuson-Stevens Act process, which looks at very similar things  
22 but not exactly the same, and align it to the NEPA process, and we  
23 did that after 2007. So, there is a whole body of NOAA procedures  
24 that maps out how the Councils do their actions and how they  
25 incorporate NEPA. And most of what you do is incorporate NEPA into  
26 the decision-making process, so you do integrated documents where  
27 fishery management plans and the NEPA documents are the same  
28 document. So, that's the background for what I'm about to tell  
29 you.

30  
31 Congress has not amended NEPA in years, but about two years ago,  
32 there was a congressional amendment to NEPA. So, NEPA as a statute  
33 changed. At around the same time, the Council for Environmental  
34 Quality, which is an agency in DC, and traditionally has put out  
35 NEPA regulations, put out a new set of regulations that added some  
36 other requirements or changed some requirements. One of the things  
37 that the NEPA regulations did is that they required us to update  
38 our procedures within a year. So, their regulations came out in  
39 May 2024 and a year from that would have been about July 1, 2025.  
40 And so, we were working with a subgroup of the Councils, I think  
41 led by you all for now and will be led by New England next year,  
42 to try to create a set of amended procedures that would both meet  
43 the statutory and the regulatory requirements.

44  
45 But recently, a court in Washington DC has said that the Council  
46 for environmental quality does not have authority to issue those  
47 NEPA regulations, or any NEPA regulations. Now that litigation is  
48 ongoing. I don't know whether that will be the final end result of

1 that, but that has created a great deal of uncertainty with the  
2 regulatory part of that. So, as you recall, I said there's a  
3 statutory change and a regulatory change. The regulatory change is  
4 quite a bit uncertain right now because of that court hearing.

5  
6 What that means for us is until that uncertainty is resolved, we  
7 are not going to be trying to push through rapidly a change to our  
8 procedures to account for those regulatory issues. We still have  
9 to account for the statutory changes. Those went into effect  
10 immediately. We have no choice. Congress says to do that. That is  
11 what we're going to do, and that's what we've been doing.

12  
13 The court decision does not affect our internal NEPA procedures.  
14 So, if you remember at the beginning, I said we have within NOAA  
15 a set of procedures that explicitly say how NOAA is going to  
16 implement the National Environmental Policy Act and talks about  
17 how that interacts with what the Councils do. That is explicitly  
18 in NOAA's NEPA procedures which have not been set aside, and nobody  
19 has questioned our ability to do that. So, that is what we continue  
20 to follow. And that is largely consistent with all existing process  
21 except we need to amend it a little bit to account for the new  
22 statutory changes, but we're going to be following the statute  
23 more than our guidance if there's any conflict.

24  
25 But for the procedures of this Council, there are procedures that  
26 we're following that look basically like they do now. We are going  
27 to have to be changing our procedural document at some point to at  
28 least account for the statutory changes. The rapid time frame that  
29 we were working under, we're not going to be working under because  
30 we need to figure out what the status of the CEQ regulations are.  
31 So, that's that issue.

32  
33 The biggest, I think, impact for the Council on all of that is the  
34 page limit requirement, which means that these environmental  
35 documents and environmental impact statement that are not  
36 extraordinarily complex have to be 150 pages. It is hard when you  
37 do a combined document like we have been doing, that is both an  
38 FMP amendment and a NEPA document to separate that out. So, that  
39 is going to require us, if we can't get that combined document  
40 down to 150 or so pages, to sort of identify what part is the NEPA  
41 document and what part is the Magnuson-Stevens Act document and  
42 put some stuff in appendix. You can still have a lot of appendices.  
43 So, there will be some slight way that we may have to adjust page  
44 limits to that. But that's, I think, going to be the biggest issue  
45 with complying with the statutory provisions. There are some other  
46 minor ones, but we will be talking with the Councils as we go along  
47 about that.

48

1 I've also been asked to talk about America the Beautiful. So, as  
2 you all may recall, when this administration, when President Biden  
3 took office, one of the first things he did was issue an executive  
4 order which set a goal for conserving 30% of our land and water by  
5 2030. So, that initiative was called America the Beautiful 30 by  
6 30. And it has been somewhat unclear exactly what the President  
7 meant by conserve and how much of the land and water that we  
8 currently do is conserve because we have national parks, marine  
9 monuments, a lot of actions that the Fishery Management Councils  
10 do that take conservation actions in areas. And so, it's been  
11 unclear as to whether or not we are below or above that, at least  
12 in terms of the ocean. There was a beta atlas.

13  
14 So, they put out an atlas, last April, on a website called  
15 conservation.gov, which outlined, at least as a preliminary  
16 matter, a lot of the conservation actions that are taking place in  
17 the land and water, and the Councils provided a lot of input into  
18 that. So, there was a lot of work that the CCC did that accounted  
19 for all the Magnuson-Stevens Act management activities that were  
20 going on and inputted that in there. And so, some of that is taken  
21 into account. I do not know what the future of that effort will  
22 be. That was created by Executive Order. Executive Orders don't  
23 automatically go away when an administration changes, but they  
24 could. And so, it's unclear what the next administration will want  
25 to do with this effort.

26  
27 One thing on that I will say is that there used to be a Federal  
28 Advisory Committee called the Marine Protected Area Federal  
29 Advisory Committee, the MPA FA Committee. That was disbanded and  
30 then reestablished as the Marine and Coastal Area Based Management  
31 Advisory Committee. Now, the National Fisheries Service are one of  
32 the federal co-sponsors of that committee, and there are two  
33 Council representatives on that committee. One is Eric Reid, and  
34 another is Jessica Coakley who works with that committee to make  
35 sure that the Council's interest or views are accounted for as we  
36 look at things like area-based management.

37  
38 Their next and their 3<sup>rd</sup> full meeting will be December 9<sup>th</sup>, and it  
39 is virtual. And, if anybody wants to participate in that, the  
40 public is invited. You could call in to that to participate  
41 virtually in that. They're going to discuss area-based management  
42 in the United States. How NOAA can best leverage area-based  
43 management investments, including all the money that came in  
44 through the bipartisan infrastructure law, the Inflation Reduction  
45 Act funds, how they can engage communities meaningfully in area-  
46 based management, and how NOAA can better support and prioritize  
47 indigenous led conservation and co-stewardship as well as a number  
48 of issues. So, that right now is the next opportunity to

1 participate in that process, but the future of America the  
2 Beautiful 30 by 30 remains to be seen when the new administration  
3 takes over.

4  
5 The last thing I was asked to talk about was the new integrated  
6 policy on Endangered Species Act in Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries  
7 Conservation Management Act, how those 2 interrelate. So, one of  
8 the efforts of the CCC in the 2010's, was the creation of a policy  
9 on the interrelationship between the Endangered Species Act and  
10 the Magnuson Act and how we should engage with the Councils and  
11 all of that. So, I worked on that at the time, and we implemented  
12 it for about 10 years, and it was a pretty good document, but there  
13 were still a lot of gaps, a lot of uncertainty. There's still a  
14 lot of concerns about the way that we interacted with the Councils  
15 and how the ESA was applied to fishery management actions. So, we  
16 agreed at the CCC's request to update and review that, and we  
17 worked with a subcommittee of the CCC on what they wanted to see  
18 and what we did, and we've been rolling that out to the CCC  
19 throughout the process.

20  
21 Recently, we concluded that, it is now an updated policy directive  
22 as of October 3<sup>rd</sup>. We rolled it out here at the CCC meeting. They're  
23 basically close to really final version. I think there were a  
24 couple of words that were changed since then. I don't want to speak  
25 necessarily for the CCC, but I believe the CCC thought that  
26 engagement was very productive and helpful. It does promote early  
27 coordination. A lot of the issues that the Councils had were: not  
28 engaging early enough in the process to have meaningful engagement,  
29 not respecting that they have discretionary authority, that we  
30 should not necessarily be telling the Councils what they have to  
31 do, but you do have to comply-- We, as an agency, have to comply  
32 with the ESA and at some point, the Council may choose to just  
33 defer to us and let us deal with it or if the Councils want to  
34 deal with it, how the Council gets involved in a way that is less  
35 burdensome than it was being applied in certain areas.

36  
37 But it does reiterate the important roles that the Council has in  
38 fishery management actions and, our general preference that if we  
39 have an ESA issue with our fisheries, our federal fisheries, we  
40 want to work through the Council process and try to do that without  
41 it being overly burdensome. But that is also out there.

42  
43 Those were the items that I think the Council wanted me to talk  
44 about. I'm happy to take questions on any of that.

45  
46

#### 46 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sam. Any question for Sam? Anyone

1 online has any question for Sam? Okay. Vance?  
2

3 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Samuel, thank you. Regarding executive orders  
4 and how they can be transmitted from one administration to the  
5 other, there's an executive order concerning the preservation of  
6 corals and coral reefs. Has that passed, or has it been changed  
7 from administration to administration? This was back to Clinton,  
8 I think, '89.  
9

10 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Yeah. So, as I said, presidents could issue  
11 executive orders. They do not automatically go away. They continue  
12 in perpetuity unless a president chooses to change them. They're  
13 a creature of presidential prerogative and the presidents could  
14 choose to change them, so if it hasn't been changed, then they  
15 just continue on.  
16

17 But it's up to the new president, so President Trump, when he takes  
18 office, may decide to change it or not, but if it's been survived  
19 since Clinton, I would imagine it's going to-- if the president  
20 didn't change it in his last term of office, I'm not sure he'll  
21 choose to change it in this one, but it's up to the president, and  
22 I can't speak to that.  
23

24 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you, Samuel.  
25

26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more question for Sam? Miguel?  
27

28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you for your presentation, Sam. It's very  
29 difficult to predict what is going to happen in the next couple of  
30 years. But one thing that we were discussing at the CCC is the  
31 ESA/MSA relationship that you mentioned. What will be the next  
32 step? We can expect in 2025, let's say, regarding actions that the  
33 Councils and NOAA have to take to implement what is needed to be  
34 able to have the ESA and MSA complement each other rather than  
35 working separately.  
36

37 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Well, in my perspective, nationally, they  
38 do work in tandem. There was a time in the '90s where we saw large  
39 scale fisheries injunctions because we couldn't align the two  
40 actions. We were not necessarily applying the ESA in a fishery  
41 management context. Since that time, working with the Councils, we  
42 don't see that much anymore. And so, many most of our fishery  
43 management actions are complying with both the Magnuson Act and  
44 the Endangered Species Act.  
45

46 So, my general view is that the statutes are compatible as we apply  
47 them. That doesn't mean that it has been an easy road with the  
48 Councils in working at the system, which is why we tried that new

1 procedural directive, which was trying to smooth things out there.  
2 There could always be statutory changes to either the Magnuson Act  
3 or the Endangered Species Act. That would be up to Congress. There  
4 could be regulatory changes to one or the other ones which, if the  
5 Councils are interested in something like that, then we can talk  
6 about whether or not that would happen. I'm not sure that that's  
7 needed.

8  
9 If we need to tweak the procedural directive again to make the  
10 processes better. You know, when we did it ten years ago, we  
11 thought we had solved the problem. We didn't, so I'm not so naive  
12 to think we've solved it again this time. You know, our goal is to  
13 work together with you all to align the two statutes and make it  
14 work both substantively and procedurally. If that doesn't work,  
15 then we can talk about that and maybe amend them again.

16  
17 So, I, you know, I do not know whether the next administration is  
18 going to want to take a different view of any of those things. I  
19 think that the two statutes, as we have applied them recently, in  
20 the last decade or so, largely, are compatible, but if there are  
21 specific things that we need to do to make it easier on you or to  
22 better comply with the law, I'm very open to those kinds of  
23 conversations.

24  
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you. In the good old days, when I was  
26 working in the team that prepared one of our management plans, in  
27 order for us to comply, we had a document of 200 pages and two  
28 tables of contents. The table of contents to comply with the MSA,  
29 these are the management plan, these are the section. Another table  
30 of content to comply with the ESA requirements. So, we have to  
31 reference the same document. That's no longer true. In the case of  
32 some of the plans, it went from 200 pages to 1,000 pages. This  
33 still is our concern.

34  
35 So, anyway, I don't have any questions. It's just a comment that  
36 the CCC, whenever we discuss this and you've been there for the  
37 last several years, those are the questions that come up.

38  
39 The other thing that worries us, well, that we are concerned about  
40 is the famous definition of conservation under the act 30 by 30.  
41 To give you an idea, guys, 72% of our fisheries under the Magnuson-  
42 Stevens Act are protected. The waters are protected for  
43 conservation purposes under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. But if you  
44 look at the Department of Interior and other regulations,  
45 conservation is defined as no take. You don't look at the fish,  
46 you don't look at the bottom, that's it. And that's incompatible  
47 with the fishery industry.

48

1 So that's why it's so important to be close to these discussions.  
2 I don't know whether the 30 by 30 will survive. We used to have  
3 Act 20 by 20, and it didn't survive. We're supposed to conserve  
4 20% of the fisheries of the United States by 2020. 2020 went by 4  
5 years ago, and we are now shooting for 30 by 30. So, I don't know  
6 if in the new administration will have a 40 by 40 or 0 by 0.

7  
8 But anyway, the point is that we, actually, Liajay participated  
9 with us, with the executive directors, and all the other Councils  
10 management and NOAA NMFS. We prepared this document that identified  
11 where the marine areas are, which are of importance and that could  
12 be considered in compliance with the 30 by 30 executive order. But  
13 it's still there. We've finished that. And those of you who want  
14 to see what the group did, you can go to, as I mentioned,  
15 conservation.org, and there you have a map. And you will see the  
16 effort, so far, as to how we identify the areas that we can protect.

17  
18 It's something that is out of our hands now. We finish our work as  
19 Council, but we might be asked again to review some of these areas  
20 to provide comments. So that's what we have for 30 by 30. Mr.  
21 Chairman, any question? Any other comment?

22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

24  
25 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Sam. So, I had a question about  
26 ESA/MSA integration. So, can you talk a little bit more about what  
27 prompted this step? Was it differences in the way that it was  
28 implemented in between regions? Is it conflict? Or is it-- I don't  
29 know. I'm interested in seeing why we are where we are.

30  
31 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Well, there certainly are differences in  
32 the way that it has been applied in between regions, and I think  
33 that-- so, originally, the first time we did it, it was because we  
34 were not necessarily fully consulting with the Councils, fully  
35 integrating the Councils when we consulted on a fishery management  
36 issue and we would-- let's just-- On a West Coast one, just for  
37 example, we would say this fishery is jeopardizing this species,  
38 and so this fishery has to change in x y z ways. And we would just  
39 do it. And we would not be going through the Council process and  
40 doing that. And while we have to comply with the ESA.

41  
42 As the Council well knows, there are different ways to achieve the  
43 same objective. There are ways that you can do that will be less  
44 impactful on communities and fishermen. And so, we wanted to try  
45 to bring the Councils better into that process. So that was the  
46 original intent and that's still the intent.

47  
48 In practice, though, there was a lot of vagueness in the way that

1 it happened, and some Councils felt that we were still imposing  
2 things on them. I think that the one thing that really triggered  
3 this for certain Councils is, we were still saying as a-- we were  
4 still saying that this has to go through the Council process, but  
5 we were dictating what it was. So, we were saying "This is  
6 jeopardy. Council, you have to do x, and you have to do a management  
7 amendment." Which is not the way that we do it. As opposed to,  
8 this is jeopardy. We need to remove this jeopardy and fix this  
9 problem but not be so directive on the Councils which are somewhat,  
10 you know, they set their own agendas. We still need to fix that  
11 problem, so we are not saying that is not the case. And there is  
12 a recognition that sometimes you don't have time. Sometimes, NMFS  
13 just has to take it over for some various reasons.

14  
15 So, there was that. And then there was a survey of all the Councils  
16 who agreed that there were things about it that people wanted to  
17 change. So, it's been around for 10 years, and we wanted to update  
18 it. So, there was some overarching issues with certain Councils,  
19 not this one, and then a number of Councils had things like what  
20 Miguel was suggesting that they wanted to see, tweaked, but without  
21 those big episodic things, I'm not sure whether it would drove it  
22 or not. But I'm really pleased that we were able to do that and  
23 work through the Councils on a better, clearer, more collaborative  
24 approach.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

27  
28 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, to bring it back to the Council. We  
29 are recently going through the ESA/MSA issues with the queen conch  
30 that not only extends to the U.S. Caribbean, but also in the  
31 international arena. So, you know, that's a concern for us, because  
32 it's both a recovery and a rebuilding program for the species. One  
33 of the species is iconic and a great fishery for the area. So,  
34 that's one thing.

35  
36 But in terms of conservation and the 30 by 30, Miguel just reminded  
37 me that we have worked collaboratively to do the trawl amendment,  
38 which was one of the issues that had to do with an MPA. Is it  
39 really a conservation area? Because we de facto did not prohibit  
40 the use of trawls in the area. Albeit the fact that we do have  
41 corals all over the place and dragging nets around here would be  
42 a nightmare.

43  
44 So, these are things that the Council has been aware of in a way,  
45 but the ESA/MSA, it's going to be something that is fairly new to  
46 us, except for the turtles back in the eighties and that was way  
47 before my time. So, we'll see how that develops.

48

1 So, the Council Members will be hearing about that connection  
2 between protected resources, ESA/MSA, etcetera. So, thank you for  
3 bringing that up.

4  
5 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Yeah. I look forward to that. And just to  
6 talk about conservation, as you said, it's unclear what the future  
7 of that effort will be, but even under this administration, it was  
8 clear that conservation did not mean a marine protected area. All  
9 of the examples indicated that some level of management could be  
10 considered conservation, and this administration did take into  
11 account the views of the collected Councils on that and recognize  
12 the value of work like the Councils do, like we do with the  
13 Councils, in that such that conservation can be something less  
14 than a no take reserve. And that was our position, and that was  
15 the administration's position, even under this administration.

16  
17 So, I don't know what the future holds, but that's what this  
18 administration said about that. Senator?

19  
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, thanks, deputy director. I wanted to ask  
21 another question about the 30 for 30 in America the Beautiful. As  
22 you said, it doesn't have to be a no take reserve, but almost any  
23 of the conservation needs that we're trying to put in or  
24 restoration needs are going to need some type of management and  
25 enforcement to kind of identify and protect those and conserve use  
26 for all the people. And what we found in this region in particular  
27 currently the only instrument that we've used that allows  
28 coordination across the many different enforcement agencies are  
29 the joint enforcement agreements. And if we're expanding the level  
30 of, you know, either protected or conserved or restored areas that  
31 require more enforcement, I wonder if there was any thought from  
32 this administration to how we also think about the increased levels  
33 of enforcement that are going to be required to protect those  
34 conserved lands, and if there's been any thought to how we can  
35 create more constructive instruments that allow more coordination  
36 and beneficial working relationships across the different  
37 territorial state and federal agencies doing enforcement for those  
38 protected areas in the U.S. Caribbean and across the nation.

39  
40 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Thank you for the question. I don't  
41 anticipate anything new coming out of this administration on this  
42 issue, before January 20th. One of the things that was clear in  
43 the current process was it was not in and of itself going to create  
44 any new protected areas. It talked about respecting the current  
45 processes. So, you know, the Council does recommend, and we do  
46 implement closed areas sometimes. Or you could create a national  
47 park or a marine monument.

48

1 When you do that, you're absolutely right. It doesn't do any good  
2 to anybody just to designate something on paper and then walk away  
3 from it. If you don't then invest in both, the management of that  
4 area, the enforcement of that area, what was the point of making  
5 the statement? This is something that we always consider when we  
6 work with you all in fishery closed areas. Right? Do we have the  
7 ability to actually implement and enforce that?

8  
9 This is what, when we work with other agencies, like you talked  
10 about in the creation of any of these other sorts of tools, we  
11 talk with them about that. So, this is-- I mean, I agree with you  
12 that this is an issue. I do not think this administration is going  
13 to do anything more on this issue now. But, if this issue were to  
14 go forward, that is something that we will continue to push.

15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions or comments for Sam? Miguel?

17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. I just want to tell you something because,  
19 for those of you who are not familiar with the intricacies of  
20 bureaucracy. Sometimes it is very hard to get the ear of someone  
21 in high places, not even the helpers of people from high places.  
22 But this is our Council. This is not the CCC.

23  
24 I want to recognize the help that I have personally received from  
25 Sam over the years. Working with the Council is difficult because  
26 you have too many issues, too many people, too many opinions. Our  
27 country is as small as one of all of them, but Sam has always been  
28 able to set some time aside and help us with the issues that we  
29 discussed here, including international meetings.

30  
31 I tried to get anybody from Washington to go to one of our  
32 international meetings and the only one who came to the meetings  
33 in Panama, I guess it was, was Sam. So, for that, we are really  
34 grateful and look forward to work with you in the next four years.  
35 Thank you.

36  
37 **SAMUEL D. RAUCH, III:** Thank you.

38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next, we have the Outcomes from the WECAFC  
40 Flyingfish Dolphinfish Working Group Meeting. Laura Cimo. I made  
41 a mistake with the agenda, but we're going to let--

42  
43 OUTCOMES FROM WECAFC FLYING FISH DOLPHINFISH WORKING GROUP  
44 MEETING AND WECAFC SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS WORKING GROUP MEETING--  
45 LAURA CIMO, NOAA FISHERIES, THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS,  
46 TRADE, AND COMMERCE

47  
48 **LAURA CIMO:** Thank you, Cristina. So, first of all, good morning,

1 everyone. My name is Laura Cimo, and I'm with the NOAA Fisheries  
2 Office of International Affairs Trade and Commerce. I have had the  
3 honor and the pleasure of speaking before the Council on previous  
4 occasions about the Western and Central Atlantic Fishery  
5 Commission or WECAFC. Today, I'm primarily going to share some  
6 updates, and, specifically, I'll be sharing the outcomes of two  
7 working group meetings that took place this past summer.

8  
9 So, many of you are aware of WECAFC, but just for those who are  
10 not, as a refresher, WECAFC is a regional fisheries body. It  
11 provides management recommendations, and advice for the  
12 conservation management development of all living marine resources  
13 in the wider Caribbean, and it's comprised of 34 members, including  
14 the United States. The area of competence is the area shown in  
15 blue on the map.

16  
17 So, WECAFC primarily does its work through various working groups,  
18 and on this slide are shown the list of working groups. I won't  
19 read all the names of the working groups. There's quite a few. But  
20 just to note that they're comprised of fisheries managers,  
21 scientists, and experts that participate in the invitation of  
22 members, as well as representatives from regional international  
23 organizations. I will say that the United States, represented by  
24 NOAA Fisheries and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, are  
25 active in several of these working groups and really have done  
26 quite a bit, to promote the activities and management of species  
27 under the jurisdiction.

28  
29 So, specifically, I wanted to discuss the working group meetings.  
30 Basically, this Caribbean Fishery Management Council graciously  
31 hosted, with support from NOAA Fisheries, these meetings that were  
32 held back-to-back in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The first meeting took  
33 place June 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, and that was the first meeting of the  
34 flyingfish, dolphinfish working group, which was held in a hybrid  
35 format. And that was followed, by two days of a meeting of the  
36 spawning aggregations working group.

37  
38 So first, I'll talk about the outcomes of the flyingfish,  
39 dolphinfish working group. First, just to note, we were really  
40 pleased that we had really good participation. We had a broad  
41 representation of the members, with more than 50 participants. We  
42 had 12 of the members provide presentations on their flyingfish  
43 and dolphinfish fisheries, their management approaches, and some  
44 of the challenges that they're facing. And in the presentation as  
45 well as the discussions, we sort of heard some common themes, so  
46 we just wanted to flag a few that may be of interest.

47  
48 First, there were concerns about the influx of sargassum in recent

1 years, having an impact on the availability of dolphinfish. Also,  
2 there were some strong calls in the need for increased data  
3 collection and genetic studies that would help us inform our  
4 understanding of, sort of, the stock dynamics, the stock structure,  
5 and the status of dolphinfish in the Atlantic. There was some  
6 discussion of, you know, potentially conducting a regional stock  
7 assessment for dolphinfish, but the working group agreed that what  
8 we really need to do is take a stepwise approach, and that would  
9 be to really first identify what the critical data needs are, so  
10 to work to address any gaps while simultaneously looking for  
11 alternative approaches to assess any trends in dolphinfish. There  
12 was a recommendation that dolphinfish in wahoo be prioritized for  
13 data collection within WECAFC data collection reference framework.  
14

15 Noting that this is a data deficient species, it's of significant  
16 concern, and there's a strong interest in conservation of the  
17 species in the region, there was support for trying to work towards  
18 regional management of dolphinfish. So, the group basically  
19 recommended the development of a draft outline of a fisheries  
20 management plan that could help facilitate the considerations of  
21 alternative management options. And lastly, the group developed  
22 terms of reference and a work plan.  
23

24 So, now I'll briefly touch on the outcomes of the spawning  
25 aggregation working group meeting. We, basically, heard from  
26 member countries and some of the subregional organizations,  
27 presentations on, sort of, the status management, and some of the  
28 issues and opportunities for fish spawning aggregations in the  
29 region. We heard an update on an E.U. funded program that supported  
30 three pilot projects. Basically, one was in the Bahamas, and the  
31 other in Belize, and the other in Cuba. And these projects  
32 basically had several objectives. One was to compile fisheries  
33 independent and dependent data, also collect socioeconomic and  
34 trade information on fish spawning aggregations. Another objective  
35 was to try to achieve some regional harmonization in data  
36 collection and storage protocols, also to try to ensure that any  
37 data that is collected basically is included in existing regional  
38 databases. One example is WECAFC's Fishery Information System, or  
39 we call it WECAFIS. And then finally, another element of the  
40 project was essentially launching a digital communications hub,  
41 which serves as a multimedia repository for resources on education  
42 capacity building, and I'll talk about this a little bit more in  
43 the next slide.  
44

45 So, at the meeting, we heard updates on the Big Fish regional  
46 communication strategy and the digital hub, which I just mentioned.  
47 I do want to, again, go back to what Miguel so eloquently said on  
48 the first day of the meeting, is that the working group had

1 expressed really strong support and enthusiasm for these  
2 initiatives. And frankly speaking, I should say that, you know,  
3 this Council in particular has been really a strong advocate, in  
4 partnership with NOAA Fisheries, promoting this strategy. It  
5 really has seen, as I mentioned, a lot of good work with the  
6 materials that have come out and has been really helpful to the  
7 region. And just the one challenge, as Miguel noted, is just the  
8 lack of funding. This is something that's really important because  
9 we don't want to see the investment and all the hard work that's  
10 gone into this project, basically, be wasted. So, this is something  
11 we're going to need to look for in the year ahead, some additional  
12 resources.

13  
14 The working group also discussed non-extractive uses of fish  
15 spawning aggregations. And then, we also reviewed members' efforts  
16 to basically implement the regional fisheries management plan for  
17 fish spawning aggregations that WECAFC has endorsed, which focuses  
18 on nassau grouper and mutton snapper. And there was a discussion  
19 of some of the actions we could take to facilitate the  
20 implementation of that plan. Also, we updated our work plan.

21  
22 One thing that I did want to note was that we repeatedly heard the  
23 importance of engaging fishers in any monitoring of fish spawning  
24 aggregations and a continued emphasis on the need to educate the  
25 public of the importance of these resources.

26  
27 I do want to just pause, for a couple acknowledgements, and thanks.  
28 As I mentioned, you know, our office, actually, even though we  
29 lead the engagement in WECAFC, it really is truly a team effort.  
30 Basically, at these two working group meetings, we had support and  
31 participation from my colleagues from the Southeast Regional  
32 Office, as well as the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The  
33 Council not only hosted the meeting, but Carlos Frechette was in  
34 attendance on behalf of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council,  
35 and we had a representative from the South Atlantic Fishery  
36 Management Council, so we had good U.S. representation. And, you  
37 know, as I've mentioned before, and you've probably heard  
38 previously, of course, the U.S. is really active in WECAFC and  
39 several of the working groups. I did want to note that the spawning  
40 aggregation working group is one in particular that's an excellent  
41 example of where the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, in  
42 particular, with support from NOAA Fisheries, has been a strong  
43 leader.

44  
45 Basically, thanks to the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, we  
46 have the development and endorsement of this regional fishery  
47 management plan, which its co-author, Martha Prada, is behind me.  
48 We can thank her. She's also the coordinator of this working group.

1 Also, the development of the communication strategy that was  
2 really, in large part due to the Council's leadership, as well as  
3 the development of several outreach tools and that really this is  
4 something where the region continuously has expressed its  
5 gratitude, and its strong support for U.S. leadership. So, I just  
6 wanted to take a moment to thank the Council for all of its active  
7 engagement and partnership.

8  
9 And this is just the last slide, which is essentially just to share  
10 some updates that may be of interest. The work plans, the terms of  
11 reference, and the recommendations from these working groups,  
12 basically will be reviewed at the next biannual commission meeting.  
13 This meeting is tentatively scheduled for July 2025 to take place  
14 in Jamaica. I also wanted to note that there continues to be  
15 discussion of a second preparatory conference on strategic  
16 reorientation of WECAFC.

17  
18 Just as a refresher for those who may not remember, basically, for  
19 several years, we've been talking about the need to strengthen  
20 WECAFC. It's currently, as I mentioned, a regional advisory body,  
21 but there's an interest in making this an organization that has  
22 binding management authority over certain stocks and over a  
23 specified area.

24  
25 I don't know if Sam's still here, but he actually was the one who  
26 led our efforts in March 2019. He was the head of our US delegation  
27 to the first preparatory conference, where we discussed options  
28 for strengthening WECAFC. And at the subsequent meeting, of the  
29 commission in July 2019 that the U.S. hosted, we had adopted a  
30 road map to strengthen the organization and develop a working  
31 group, and they had some subsequent surveys soliciting interest  
32 and options from the members. So, there's been, you know, steps  
33 towards making progress, but they've been slow.

34  
35 So, definitely, NOAA fisheries will continue to share any updates,  
36 and any developments. And I think that's the next slide, so happy  
37 to take any questions.

#### 38 39 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

42  
43 **VANCE VICENTE:** Laura, thank you. May I ask you to expand a little  
44 bit regarding what you found in the flyingfish, dolphinfish,  
45 working group? Influence of sargassum, influxes on dolphin  
46 availability noted. Can you expand a little bit on that?

47  
48 **LAURA CIMO:** Yeah. Absolute sorry. Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you for

1 the question.

2  
3 I think that-- so primarily, you know, I think some of the members  
4 were expressing that they felt that the availability had diminished  
5 with the influxes of sargassum. But as I mentioned, most of the  
6 information we heard was mostly anecdotal. But then, I think there  
7 was, again, because we had heard this from several of the members,  
8 I think that was something that we thought really was something we  
9 should take account of and, essentially, there needed to be further  
10 work to be conducted. Maybe that's something of an area of emerging  
11 concern and interest. And I can look-- Kevin, of course, you were  
12 at the meeting as well as María. So, if anyone has anything to  
13 share, please feel free to jump in.

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sure. Vance?

16  
17 **VANCE VICENTE:** I don't want to take any other turn, but one more  
18 question. Regarding the protection of spawning areas of the  
19 flyingfish. Is there anything on the removal of the benthic fish  
20 eggs sold as a tobiko, I guess, or fish roe, which is very popular  
21 in Asian restaurants. Is that being regulated or just the fishing  
22 of the adult fish themselves?

23  
24 **LAURA CIMO:** Yeah. Thank you for the question. I am personally not  
25 aware of any management, other than the fishery itself. But, yeah,  
26 it's definitely something of interest, and thanks for raising it.  
27 Certainly, we'll flag that. That's something we should look into.  
28 So, thank you very much for the question.

29  
30 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a chat.

33  
34 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We have a question from Elizabeth  
35 Ban. "Can you provide an example of a non-extractive use of  
36 spawning aggregations?"

37  
38 **LAURA CIMO:** Yeah. No. Thank you for the question. So, some of the  
39 ideas that were discussed, for example, of tourism, and basically  
40 the idea of having divers come down and look at spawning  
41 aggregations. I think that was one of the examples of the  
42 activities that were most frequently cited that would potentially  
43 provide some economic benefits as well, and it would provide an  
44 incentive to protect those fish spawning aggregations. So, that's  
45 the one that comes to mind, I think, that was referenced the most.

46  
47 But I look at Carlos and Martha, if you can think of better ideas.  
48 Ah, thank you. Martha, thank you. Martha Prada is behind me, and

1 she also mentioned research and education. So, thank you, Martha.

2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Miguel?

4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Also, to expand a little bit on where we are.  
6 Laura's office paid for the meeting in the summer, so we could  
7 host it. But also, with the monies that were saved in that meeting,  
8 we hired Dr. Martha Prada, and she prepared an outline for the FMP  
9 that she just mentioned.

10  
11 It's interesting because we used to work a lot with flyingfish,  
12 and to hear and to learn that after two, maybe three management  
13 plans, nothing happened. And the flyingfish is disappearing from  
14 the area where they used to be very common. They were very  
15 important in Barbados and other islands, so much so that the  
16 Barbados dollar has a flying fish rather than an eagle on one of  
17 the sides. So, it's something that the group, the WECAFC group, is  
18 looking to, number one, get the right information through the  
19 management plan, the outline of the management plan, and also to  
20 identify actions that can be taken by countries to see if we can  
21 manage the fishery in a better way.

22  
23 The other thing that I was going to mention is that the  
24 presentation by Laura here is the Big Fish Campaign. That is the  
25 best thing that we have done, besides managing plans. Because  
26 remember, I learned a long time ago, with a friend of mine, Dr.  
27 [inaudible], to do something and do nothing isn't a management  
28 plan, it is in between. But the point is in order for a management  
29 plan to work, you have to implement the management plan.

30  
31 So, we are in this phase now trying to implement the management  
32 plan that we had, and the spawning aggregation is one of them. But  
33 we identified from the get-go, all the countries involved, that  
34 the campaign is a key to the success of protection, the effort to  
35 protect the spawning aggregations. We even found that people didn't  
36 know that they have spawning aggregation in their own jurisdiction,  
37 in the water jurisdiction.

38  
39 We were able to engage the fishers, because this idea of having  
40 everything from the top down doesn't work anywhere. So, we have  
41 Ana Salceda, who has been able to engage fishers. You have seen  
42 the video that she prepared. By the way, I have to say this again,  
43 the videos won two major awards. And one of them was about engaging  
44 the communities to move the agenda of conservation and wise use of  
45 the resources, of the marine resources.

46  
47 So, I don't know what is going to happen in the future with the  
48 funding for this campaign, but Laura and I were talking outside

1 the meeting, and we are going to have a virtual meeting with the  
2 key players. WECAFC is under the FAO, and as you know FAO is an  
3 organization of the United Nations. So, we think that there is a  
4 possibility of identifying some funds to continue with the  
5 campaign.

6  
7 And as I said, the Big Fish Campaign has three components, the  
8 enforcement, the managers, and the fishers. And we are putting a  
9 lot of efforts into getting the fishers recognized and working. We  
10 had a meeting in the Bahamas, and Ana Salceda was able to present  
11 that at the GCFI. We learned that there are fishers in Saint  
12 Vincent and other places where the fishers are the ones taking the  
13 role of outreach and education, and they are downloading from our  
14 hub information that they use. We have scientists also getting  
15 information from the HUB regarding the matter history, scientific  
16 stuff that is important for the conservation of these spawning  
17 aggregations.

18  
19 When we say spawning aggregation, we have two poster boards for  
20 spawning aggregations, the nassau grouper and the snapper. But we  
21 also recognize there's other species that aggregate to spawn. So,  
22 the idea is that with this management plan and the efforts that we  
23 are creating and the outreach and education that was put forward  
24 by all the Councils-- or no. Not all the Council. All the countries  
25 involved is the right way to go. It is a step in the right  
26 direction. So, hopefully, the Big Fish Campaign will not die.

27  
28 But to give you an idea, people like to talk about outreach and  
29 education thinking that they know how to do outreach and education  
30 because they read the newspaper or have a social network. That  
31 doesn't work that way. You have to have an expert who really knows  
32 how to identify the right target, how to address those targets,  
33 how to get those people to come to the table and discuss the issues  
34 they need to discuss with you in the language that they understand.

35  
36 By the language I mean language that they understand. It is to do  
37 away with the jargon that we use in bureaucracy, in science, and  
38 talk the language that they have. That's something that, through  
39 the years, I have learned from country to country. I do not speak  
40 any French, but I speak fish, and I have been able to communicate  
41 with Guadalupe fishers and Martinique fishers, in a way that we  
42 were able to understand the needs of Guadalupe, the needs of  
43 Martinique.

44  
45 So, anyway, that's my speech for saving the Big Fish Campaign.

46  
47 And then, the Council, we are going to participate at the Jamaica  
48 meeting because Yvette asked me to do so. And Martha Prada has

1 been invited to join in, paid for by WECAFC, at some of the key  
2 meetings that they are working in now, to move forward with the  
3 agenda of the WECAFC organization. And the Council, the Caribbean  
4 Fisheries Management Council, of course, because of budgetary  
5 constraint, next year won't be able to host those meetings like  
6 before unless we get funding from outside. But we'll be  
7 participating as much as possible with any activities that they  
8 have. And Carlos and I will be participating as much as possible  
9 in anything related to it.

10  
11 And also, now we have María López from the Regional Office. It  
12 took some time-- and Sarah also. It took some time to get somebody  
13 from the Regional Office of this area to work. And the other  
14 Councils, the Gulf and the South Atlantic, especially with the  
15 dolphinfish, do have interest in in their participation. So, thank  
16 you, Laura, for all your effort.

17  
18 When we met Laura a long time ago, Carlos and I went to this  
19 meeting. Remember? And this young lady was quiet there. When we  
20 had this conversation, she convinced us that we need to work  
21 together. So, we did, and I'm grateful for that, Laura. So, we are  
22 always at your service. Just call us whenever you need anything  
23 from us, and I hope that we can continue working together.

24  
25 Dr. Martha Prada, and Yvonne Sadovy, Dr. Yvonne Sadovy, were the  
26 key players. They were the two scientists that worked literally 24  
27 hours because Yvonne was in Hong Kong, Martha was here, and there's  
28 a 12-hour difference, in terms of your work. When she was sleeping,  
29 Martha was working and vice versa. And they were able to develop  
30 this management plan, which to me is the key to moving forward  
31 with the protection of the spawning aggregations.

32  
33 And that's all we have, Mr. Chairman, unless you have any comment  
34 or question.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

37  
38 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks, Laura, for all that you work on. I had a  
39 quick question. I know this probably happens in other working  
40 groups for the FAO, but marine habitat conservation, and, you know,  
41 seagrass, coral restoration and conservation. I don't see anything  
42 under WECAFC's working group where that is a particular focus.

43  
44 As we know for this region, habitat loss is a huge problem  
45 contributing to a lot of the issues in these particular fisheries  
46 that we focus on in these working groups. I was wondering, you  
47 know, how that works into the WECAFC profile, and in particular,  
48 trying to get better coordination across all these Caribbean

1 nations to do that kind of work, how does that fit into this  
2 purview?

3  
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We have a tandem here. Usually, at the  
5 beginning, which was left to the discretion at the national level.  
6 We have three levels: national, subregion, and regional. But  
7 perhaps it's time that we start talking about joint efforts of  
8 subregional and regional to protect those resources. We have worked  
9 with CRFM.

10  
11 As you know, CRFM is the arm of CARICOM. CARICOM is a group of  
12 nine countries that participate and belong to CARICOM but also  
13 have other observers, up to seventeen. So, they have been looking  
14 at this, especially CRFM, habitat protection, coral protection,  
15 and sargassum issues. Because sargassum, as you know, used to be  
16 something that you saw in National Geographic. Now you see it in  
17 front of your backyard. So, we are working with those people.

18  
19 I believe that's a good point that for all the other working group,  
20 we should make an effort to include the discussion of habitat  
21 protection because in the U.S. we have an essential fish habitat.  
22 In other countries, they have a similar approach to that but is  
23 not as the one that we have in the United States where it's  
24 protected by law and regulation.

25  
26 **LAURA CIMO:** No. Thanks, Miguel. And thanks for the question,  
27 Sennai, because that's actually an excellent point. Definitely, as  
28 Miguel noted, we've discussed habitat. But as you noticed, given  
29 the number of working groups and the lack of resources, there  
30 hasn't been an appetite for creating any additional working groups.

31  
32 In fact, when the Council approached us to try to get a working  
33 group on dolphinfish and other pelagic species, we had to  
34 incorporate it into an existing one, which was the flyingfish  
35 working group because they said, "you know, no more. We can't  
36 create anymore."

37  
38 So, I think Miguel's point is excellent because, again, the  
39 discussion of habitat certainly, definitely, is important when it  
40 comes up. So, we'll definitely take that back and see what we can  
41 do to see how those habitat considerations could be brought into  
42 the existing working group. So, thanks for the thoughts.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

45  
46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, in that same line, the deep-sea  
47 fisheries that are included within WECAFC, how deep are these  
48 fisheries? And the reason why I'm asking is because our deepwater

1 fisheries here to 1500 feet or so, the queen snapper and other  
2 groupers, we are concerned about changes due to climate at depth.  
3 So, we were wondering, you know, what was the depth that we're  
4 talking about? What species, is climate a consideration because of  
5 that vertical migration of these species rather than the horizontal  
6 displacement?

7  
8 **LAURA CIMO:** Thanks for the question and the point. So, I would  
9 say that the deep-sea working group, unfortunately, really hasn't  
10 done very much work, frankly speaking, and it isn't due to lack of  
11 interest. It really has been a lack of funds. And that kind of  
12 goes back to the point that Miguel was making, and we were saying  
13 is, unfortunately, you know, there's strong interest in the topics.  
14 It really comes down to, we can only host meetings of the working  
15 groups when there's funds to support that work.

16  
17 So, the last time the working group on the deep-sea fisheries met,  
18 frankly, which was, again, over 10 years ago, there hadn't really  
19 been a discussion of specific depths, whether it really was more  
20 there was some preliminary work that had been done by FAO on deep  
21 sea fisheries and identifying some species, but it was essentially  
22 sort of a framework. And so, that was a discussion at that point  
23 of some of the issues and things that we needed to consider. So,  
24 there really hadn't been a specific focus on particular species or  
25 depths.

26  
27 But I do want to just emphasize that the WECAFC Secretary just  
28 talked with us about that. Something she really would like us to  
29 do is revisit that working group and re-invigorate it, have a  
30 meeting. So, certainly, please stay tuned because if we can find  
31 support for a meeting of that working group, you know, we'll, of  
32 course, come to the Council and basically solicit ideas and input  
33 for what we should be bringing forward and the things that-- if  
34 there's particular topics, we should discuss that. We'd like to  
35 hear from the regions. Happy to work with you to do that. So, thank  
36 you.

37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Martha?

39  
40 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Thank you, and good morning. Talking about  
41 WECAFC, I guess, I can make some comments and share some  
42 information with you all. First, the spawn aggregation was focused  
43 on two species, the nassau grouper and mutton snapper, but also  
44 includes representative from other deepwater grouper snappers  
45 because countries in the region feel that not necessarily these  
46 two species are the interest for all of the countries. So, the  
47 management plans include some recommendations for those other  
48 species. And also, the spawning aggregation working group has made

1 some calls to the region to attend the issues of parrotfishes.

2  
3 Parrotfishes were, initially, not included at all in the spawning  
4 aggregation working group, but there are some countries that are  
5 pushing the actions to do something with parrotfish since they  
6 actually aggregate to spawn daily activities. So, that's some  
7 action that the WECAFC is studying, how to address that and perhaps  
8 be able to include the more active involvement of the unit program,  
9 which they have some working group on species. And they have  
10 species such as the nassau grouper and also parrotfishes on that.

11  
12 The second comment is that through WECAFC I have been able to look  
13 for fundings to do some pilot projects. And so, we were able to  
14 secure, well, mostly FAO, but the ones that dropped dried the  
15 proposals and everything were locally.

16  
17 For queen conch first, to analyze how to better improve landings  
18 from artisanal fishery, which is also a concern in all of the  
19 fisheries. That pilot project was done, like, 6 months ago and was  
20 shared with the region through virtual workshop that were supported  
21 by the Council, the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council. On a  
22 second pilot project, it was dedicated to the spawning aggregation  
23 kind of implementation. And so, three main activities were  
24 conducted, and the project is actually ending.

25  
26 Right now, we are working on a new proposal. That new proposal is  
27 still in the very early stages, and it will try to use artificial  
28 intelligence to support monitoring on the queen conch measurements  
29 and trying to address the problem that regulations are based on  
30 conch shell morphology, but not necessarily conch shells are  
31 available to verify the enforcement of the regulations. So, if we  
32 are successful in that, perhaps we will have good news in the  
33 future. Thanks.

34  
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. I have just a quick question about  
36 the non-extractive use that they mentioned about tourism. Is there  
37 any concern that maybe too much tourism would disturb the fish  
38 when they're getting together to spawn? Because I know that when  
39 I used to do turtle patrols for the leatherback turtle, we didn't  
40 allow anyone to be close to the turtles until they had actually  
41 started to dig their nest. You know, once they start that, you can  
42 do whatever you want to them, and they don't they don't stop till  
43 they're done. But I don't know if there's any consideration for  
44 that.

45  
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Actually, yes. It had been discussed  
47 because of the issue of sightseeing, the idea is of all always to  
48 get money, to get funds for the particular country that is the one

1 within the jurisdiction that has the spawning aggregation. But  
2 scientists are concerned about just what you said, too much  
3 sightseeing will jeopardize the opportunities of these species to  
4 spawn. In some cases, just the sound of the propellers may  
5 interfere with the aggregation.

6  
7 So, the countries are involved in this-- This is just the  
8 beginning, but we don't want to promote it without real guidance,  
9 you know, based on the scientific aspects of the fishery, etcetera.  
10 I remember I used to dive off La Parguera, a long time ago, where  
11 we had a spawning aggregation of different species of fish. And  
12 Vance, I bet you did too. But we found, and the fishers told us  
13 that whenever we have boats approaching the spawning aggregation,  
14 the spawning aggregation stops and disappears. So, that's why we  
15 have some concerns, and we don't want to promote sightseeing and  
16 use of a spawning aggregation without any strict guidance of how  
17 that can be done.

18  
19 If you look at the video that was prepared by Ana Salceda, that  
20 video has been going around the world by the way. They have shown  
21 there, in that video, the importance of maintaining that spawning  
22 aggregation. And the reason that spawning aggregation is still  
23 surviving is because they receive water from the deep water, it  
24 comes through the canyon and goes into that place where the fish  
25 aggregate.

26  
27 The point is that the fish aggregation has survived because of  
28 natural causes. But still, we cannot say, "Okay. Just go there and  
29 use it for recreational purposes." So, that point, Mr. Chair, is  
30 something of concern by all the countries that are involved.

31  
32 So, in essence, what the fishers are saying is, "If we don't fish  
33 them, leave them alone," because that way we can ensure there will  
34 be a strong integration and fish for the future. And remember a  
35 lady from-- my hero from Guatemala says, you know, I've said this  
36 before, "if you fish this aggregation, it's bread for today, hunger  
37 for tomorrow."

38  
39 The fishers are behind these efforts. So, I don't know what is  
40 going to happen at the next meetings of the WCAFC Group, but that  
41 has been called to our attention. And we especially, Carlos, you  
42 and I would be probably going to the meeting where we are going to  
43 discuss it. So, we need to bring that point to make sure. So far,  
44 the groups, all the countries that were represented at the working  
45 groups are cautious to promote the idea that people can go and  
46 visit these places.

47  
48 Of course, luckily, those places are far away from shoreline, and

1 the tourists that go to the area, they just go to the beach, have  
2 sightseeing tours, but they don't like to spend the whole day  
3 steaming out to the sea to watch a fish spawn and come back. So,  
4 that's where we are, Mr. Chairman, regarding the situation with  
5 the sightseeing for the spawning aggregation.

6  
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any other questions for Laura?

8  
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Laura. Thank you, Laura.

10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I know I made a mistake on the agenda, and  
12 I bumped Kevin's presentation. But, Kevin, I'm sorry. I have to  
13 bump you again. I'm going to take a quick 10-minute break. I  
14 apologize for that. You can beat me with a swizzle stick.

15  
16 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** This has been noted. This has been noted.

17  
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, let's take a quick 10-minute break.

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

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to get started again. Hello?  
23 Alrighty.

24  
25 Okay. Next on the agenda is the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
26 Update with Kevin McCarthy.

27  
28 **SOUTHEAST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER UPDATE—KEVIN MCCARTHY, NOAA**  
29 **FISHERIES SURVEY OF STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES FOR CARIBBEAN**  
30 **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

31  
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I'm Kevin McCarthy. I'm the branch chief of  
33 the Caribbean Fisheries Branch of the Southeast Fisheries Science  
34 Center, NOAA Fisheries. We've actually got three presentations  
35 today. After me will be Colleen O'Brien and following her will be  
36 Jennifer Pytka. Those are going to be much more interesting. But  
37 for the next 10 minutes, you're going to see the best talk that  
38 takes 10 minutes you're going to see today. So, let's get started.

39  
40 So, I want to talk about SEDAR 84. This is ongoing right now. So,  
41 recall this is yellowtail snapper for Puerto Rico and Saint Thomas  
42 Saint John, and stoplight parrotfish in Saint Croix. This one  
43 presented a few challenges, not just-- we've heard a lot about  
44 data limitations and all of that. But sometimes, the life history  
45 of the organism presents some challenges to modeling and to the  
46 assessment process.

47  
48 So, in this case, we've got hermaphroditism, which is a difficult

1 word for me to say. The stoplight parrotfish switches from female  
2 to male, as they get bigger. So, that presents some challenges to,  
3 sort of, the standard stock assessment. We've also got continuous  
4 recruitment. So, year-round production, which happens with a lot  
5 of species here in the Caribbean, that presents some problems to  
6 the modeling process. They're not insurmountable. It's just a  
7 challenge.

8  
9 One thing that is especially difficult and is especially difficult  
10 from the Virgin Islands is when you have a short time series of  
11 landings. So, that presents some modeling issues as well. Those  
12 have all been addressed. And we're now, we just finished up the  
13 assessment workshop. So, that's a series of webinars. A number of  
14 you participated in that.

15  
16 That report is being written right now and will be circulated. It  
17 goes through a couple of review steps, and then it gets circulated  
18 on January 28<sup>th</sup>. And following that will be a review workshop in  
19 February. Excuse me. I mentioned this, I think, yesterday. So,  
20 that's a combination of the Center for Independent Experts, which  
21 are outside reviewers that come in, and also a few of the SSC folks  
22 will be participating. Once that is done, the SEDAR process, our  
23 formal stock assessment process is over, and then it moves on to  
24 the SSC, and they do their own review, and make recommendations.

25  
26 Okay. So, let's talk about spiny lobster. The data workshop we  
27 completed a couple of weeks ago in Saint Thomas. That went really  
28 well. A number of you all were involved in that, and your input  
29 was really important to the success of that workshop. We're on  
30 track now to put together the data workshop report. If that's late,  
31 it's because it's on me, and everybody else is waiting for my  
32 review of it before it goes out the door. That does get reviewed  
33 within the SEDAR process, so it'll still be a number of weeks  
34 before it's readily available for folks.

35  
36 The assessment workshop is scheduled to begin the week of January  
37 27<sup>th</sup>. We don't have an exact day yet, but that will be forthcoming.  
38 Probably a doodle poll for the participants. That will include SSC  
39 participation. Each step of this process, the data workshop, the  
40 assessment workshop, and the review workshop involve SSC folks as  
41 well as other stakeholders, scientists, and others from the region.  
42 Once you get to the assessment workshop, it's pretty technical  
43 we've moved away from discussing too much of the data and start  
44 discussing mor of the modeling and the modeling issues.

45  
46 There's a review workshop scheduled for August. No final date on  
47 that. And because of the timing of this, that means that the  
48 assessment will likely be reviewed by the SSC in November of next

1 year and presented to you all, a year from now. So, at the December  
2 meeting.

3  
4 So, what I want to talk about today very quickly so we can get to  
5 more interesting things from Colleen and Jennifer is how we're  
6 going to spend some of the IRA money that-- we've already got in  
7 hand, money from fiscal year '23 and '24. We're anticipating two  
8 more years. We'll see when and how those monies arrive to us. The  
9 Science Center got about 500,000 each of the four years to focus  
10 on Caribbean work.

11  
12 Here's how we're spending it. So first, we already had a fishery  
13 independent lobster trap survey. I talked about this a little bit.  
14 So, looking at the pre-exploited, so the animals that are under  
15 legal size, as well as those that are legal size and can be landed  
16 and sold. So, we've got it. We've already got a project going on  
17 in Puerto Rico. We're going to expand that to the U.S. Virgin  
18 Islands. And it is meant as cooperative research with the fishers.  
19 That's the only way to get it done. Well, there's one other way to  
20 get it done, but I prefer to work with the fishers.

21  
22 We put that out for bid last year. We didn't get any takers, but  
23 we'll try again this year. This extended survey also-- by extended  
24 survey, I mean moving it over into the Virgin Islands. That  
25 leverages some existing monies that we're spending, this  
26 cooperative research program funding for the Puerto Rico survey,  
27 the one that's been ongoing for a while. So, we're not just  
28 spending IRA money. We're merging it and getting more bang for the  
29 buck by complementing ongoing programs.

30  
31 I'll skip down to the last bit because you'll see this a few times.  
32 This is not something I thought up independently. Actually, this  
33 one I did think of, but the other ones you'll see, and this one  
34 too. It came out of the Caribbean strategic planning workshop that  
35 we had a couple of years ago. Many of you were involved.

36  
37 We've also got fishery independent surveys for reef fishes. There's  
38 an ongoing one, again, in Puerto Rico. But what we did was use  
39 some of the IRA money to extend that survey into shallower waters.  
40 The idea here is to overlap with the dive survey, so that we can  
41 have a survey of reef fishes, from very shallow water, however  
42 shallow the divers go down to 450 meters. The divers go to about  
43 30 meters. Generally, they've done a couple of surveys where  
44 they've gone a little bit deeper. But we want to get that overlap.

45  
46 Again, it is cooperative research. It's ongoing in Puerto Rico.  
47 We've extended it to Puerto Rico. We want to move that same kind  
48 of survey over to the Virgin Islands.

1  
2 This is a little more technical. So, we were using some of the IRA  
3 money to continue, basically, it's not mapping, but it's analyzing  
4 mapping data, benthic mapping data. So, we're looking at things  
5 like depth and substrate complexity, and substrate hardness, and  
6 that sort of thing. What we need it for is to inform these fishery  
7 independent surveys. Where do you sample based on the habitat? And  
8 so, that's why we're spending a little bit of money. This is work  
9 that will go on in cooperation with some folks at the University  
10 of Miami.

11  
12 Once we have that, that second bullet there is designing the  
13 fishery independent survey. That, we're going to fund that with  
14 some other money. So, again, matching money from IRA with money  
15 from other sources. FIS is the fishery information system. We get  
16 a lot of money through that, as well as what we call the territorial  
17 initiative. That's money that comes every year to do work here in  
18 the region. And again, this came out of the strategic planning  
19 workshop.

20  
21 We're going to hire a research associate. Martha was just talking  
22 about a project that, you'll see in a few slides, might mesh very  
23 well with something that we're planning on doing. And the idea of  
24 this research associate, number one, is to have them located in  
25 the Caribbean. We want them to develop partnerships with scientific  
26 consulting firms. We have a few. We need more, especially in the  
27 Virgin Islands, because we've got to have folks that have the  
28 capability of conducting research, cooperative research,  
29 particularly with the fishers.

30  
31 And another important thing is that they're going to integrate  
32 existing fishery independent surveys, not to tell people what to  
33 do or how to do their work. But sometimes the left hand doesn't  
34 know what the right hand is doing, and it sure would be nice if  
35 they did. So, that's a big part of the job for this person. And  
36 again, this is coming out of the strategic planning workshop.

37  
38 We really like to hire students, and we like to hire students from  
39 the region. So, one of the things we need to get a handle on is  
40 what is total fishing effort. There are a couple ways, well, there  
41 are a number of ways to do that. We'd like to use remote sensing.  
42 It turns out some folks from Duke University are already ahead of  
43 us on this, but we've spoken to them. They're really excited about  
44 having a student from the region work on ways, especially the  
45 second bullet point, to develop some way to ground truth.

46  
47 You know, you don't always have a satellite overhead. Sometimes  
48 you think you do, but you don't. And so, how do we match what we

1 can see on the ground every day to what we might see of boats on  
2 the water from a satellite or from some radar system or something  
3 like that? We want to start that in Saint Thomas because Puerto  
4 Rico is bigger, so we'd like to figure out how to get it done in  
5 a smaller area. And again, this came out of the strategic planning  
6 workshop, discussions.

7  
8 And here, this is going back to what Martha was just talking about,  
9 but this is a different initiative. So, we ought to be talking to  
10 one another. One of the problems that we have with queen conch is  
11 a sampling design issue. Right? These things occur in aggregations.  
12 It costs a lot of money to put divers in the water to swim around  
13 or get towed around to find these aggregations. So, our thought is  
14 let's build a camera system, couple it with AI so we can pull this  
15 through the water. It's a lot cheaper to have two people in a boat  
16 driving around looking for aggregations than to have a bunch of  
17 divers out. Once you find the aggregation, you can put divers on  
18 that. And you then you're truly measuring what actual density of  
19 the animals is per hectare rather than a bunch of-- the zeros  
20 matter. But if you include them in your estimate of density, you  
21 might have a false idea of how many animals you have in a given  
22 area.

23  
24 Anyway, what we were going to do is use AI in real time as we're  
25 driving this boat around to say, is that a conch? Is it a rock?  
26 And how many of them are there? And as you start to see more and  
27 more, okay, maybe this is an aggregation. Let's mark it on the GPS  
28 and send divers out. Or maybe later, we'll figure out how to better  
29 count those things still using the same kind of system. Again,  
30 this came out of the strategic planning workshop.

31  
32 So, these are all the people that are actually doing the work along  
33 with Colleen and Jennifer. I just try-- and you can see all of  
34 these things. They're doing lots of stuff. I just try and  
35 facilitate and stay out of their way so they can do really good  
36 work. And they do. Many of you are familiar with most of these  
37 folks.

38  
39 And I'll take any questions. And if you don't have any questions,  
40 we'll move on to more interesting talks. Go ahead. Vance, you want  
41 to ask a question.

42  
43  
44

#### QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

45 **VANCE VICENTE:** No. Let's finish. Afterwards.

46

47 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. I think Colleen is up next. So, I'm going  
48 to move out of her way and let her take over.

1  
2 WHAT DO FISHERY MANAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS WANT? A PRELIMINARY  
3 STUDY - COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN  
4

5 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Alright. Hello. My name is Colleen O'Brien,  
6 and I'm a researcher at CMIS, at the moment. And today, I'm going  
7 to present to you all about my pilot project, about what fishery  
8 management stakeholders want.  
9

10 So first, a quick background of the project. My research question  
11 was basically, what are the priorities of fishery stakeholders  
12 regarding fishery management here in Puerto Rico? So, it was a  
13 pilot project. I spent a couple weeks in Puerto Rico, and I did  
14 interviews with 37 people. All of them in person, and I also had  
15 some informal conversations with other fishery stakeholders. And  
16 I attended events such as fishing tournaments.  
17

18 Here you can see the breakdown of the different sectors with whom  
19 I did interviews. Note some people belong to two different  
20 categories. So, I talked with commercial fishers, recreational,  
21 charter, owners of pescaderías, and then just kind of other groups  
22 of people, like people who work at dive shops or who are scientists  
23 or yacht brokers or in like the board at a yacht club, those kinds  
24 of categories.  
25

26 I think one kind of difference between this project and many other  
27 projects that have been done is this attempt to include all of the  
28 different sectors instead of just having a focus on commercial  
29 fishers.  
30

31 These are the different locations that I went to in Puerto Rico.  
32 I basically just went around the island and tried to interview a  
33 few people in each place, and I also went to Vieques, but not  
34 Culebra. So, that's the list of the locations. I'm not going to  
35 read it to you.  
36

37 So, the question topics that I asked about in the interviews were  
38 these sorts of general topics. So, I asked about their concerns  
39 regarding different fisheries, like what's impacting the fisheries  
40 the most here in Puerto Rico. Their uncertainties regarding the  
41 future of the fisheries, their desires for fishery management,  
42 specifically like what has or hasn't been successful in the past.  
43 So, what kind of management practices they liked or found  
44 successful, which ones they thought were actually harmful, and  
45 then what they would like to see in the future with respect to  
46 fishery management. What kinds of things would they want NOAA to  
47 do or other entities to do, moving forward.  
48

1 I also asked about their experience with fishery management  
2 organizations, such as the Caribbean Fishery Management Council.  
3 Basically, if they've ever been to any meetings or had interactions  
4 with the Council or other kinds of organizations. And also, if  
5 they had not ever done that, if they would like to in the future.  
6 And then I asked about changes in their fishing over time.  
7 Basically, what they fish and how they do it, and also if there  
8 have been changes due to climate change. So, these were the general  
9 topics. Of course, I asked about more things too, but that's a  
10 sort of summary.

11  
12 So, I'm going to go over some of the preliminary findings. Again,  
13 this is a pilot project, and I haven't analyzed all of the data  
14 yet, but these are some of the things that stuck out, in the  
15 beginning. So, regarding threats to fisheries, I asked them what  
16 they think are the biggest threats to fisheries, and these are  
17 kind of the main things that came up. In parentheses, you can see  
18 whether I got these answers from recreational fishers or commercial  
19 fishers or both.

20  
21 So, several recreational fishers mentioned long liners that are  
22 not from here, and they think that's a major threat to the  
23 fisheries here in Puerto Rico. Sargassum, which has been mentioned  
24 before in this meeting, of course, was referred to as a threat to  
25 fisheries here by both recreational and commercial fishers.  
26 Pollution here in Puerto Rico, of course, is another obvious threat  
27 to fisheries that people brought up over and over, specifically  
28 from rivers and dredging, but also from other things too. And that  
29 was a concern of both commercial and recreational fishers.

30  
31 Commercial fishers brought up the problem of recreational fishers  
32 selling their fish and said that that is a big issue here. They  
33 brought it up quite a lot. Not surprisingly, no recreational  
34 fishers mentioned this as a problem, but commercial fishers did.  
35 And then, many recreational fishers are concerned about FADs. So,  
36 they're concerned about FADs in many ways, but with respect to it  
37 being a threat, they were concerned about FADs in Dominican  
38 Republic attracting a lot of fish there, and then kind of like  
39 keeping them there, and that the fish are no longer migrating here  
40 because of the FADs in the D.R. So, this was brought up a lot.

41  
42 So, I asked them about management strategies of the past that they  
43 liked and that they didn't like. So, first, I'm going to start  
44 with the positive ones, the things that people like. So, catch and  
45 release rules being implemented. A lot of recreational people were  
46 in favor of that. They're very pro catch and release. Particularly  
47 for Swordfish, they said that they found a big difference after  
48 catch and release have been implemented. Also, for Marlin. So,

1 they discussed quite a lot the positive aspects of doing catch and  
2 release, for recreational fishing.

3

4 And then, seasonal closures. Overall, most of the participants I  
5 interviewed were very positive about seasonal closures, both  
6 commercial and recreational fishers. Some people told me they saw  
7 improvements after seasonal closure rules were implemented. So,  
8 that's positive. However, there is a caveat that they want there  
9 to be more communication with them about the seasonal closure,  
10 what the rules are specifically, and why. So, basically, they said  
11 that they felt positive about it, but they would like it to be a  
12 more transparent process, and just more communication between the  
13 different entities regarding it.

14

15 Another thing that everyone seemed to really like is having  
16 workshops and meetings where they can get more information and  
17 also provide input. So, I attended an HMS workshop and did  
18 interviews with people after that, and they were all talking about  
19 how helpful they found that to be and how they would like to have  
20 more of those too. So, that's a management practice that everyone  
21 viewed very favorably.

22

23 As for things that they didn't like in past management, you can  
24 see this list is a little bit longer than the positive ones. So,  
25 the bag limits on mahi-mahi and on other fish, that was brought up  
26 by recreational fishers as something that they don't like. Either  
27 they don't like having a bag limit at all, or they want it to be  
28 different than what it is in terms of the number. The size limit  
29 on lobster was brought up. Not that they want to get rid of size  
30 limits, but they just think that the current size limit is not the  
31 best size limit it could be. Some commercial fishers discussed  
32 restrictions on catching bait fish as harming their fishing  
33 abilities.

34

35 Some recreational fishers talked about catch limits at  
36 tournaments. So, they might be in favor of catch limits in general,  
37 but they don't want them at the tournaments because then it makes  
38 the tournament kind of pointless if you're only allowed to catch  
39 a certain number of fish. So, they think that there should be  
40 different rules for tournaments versus day-to-day fishing. Limits  
41 on certain fish were brought up, like sabalo.

42

43 And then finally, new restrictions being made without much  
44 information was brought up again and again, which goes back to the  
45 previous slide where they talked about the things that they felt  
46 positive about. So, workshops and communication, of course. So,  
47 basically, the times when there was a lot of communication, they  
48 feel positively about that, and then they feel kind of angry when

1 new restrictions happen without them receiving enough information.  
2 And then the last thing is, too many permits given for certain  
3 things.

4  
5 So, I asked them what they think is important for fishery  
6 management, and these are some of the themes that came up. So,  
7 again, providing more information. Everyone said that, both  
8 commercial and recreational fishers. The big difference is that  
9 the commercial fishers, at least in general, felt like they were  
10 getting some information, whereas many of the recreational fishers  
11 told me that there's just no communication with them at all. And  
12 so, they feel very left out of the management process.

13  
14 Everyone said that there needs to be more enforcement. I think  
15 maybe every single person I interviewed mentioned this. So, they  
16 feel very frustrated that there are rules, but that they don't get  
17 enforced. And so, they said that this is a big problem. Commercial  
18 fishers brought up issues regarding licenses for recreational  
19 fishers.

20  
21 And then finally, sort of related to the first point is that many  
22 of the fishers would like to have more localized information  
23 sessions. So, instead of there being meetings in one part of the  
24 island that they travel to, many of them brought up that they would  
25 like to have more information and sessions where they're located  
26 with smaller groups and where they can participate more.

27  
28 So, these are some other, kind of lesser things that they brought  
29 up as important for fishery management. So, many of the  
30 recreational fishers said that they would like large commercial  
31 fishers to be monitored more. So, they felt positively about  
32 smaller commercial fishing operations, but they are worried about  
33 the larger ones.

34  
35 A lot of people also brought up that they would like to have just  
36 more scientific studies and participate in these studies, like  
37 tagging projects, or keeping more records about when and where the  
38 fish are caught. And so, they said that they would like this to  
39 happen more and also that they'd like to participate in it  
40 themselves. And then finally, many of the recreational people are  
41 worried about the migratory fish and would like somehow for there  
42 to be more collaboration with other governments, such as in the  
43 Dominican Republic.

44  
45 So, some basic conclusions from this pilot project. Again, I think  
46 it's interesting, well, I didn't expect most fishers to tell me  
47 that they supported seasonal closures, but they did. Again, just  
48 with the caveat that there's more information about it, and that

1 they're more included in the process. Most commercial and charter  
2 fishers told me that they had little or no experience with  
3 organizations like the Caribbean Fishery Management Council. Many  
4 of them didn't even know what it was when I asked them if they did  
5 have experience with it. And then some of them said that they would  
6 like to have more interactions with management.

7  
8 Other sectors such as dive shops know very little about fishery  
9 management and definitely haven't been included in these studies  
10 previously. And as for providing information to people, most of  
11 the fishers would like it to be more localized through some kind  
12 of organization that they're a part of, whether it's a villa or a  
13 Yacht Club or whatever kind of organization they feel they're part  
14 of. They would like to have that be the host of information  
15 sessions, and also just put up flyers and things like that. And  
16 then finally, they all seem very positive about having more  
17 communication with the different entities that are involved in  
18 fishery management.

19  
20 Okay. Thank you.

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

23  
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Thank you for the presentation. Can we go  
25 back to the other slide? The other one. That one.

26  
27 No, the one about the desire for more communication?

28  
29 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** I think, conclusions.

30  
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Did they identify examples of better  
32 communication? Can you tell us?

33  
34 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Yes. So, there are a few different things  
35 they told me. One is in person meetings. So, a lot of them did  
36 mention that they don't use phones or social media so much. So,  
37 they would prefer more in-person meetings and also flyers, like,  
38 in the places that they hang out having just, like, a printed-out  
39 piece of paper with information on it hanging on the wall.

40  
41 And they also mentioned having, like, the owner or the leader of  
42 the villa or the pescadería kind of in charge of communicating  
43 some of the information with them or some examples.

44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you. Because that's interesting. I did  
46 probably 10 years ago or more. I did an impromptu survey with the  
47 fishers. I asked them about-- we had six tools at that time.  
48 Newsletters, electronic emails, etcetera. And they came with the

1 same tool that you found. Eye-to-eye communication in my shop, and  
2 also, they told me, "Miguel, I need some-- okay. You can send an  
3 email, but I need some flyers that I can stick to the wall of my  
4 fishing village so we can show everyone that this is what is  
5 happening."

6  
7 Ruth Gomez, from the Virgin Islands, also found the same thing,  
8 and she actually put together bulletin boards for the fishers to  
9 participate. So, my point is that we have here the two liaison  
10 officers. Hopefully, in the future, in 2025, we are going to hire  
11 another one for Saint Croix. And they have found similar responses  
12 from the fishers, but there are some of the ones that you found  
13 that we are going to take note of, so the liaison officers can  
14 incorporate it. This is excellent work.

15  
16 I found that also you interviewed recreational and commercial  
17 fishers, and it's interesting that some people don't even know who  
18 we are. So, we had to make note of that and make sure that we have  
19 the right tools to promote it. And the last thing is you're going  
20 to give us a copy of this report when due, and we can look at the  
21 places that you visit so we can maybe follow-up and meet with those  
22 people that would like to be considered, they are the leaders that  
23 would like to be considered as contact points.

24  
25 And the last thing I was going to say is that Nicole Greaux and  
26 Wilson Santiago, our two liaison officers, they're working, in the  
27 case of Puerto Rico, we have what we call PEPCOs. So, our fishers  
28 do fisher meetings where they provide information as to-- they,  
29 the liaison officer, provide information to us, and you will hear  
30 this with their presentation this morning.

31  
32 So, thank you for that, and I believe that we can contact you to  
33 do that. How long are you going to be working on these projects?

34  
35 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** We just applied for more funding to do a  
36 continuation of this project and also extend it into MSE work. So,  
37 hopefully, I'll still be working on this for a while longer.

38  
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.

40  
41 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** But, yes, feel free to contact me on  
42 WhatsApp or email.

43  
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you very much.

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have a chat.

47  
48 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We have Grisel Rodríguez-Ferrer, and

1 her question is, "Were there any questions about years of fishing  
2 experience?"

3

4 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Yes. I asked about years of fishing  
5 experience, and when I'm going to write the final report, I will  
6 analyze, like, look for relationships between years of fishing  
7 experience and some of their responses to these questions.

8

9 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** We also have a comment from Helena Antoun.  
10 Helena said that "I'm curious to know if the recreational fishers  
11 had any suggestions for outreach. In person meetings don't work  
12 with them."

13

14 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Yes. So, I had a few different suggestions  
15 from them. One was in person meetings, especially through yacht  
16 clubs. Of course, that comes with the caveat that these are  
17 recreational fishers who belong to yacht clubs. But for the ones  
18 that do, they said having meetings, like, at Club Náutico or  
19 something would be useful to them.

20

21 And then some of the other ones said that having more, like, direct  
22 online communication could be useful. So, something where it's not  
23 just they're following a social media post, but where there's  
24 actually a human that they're communicating with, whether it's via  
25 WhatsApp or email or something like that was the thing that they  
26 wanted. I don't know whether that's feasible, but it's definitely  
27 a thing they suggested.

28

29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo?

30

31 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Are you planning to keep  
32 interviewing fishers in Puerto Rico?

33

34 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** I'm sorry. Can you repeat the question?

35

36 **NELSON CRESPO:** Are you planning to keep interviewing fishers in  
37 Puerto Rico?

38

39 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Yes. I want to keep interviewing fishers  
40 in Puerto Rico and also in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

41

42 **NELSON CRESPO:** I'm curious because on one of your slides it says  
43 that the fishers don't know about the Council. We are celebrating  
44 PEPCO here in Puerto Rico. That is an educational program that the  
45 liaison officers, like Wilson Santiago, has celebrated for around  
46 13 years. So, they are expressing something about that program.

47

48 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** I didn't hear anyone mention that program

1 specifically. And also, the fishers who said they hadn't heard  
2 about the Council were all recreational or charter fishers. I don't  
3 maybe a couple of commercial fishers said they hadn't interacted  
4 with the Council, but they had heard of it. But it was recreational  
5 and charter fishers who mentioned not really knowing about it at  
6 all.

7

8 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you.

9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We got Ricardo and then Clay.

11

12 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Thanks for a very good presentation. It has  
13 a lot of details. You talked about the size of the lobsters that  
14 some of the fishermen didn't like. Did they have any recommendation  
15 for that?

16

17 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** 3 inches instead of 3 and a half.

18

19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Clay.

20

21 **CLAY PORCH:** Yeah. Thank you for the presentation. You mentioned  
22 that a lot of the fishermen support closed seasons in one form or  
23 another. Obviously, when you don't know the catch very well so you  
24 can't really do precise monitoring, closed seasons are a very  
25 attractive option. But I'm wondering what kind of closed seasons  
26 they would support.

27

28 Do you have any more detail on what they were thinking? Is it more  
29 closed season during the, say, the low demand season? Were they  
30 interested in closing, you know, a large portion of the year when  
31 spawning occurs? Things like that. It makes a big difference.

32

33 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** So, that question was more about past  
34 closures. So, they were saying the snapper closures were very  
35 effective. I think lobster is as well. And then, as for which ones  
36 they would support in the future, they said, of course, that they  
37 don't want too much overlap between them. So, like, they don't  
38 want conch and lobster to be closed at the same time, because they  
39 all switch between them.

40

41 Those were the main points that they raised about specifics of the  
42 closures.

43

44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai.

45

46 **SENNAI HABTES:** Colleen, thanks for the presentation. Really  
47 interesting project. I'm kind of going to rework a similar question  
48 that was already asked. I know that you mentioned the types of

1 media that the fishers would prefer. Did you happen to ask them  
2 where they're currently getting their information?

3  
4 Like, what are their sources that they use most frequently for  
5 finding out information and transmitting information about the  
6 fishery?

7  
8 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** So, I didn't ask that specifically, but  
9 some of them did mention it. So, a couple of them mentioned getting  
10 information from like the president of the Villa. Actually, that  
11 was a lot of them said that that's where they get a lot of their  
12 information. And then, some of them said that they do follow some  
13 things on social media, but they didn't talk about it in very much  
14 detail. So, mostly yeah. From the presidents of the villa, and  
15 then some people mention that Wilson sends them messages or texts  
16 and that they, get their information from him.

17  
18 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks. I think that'll be a when you move over to  
19 the Virgin Islands, I would recommend keeping track of that,  
20 particularly for the recreational fishers. Like, understanding the  
21 sources of information that they use will really help us get a  
22 better understanding of how best to target them. And it honestly  
23 changes on an annual basis. Like, a lot of our recreational guys  
24 now are using social media, and there's a lot of misinformation  
25 that gets rampantly pushed around through there. But our liaisons  
26 work to develop the chats. So, one of the text messages that Wilson  
27 uses is still a very trusted means of communication that we  
28 utilize.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any I have Roberto and Vance.

31  
32 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a question. You only mentioned that the  
33 licenses for recreational were only mentioned by commercial, no  
34 recreational person or some or something like that?

35  
36 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** No. Not really.

37  
38 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Not really?

39  
40 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Yeah. One charter person said that he  
41 thinks that charter people should be required to do logbooks just  
42 like commercial people have to do. But other than that, I don't I  
43 don't think any recreational people said that they want more  
44 licensing or anything.

45  
46 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Thank you.

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

1 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah, Colleen. First, I want to congratulate you.  
2 You're hitting the nail right on the head. There's a huge gap which  
3 is causing, you know, in communication with the fishers, which is  
4 causing so poor data that we have to manage our fisher resources.  
5 So, thank you.

6  
7 So, I have a question for Kevin. Hi. Just really quickly. But,  
8 regarding the characterization of benthic habitat using, you know,  
9 multi-beam scanning data and everything, it's fine because we need  
10 to know the physical aspects of fisheries habitat, you know, depth,  
11 topographic complexity and substrate hardness. I think that you're  
12 trying to distinguish non-consolidated substrate from consolidated  
13 software, and that that's very important.

14  
15 However, will there be any effort into trying to get some macro  
16 view of the benthic biological composition? And the reason I'm  
17 asking that is, like, there have been very few pictures that I  
18 have seen from spawning habitats in the last 10 years attending  
19 seminars where you don't find the big, large basket sponge,  
20 *Xestospongia muta*. That's a major common benthic, if not the  
21 dominant benthic fishery in all of the spawning habitats as well  
22 as in most of the submerged hard grounds that I've been monitoring  
23 for the last 40 years.

24  
25 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. That that's a good question, Vance. So,  
26 these maps are used to set where a lot of the fishery independent  
27 surveys are happening, so that they can go-- they ground truth  
28 them when they when they do that. But also, it's used for the  
29 benthic survey work that NCCOS does. So, I think that the two feed  
30 upon each other. You know, there's a feedback loop. So, I think  
31 that they're doing all of that as well.

32  
33 I don't know as much about the benthic side of the survey work,  
34 when they've got divers in the water, but that's my understanding  
35 that that's what they're doing.

36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Any more question for Colleen? María?

38  
39 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi, Colleen. So, my question is more in line  
40 with what Sennai was discussing about social media and the  
41 preferences for education or outreach for certain fishers. So, I  
42 think one thing that we have been trying to stress during these  
43 meetings is that, you know, perhaps recreational fishers need a  
44 little bit more education on average that is directly targeted  
45 towards them. And then we all know that there are different types  
46 of recreational fishers. Right?

47  
48 So, based on what Sennai said, it would be, perhaps, important to

1 make that distinction between the different types. So, we do have,  
2 over here, charters are recreational, not in other areas. And then  
3 we have the fishermen that, you know, fish from the shoreline, and  
4 then we have fishermen that go on the, what you said, the yacht  
5 clubs and but there's different, different, different kinds.  
6 Right? And there's going to be some that are going to be a little  
7 bit more involved than others in certain types of, you know,  
8 communication.

9  
10 You know, not all recreational fishers have an association to go  
11 to. Right? And so, they will not get that information from the  
12 president. So, perhaps, one way that your research can help the  
13 Council is to create those distinctions between who are the  
14 recreational fishermen, what are the preferences, and what are  
15 they saying, so that the Outreach and Education Panel can better  
16 target their education efforts on those persons. Thanks.

17  
18 **COLLEEN ALENA O'BRIEN:** Yeah. Thank you very much for your comment.  
19 Yeah. I think that's absolutely true. Like, what a recreational  
20 fisher part of a yacht club wants is going to be very different  
21 from a shore fisher. Definitely.

22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Colleen. We have Jennifer.

24  
25 **CHARACTERIZATION OF US CARIBBEAN SHARK AND PELAGIC FISHERIES**  
26 **PILOT SAMPLING OF THE FOR-HIRE SECTOR, ST. THOMAS, USVI -**  
27 **JENNIFER PYTKA**  
28

29 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** I'm new, obviously. Okay. My name is Jennifer,  
30 and I'll be presenting a pilot study, and part of a bigger project  
31 of characterizing the U.S. Caribbean shark and pelagic fisheries.

32  
33 And so, just a little quick background pelagic species, there's  
34 also, highly migratory species, are managed under NOAA. It's also  
35 just a broad term for certain species. They can be defined as  
36 species that move through the EEZ through at least two countries  
37 and also in international waters.

38  
39 These management plans commonly are developed by federal,  
40 regional, or international bodies. And then those regulations are  
41 commonly passed down from those regional plans, and they may not  
42 be suitable in all cases. For example, when you're in, like,  
43 territorial water. Or it can also just result in unmanaged species  
44 within the state or territory lines.

45  
46 It's also important to realize that improper management can be  
47 just as bad as unmanaged. And then this can be particularly  
48 disastrous for species that take a long time to recover, such as

1 a lot of these large pelagics, and many sharks. And then this can  
2 result in overcompensating measures, which result in fishing bans,  
3 fisheries closures, or spatial temporal closures, which I guess we  
4 just learned are welcomed in some cases. But basically, it can  
5 just often happen with improper management.

6  
7 So, in the U.S. Caribbean, federally managed reef fish and  
8 invertebrates are the primary focus of data collection, and it's  
9 mainly coming from the inshore commercial fisheries. But the U.S.  
10 Caribbean shark and pelagic fisheries have received a little  
11 attention. But we do see that interest in pelagics is growing.

12  
13 So, with this, we found the data gap and a research interest, and  
14 we've been developing a pilot project. So, we began to sort of  
15 conceptualize this in 2024, broadly to characterize the shark and  
16 pelagic fisheries in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. There  
17 are two components to it. One consists of analyzing existing catch  
18 data. So, that includes landing and discards were available. This  
19 comes from sources like the HMS logbook data, so a lot of the NOAA  
20 sources, and then also some of the other recreational surveys. And  
21 then the second component is port sampling, pilot study, looking  
22 at cross sectors, so commercial for hire and recreational, to  
23 really just get an idea of, the magnitude and composition.

24  
25 So, we developed this in order to explore these gaps with different  
26 experts in various positions. And, really, we wanted to develop  
27 strong methods that can be applied moving forward in order to  
28 standardize collection and also analysis. So, with all the  
29 different data, that's sort of part one component with the analysis  
30 of the existing data, looking at what species have enough  
31 information that we can, sort of, put together maybe different  
32 marine strategy evaluations and really starting with just a couple  
33 of few to see, the most data rich to see where that could lead us.  
34 And then with that, analyzing these data, also thinking about how  
35 we can get these data so they can be applied in a consistent way,  
36 etcetera.

37  
38 Okay. So, the objective of the project, broadly, is to characterize  
39 the U.S. Caribbean shark and pelagic fisheries, including the  
40 magnitude, seasonality, catch composition, which includes those  
41 landed and discarded species, and then the fishing effort.

42  
43 For the purpose of this presentation, I'll provide a high-level  
44 summary of the project, and the results from a port sampling. And  
45 this data is still being tackled and underway. We're still  
46 analyzing potential analysis, basically. So, I'll just discuss for  
47 the next bit the field work. I can go through it quickly in case  
48 there's questions at the end, or you want me to go back a few

1 slides. Also, I'm aware of time.  
2  
3 So, okay. So, just really broadly where we did the port sampling,  
4 the pilot, on Saint Thomas. The idea was to target all the fishing  
5 sectors. So, really, yes, it's like a scoping approach. So,  
6 obviously, we are interested in the data, but, really, this was to  
7 develop the methodology, how best to collect this data, in sort of  
8 a regional specific manner that can also be standardized and  
9 reproducible. Because the idea is to collect this information, to  
10 utilize moving forward and to be shared amongst different  
11 stakeholders and collaborators. So, this was, facilitated very  
12 kindly by the U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife.  
13 So, they helped with the initial introductions and a lot more.  
14  
15 So, just the sort of method for data collection, the data that we  
16 are looking for, that classic fisheries information. So, the  
17 operational, where they were fishing, the methods that they use,  
18 trip duration and fishing duration, the composition. So, what the  
19 species were trying to get individual length and weight measures  
20 as possible and sub sampling if necessary. And I'll go into this  
21 more as we go on.  
22  
23 And then also asking about some of the discarding practices since,  
24 of course, we're at the port. So, you know, we're only getting the  
25 landed species. So, just trying to get that information, that,  
26 like, really vital part of the catch that you can't really capture  
27 when you're just at the port. And then questions like depredation.  
28 This was also because we were interested in sharks and the impacts  
29 they're having as well.  
30  
31 So, I guess I'll just-- the approach was going to the ports,  
32 waiting for fishers to come in, measuring their catch. We weren't  
33 reinventing the wheel, but really understanding sort of what's  
34 coming in, where we need to be, and what we should focus on. And  
35 as the title alluded to, it did end up being the for hire that we  
36 sampled. It wasn't intentional. It was opportunistic. They were  
37 pretty open to it after me showing up all the time. So, it's really  
38 interesting. Yeah. So, basically, I was just there every day,  
39 multiple times a day.  
40  
41 So, let's look at some of these results. So, like I said, I realized  
42 that these are really preliminary and keeping in mind there's no,  
43 like, high level analysis. It ended up being, I guess, almost like  
44 a full month of sampling. So, I'll provide some summary statistics.  
45 I'll go through it, then you can always go backwards if you want.  
46  
47 So, it ended up being a total of 113 formal surveys. There were  
48 some that, if I wasn't at that port, some of the fishermen would

1 text me and tell me what they caught, but I didn't include it here.  
2 12 of those formal surveys had no catch. There was a total of 11  
3 for-hire captains involved. And this is all the for-hire. So, in  
4 total, there were 28 species on this bar chart. I grouped some.  
5 And then a total of 885 sampled.

6  
7 This slide is the same. What I did here was I just grouped it in  
8 a different way. So, I sort of grouped it by the broad pelagics  
9 and then other being mostly the sort of inshore fishes.

10  
11 And, again, here, like, these data are really just in case you're  
12 interested, but I just have it here for you. These are the landed  
13 weight in pounds. You can sort of see they aren't error bars.  
14 They're just the minimum and maximum weights of an individual, and  
15 then the red is the mean. Not every single species sampled was  
16 weighed and or measured, so these just represent those that had a  
17 weight measurement.

18  
19 And then here's the length. See at the top, yellowfin tuna is  
20 incorrect. This is an important lesson in data management and  
21 version control. That should be 91 centimeters. But, again, it's  
22 the same minimum and maximum mean and zeros removed. So, just an  
23 idea of this, like, first effort at putting together the sampling  
24 effort for the for-hire fisheries.

25  
26 And then here, again, I grouped all the others together and kept  
27 in mostly the pelagics and left barracuda. So, the y axis is the  
28 total weight of each of those species, and then the numbers  
29 represent the counts. So, skipjack, we had 87 of them for a total  
30 of almost 500 pounds, and then blackfin tuna, obviously, a little  
31 bit smaller there.

32  
33 So, I realized I went through the results, which maybe is the--  
34 partly you might be interested in, quickly, but this was, again,  
35 just to sort of explain what we are after. And, really, of course,  
36 the data is important, but we really are trying to get this  
37 methodology done. And this was interesting in that it ended up  
38 being a pretty intensive for-hire sampling, which on Saint Thomas  
39 was good as well because they're going to be going out and catching  
40 more of those pelagic species anyway. And, of course, there's  
41 always different considerations when you start incorporating the  
42 different sectors. Of course, there'll be different effort, and  
43 that will come down to when we, Of course, there'll be different  
44 effort, and that will come down to when we need to analyze the  
45 data. But also, methodologically, when you're collecting it.

46  
47 Again, these summaries were just the for-hire. They didn't include  
48 any of the other analyses, which is still an ongoing effort. We're

1 really aiming at collaboration and cooperation, to collect data in  
2 a way that can actually be useful, and also continue, not just end  
3 here.

4  
5 So, the next steps for the sampling would be to expand the spatial  
6 and temporal coverage, including seasonality. I'll actually be in  
7 Saint Thomas again in a couple days. Expanding the sampling  
8 coverage also in the Virgin Islands, and sectors. And, again,  
9 figuring out ways to capture the total catch. So, the issue of  
10 unlanded catch is ever present and understanding fishing mortality  
11 more as well. Because, eventually, when you want to really look at  
12 these data and understand them, we need a bigger idea of fishing  
13 mortality.

14  
15 But for now, I mean, it's still work in progress, and, again, it's  
16 that, like, methodology that we're focused on developing. And  
17 that's it. Thank you.

18  
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Jennifer. Any question for  
20 Jennifer? Graciela?

21

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

23

24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Can we go back to the first slide that  
25 has the landings? So, what was it? Vermilion snapper had the  
26 highest ranking? Yeah? Well, either one.

27

28 So, these are charter operators for-hire that go out and-

29

30 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Yes. Exactly. Actually, so they take out the  
31 public guests that pay them.

32

33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** And so, are they targeting the vermilion  
34 snapper for that trip? Do you have any idea of how that is related  
35 to the rest of the pelagic species?

36

37 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Oh, I see. So, basically-- yeah. Sorry. I  
38 should have explained this a little better. Well, the for-hire  
39 guys, like, they don't-- that's something to really keep in mind  
40 too for effort. I mean, obviously, I was interested in the pelagic  
41 species. If they came back with an inshore and I was there, of  
42 course, I would sample it if I had the choice between. But I guess  
43 to answer your question, they choose what to target. It can be  
44 based on a few different things. Maybe the guests come, and they  
45 want to go out and target the pelagic species.

46

47 If the weather conditions are really bad and they can't go out,  
48 then they'll stay inshore and they'll bottom fish because then

1 they can catch a lot and make the guests happy. Sometimes it's a  
2 family that really just doesn't want to go out. So, like, this is  
3 a really important consideration when we start to actually analyze  
4 and figure out, you know, like, sampling, like, stratification and  
5 those kinds of things, it's important to understand the sector.  
6 And I made some long-winded slide about this, which I left out.

7  
8 But, yes, to answer your question, it can be several different and  
9 that's really going to depend on the guests and probably the  
10 charter itself. I'm sure there's some that are more interested in  
11 just staying in shore and doing a little bit more of, like, a  
12 touristy thing. But for the guys that I was with, yeah, it could  
13 be whether the sea is really bad. If it's rough, they can't go  
14 out, and they will bottom fish sometimes if the catch is bad  
15 because, I mean, this is their job. They rely on tips as well.

16  
17 So, honestly, sometimes just catching those little fish makes  
18 people happy.

19  
20 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, any idea what the groupers are?

21  
22 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Yeah. They were strawberry grouper. Yeah. I  
23 have them. I can look it up now, but it doesn't really--

24  
25 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** do you get any spatial--

26  
27 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** You're calling me out. Jeez.

28  
29 **SENNAI HABTES:** I can hop in and answer some of those if you want,  
30 Jen? So, for example the vermilion, they target bottomfish, but  
31 they're not specifically targeting vermilion. The grouper,  
32 generally, that they're catching on those charter trips are either  
33 going to be red hind or red grouper.

34  
35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** And do you get any spatial distribution  
36 of these for-hire vessels? I mean, do we know that they're keeping  
37 away from MCD and Grammanik Bank and the size of the fish, whether  
38 they're targeting juveniles or adults, etcetera?

39  
40 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** I mean, they will-- I mean, again, like, I'm  
41 only there at the landing. I don't know. Julian, do you want to  
42 answer instead?

43  
44 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Some mics are on. So, just to help you a  
45 little bit Graciela, when you see when you see, like, the vermilion  
46 snapper, you come down, you see, the yellowtail snapper, the blue  
47 runner, that's when you go to the north of the island. You don't  
48 catch the vermilion in the south of the island. So, if the weather

1 is really bad and the guest wants to catch a fish, they would go  
2 to the north of the island. They don't have to go too far. You can  
3 go 60, 70 feet. As you touch the bottom, the vermilion snappers  
4 are there by the millions. You go [trtrtr] and you're hooked. So,  
5 they catch a couple of fish, keep the guests happy, come back in.

6  
7 So, how is breaking up there? You know, she's showing us all the  
8 different species that was caught. But what she can do, if she's  
9 going to continue this project, I would make a recommendation that  
10 what you could do is take a couple trips and just show what was  
11 caught on those couple trips. And that will give you a little bit  
12 to answer some of your questions. Well, what is actually being  
13 caught on these trips? And you will notice that most of the time  
14 you will see certain species that are what's caught on the inshore  
15 trips, and the other species are only caught in the offshore trips.

16  
17 So, you'll have a little idea, but this shows everything that was  
18 caught. But you would be able to answer a lot of the stuff that's  
19 running through your mind as a scientist, you know, why is that  
20 number so high? So, you know, it's an easy breakdown. But I can  
21 answer a lot of those questions if you want to talk to me about  
22 it.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

25  
26 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. And I think, as Jennifer was developing  
27 this project, you know, new questions and things to ask, like what  
28 were you targeting? Why? So, this notion-- and she just, you know,  
29 hasn't reviewed all the data yet. But was it because mom and dad  
30 and two little kids, and they don't want to go out and get beat to  
31 death? You know, was it just windy? Whatever the case may be.

32  
33 So, yeah. So, that point well taken. Yeah. It's nice to know from  
34 the collective wisdom of the group what are some other questions  
35 to ask. But, yeah, that targeting question and where they're  
36 fishing is certainly being asked. But we can't, you know, not  
37 everybody wants to tell you where they were fishing.

38  
39 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** No. And thank you so much. And I do, like, if  
40 I had known that this would be more of the interest, obviously,  
41 like, I can. Feel free to ask more questions after, I mean, you  
42 are obviously the expert. But all those questions, like, I've  
43 recorded it in notes, just say for example, if the trip was meant  
44 to be four hours, and it was only two hours, then I write it down.  
45 So, the same thing is going to happen in the for-hire sector more  
46 than it's going to obviously happen, like, it won't happen to  
47 professional fishermen. They're not going to come back in when  
48 they're sick, and then the recreational. You know, so there are

1 those things, but definitely, like, for example, for the Vermilion  
2 Snappers, that number was caught from 19 surveys. Whereas, like,  
3 Blackfin, 129 Blackfin Tuna, 130 or whatever, came from 32 surveys.  
4 So, I have all those, like, sort of broken down as well.

5  
6 And then in terms of spatial-- yeah. I mean, they're pretty fine,  
7 the fishermen, I had maps, the same ones that DFW uses. And if  
8 they wanted, they would market there. And, you know, if you'll  
9 have me back, I can do a longer presentation. This one was just  
10 pretty quick.

11  
12 So, thank you everyone for jumping in and helping.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance and then Sennai. Yep.

15  
16 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you. Another great presentation. My question  
17 is, what is the nature of these captains? How many are  
18 recreational? How many are commercial? Or are they--

19  
20 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** They're all for-- none of them, well, they are  
21 for for-hire. They are charter captains. I mean, if they do  
22 recreational fishing, I doubt it. They're in the water all day,  
23 most days of the week. In terms of which one of them have commercial  
24 licenses, that's something that probably Sennai would know.

25  
26 But they're not-- But yeah, these guys, their job is taking the  
27 guests out, fishing, and then cleaning the fish for the guests.

28  
29 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you.

30  
31 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Did that answer your question?

32  
33 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you. Yes.

34  
35 **SENNAI HABTES:** Jen, I'm curious about shark depredation. How often  
36 did they report it? What type of depredation? What species? Any  
37 anecdotal information?

38  
39 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** Absolutely. I'm sorry. I should also note that  
40 there were some other pelagic species caught as well. There were  
41 a couple of juvenile sailfish, a couple blue marlin, white marlin,  
42 and then yeah. So, for the sharks, it was, for discards, I had 50-  
43 - Sorry. This is not the shark question, but I did take all that  
44 information down.

45  
46 For the depredations, it was at least 20. It was definitely more,  
47 but 20 when I could-- when they were reasonably sure it was a  
48 shark. I mean and some of them-- there were also instances of them

1 catching sharks and releasing them. It was mostly reef sharks,  
2 Caribbean reef, I'm assuming. Silkies a few times.  
3  
4 There was quite-- it was getting pretty silky near the, I guess,  
5 when it was probably the second week of July. In July, a lot of  
6 them were complaining about how sharky it was. And, yeah, usually  
7 they'd be taking-- I mean, barracuda predated quite a bit and then  
8 tunas. But, yeah, it was usually nurse reef and then silky.  
9  
10 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks.  
11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance.  
13  
14 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Just one more question. Regarding the  
15 discards, are they making any attempts to determine a probability  
16 of survivorship? How good do they do? Are they dead? Were they  
17 able to swim away? Because that's a-- Yes. I'm sorry. Go ahead.  
18  
19 **JENNIFER M. PYTKA:** I mean-- No. No. I would love to know that  
20 too, personally. I think from their perspective. Especially, like,  
21 a lot of what they'd be discarding too, I mean, sometimes those  
22 little vermilion, like, if they're too small, they throw them back.  
23 Or if they catch a tuna that's too small, I'm not fully aware of  
24 how well, something, like, tunas do in that kind of environment.  
25 Also, I mean, they're probably taking them off the line pretty  
26 quickly.  
27  
28 Some things like sailfish do very, very poorly, especially when  
29 they're little. But those sorts of things like mortality it's also  
30 what I like. Post release mortality is one of the things that I  
31 have studied, and I just finished my PhD on that, in a different  
32 fishery. But those are things that I'm really interested in. And  
33 as I got to know them more, we chatted about it quite a bit.  
34  
35 But those kinds of things, I mean, you'd kind of want to be on  
36 board to understand what's being caught, looking at the vitality,  
37 and then obviously, moving forward, exciting taking studies. But,  
38 no, it's really, like, there's a lot of interesting information  
39 that, as you all know, you can gain from these kinds of things and  
40 especially, sometimes anecdotally as well. Because when you're  
41 sampling from the for-hire guys, also the guests sometimes get  
42 really excited too. So, they ask questions, and it's always great  
43 getting questions from the public. Sometimes it is things we don't  
44 think of, or things that I didn't know that people would be  
45 interested in as well, and then it sort of engages everyone. And  
46 then the fishermen start chatting and then it kind of goes on. So,  
47 they can ask questions like that and could just be an opportunity  
48 to think about collecting more data examples. Yeah.

1  
2 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you, Jen.  
3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, okay. Julian will be the last questions  
5 because we're going to move on.  
6

7 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Not really a question, but I want to say that this  
8 presentation is excellent. This is a great opportunity. We need  
9 the six of you to do this project to get the recreational data  
10 that we need. This is a perfect example of how you get true data.  
11 She's there several times when the boats are coming back and forth,  
12 collecting all of that information.  
13

14 I know we don't have a recreational license in place yet for the  
15 U.S.V.I., but a project like this in a bigger, a bigger project  
16 with more people involved, you would be able to build a healthy  
17 database for the recreational fishery. All that she's asking these  
18 fishers and the guests' asking question is such important  
19 information, and you're seeing everything that's coming in.  
20

21 And now she's talking about even the discards, which has always  
22 been a question that comes back to the SSC. We don't know. In every  
23 stock assessment that we do, we have problems with having an idea  
24 of what the uncertainty is of the discards. So, I just want to  
25 tell you, continue doing a good job with this. Try to find funding.  
26 Try to get more people to work with you. Whoever is the lead, you  
27 know, I like this. I really like this.  
28

29 So just like the prior presentation was great also. That's the  
30 kind of work that we need to get from the people out there,  
31 students, whoever wants to get involved. I like this. Thank you.  
32

33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Jennifer. Kevin, are you done?  
34 So, Miguel?  
35

36 **LETTER FROM DR ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR**  
37

38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With the contract of the  
39 hotel, we have to break up, but we have ten minutes.  
40

41 Our proposal is, in the case of outreach and education, Jannette  
42 will address the group very quickly on the report. Before that, I  
43 have a letter that I need to read for the record from Dr. Alida  
44 Ortiz. As I said before, because of sickness, she will no longer  
45 be able to work as she wishes with the Outreach and Education  
46 Panel.  
47

48 "Dear all, I have been guiding the Outreach and Education Advisory

1 Panel of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council since 2012. I am  
2 very, very grateful for this opportunity. It has been a great  
3 experience for me to have an open space to bring, practically, all  
4 the science and education experience that I had as a marine biology  
5 professor at the University of Puerto Rico UPR in Humacao, to the  
6 fishing communities of Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and  
7 Saint Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

8  
9 At present, I am very sorry to inform you that I must resign from  
10 the position of president of the OEAP. This year I have been  
11 receiving medical treatment for breast cancer, and it will continue  
12 until 2025. It includes several chemotherapy and radiotherapy  
13 sessions and breast surgery that have changed completely my daily  
14 routine. It is not possible for me to keep the OEAP in regular  
15 meetings even if they are conducted virtually. However, I will  
16 continue the IRA proposal, Understanding Climate Change and its  
17 Impact on the Fisheries Ecosystem and the Fisheries Community in  
18 the U.S. Caribbean that was approved and is in progress. I will  
19 make a report to the Council for the next 2025 CFMC meeting. That  
20 will be the one taking place during the spring.

21  
22 I am sorry for the inconvenience. You can contact me for materials  
23 about any issue that I may provide. Happy New Year 2025. Alida  
24 Ortiz. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.”

25  
26 Alida was the first PhD marine scientist in Puerto Rico ever. Since  
27 that time, she has been a professional in marine sciences but also  
28 an educator. So, she has spent her whole life in education. I  
29 always relay this anecdote. When I went to the marine science  
30 island in Magueyes, I didn't know beans about what I was going to  
31 do, and I saw this artist drawing algae. I said "Jesus, the algae  
32 looks as if it were alive" and she looked at me and said, "I'm not  
33 an artist you idiot, I'm a biologist. These are alive because these  
34 are the real algae." So, she explained what she was doing and spent  
35 about 15 minutes telling me how to mount the algae, how important  
36 it was, etcetera. So, when I took my first botany class, I was the  
37 expert in the laboratory. And since that time, we became friends.

38  
39 Through the years, she was a member of the SSC. She had been in  
40 contact with us. And when Diana asked me, Miguel, we need to have  
41 an OEAP, I said, "Yeah. We need to get somebody who really knows  
42 about outreach and education, who really knows about marine  
43 sciences, if we can find somebody like that." And she said, "How  
44 about Alida?" So, when we contact her, she said, "yes."

45  
46 So, she's going to be working with us on a personal basis, but she  
47 is very professional. She doesn't want to interfere in any way  
48 with outreach of education. When she finishes the IRA project next

1 year and the following year, she will report to us.  
2  
3 So, at this time, Mr. Chairman, we would like for our new Chair of  
4 the OEAP, Jannette Ramos, to give us a quick presentation on the-  
5 - actually, probably we'll need to drop it and do it after lunch.  
6 After 1:30, because we don't want to interrupt you during your  
7 presentation.  
8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Yeah.  
10  
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** An hour.  
12  
13 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Are we-- just a clarification, are we taking  
14 an hour and a half for lunch?  
15  
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** An hour.  
17  
18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Just one hour.  
19  
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes, one hour.  
21  
22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. So, from 12 to 1.  
23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right.  
25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. At 1 o'clock, we are going to have Jennifer,  
27 and then we will follow with Jannette Ramos.  
28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.  
30  
31 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, let me check on the 1:30 presentation  
32 because there might be a time conflict. Because she's a professor.  
33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, check that at lunch and let us know.  
35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** But since I got about 4 or 5 minutes, I got a  
37 question for Kevin.  
38  
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Tu eres el Chairman, tú lo puedes hacer.  
40  
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** When you were talking about doing the lobster  
42 trap survey, are you referring to a specific trap design, like the  
43 Florida traps, or are they doing whatever traps they have?  
44  
45 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Well, the first year, we did whatever traps they  
46 had just to get up and running, get, you know, coordination and  
47 cooperation and all of that. But now, we met with the fishers  
48 involved in the project. We came up with a standard design. There

1 are two designs. There's a standard design that has the mesh size  
2 that you would normally see on a trap, right, the legal mesh. And  
3 then we had a second standard design, with smaller mesh  
4 specifically designed to get to, you know, retain the smaller  
5 lobsters because that's what we're interested in. Right?

6  
7 So yeah. So, it's a standard design. They'll be fishing based on  
8 a standard approach, and in areas where-- I mean, it's a little  
9 tricky, because there's some territories that people fish in.  
10 Right? So, we have got to build the design around that. But we  
11 want to put them out there based upon a standard survey design.  
12 So, it's very much a scientific design, but done by the fishers.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Is this similar to what Sennai and you're doing  
15 on Saint Croix? Is this something similar?

16  
17 Is what you're doing with the lobster traps similar to what Kevin  
18 is doing?

19  
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** The selectivity study? I mean, it's similar in  
21 that they're both selectivity. His is a little more focused at  
22 particular size classes. Ours was to get a generalized  
23 understanding of selectivity to look at population selectivity for  
24 spiny lobster.

25  
26 So, we had a good idea, I think, in Puerto Rico in terms of the  
27 selectivity from the trap studies that have been done previously.  
28 We didn't have that in the U.S.V.I.

29  
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

31  
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. So, I mean, they're really asking two  
33 different questions. One, we would need to know for an assessment  
34 model, what is the selectivity of the gear that's being used by  
35 the fishery? That's the work with Sennai. The second question for  
36 this new, well, it's been ongoing for a little while. But for this  
37 other study, the question is how many smaller lobsters are out  
38 there that next year are going to be caught, or they're going to  
39 be big enough to be caught and retained. So, it's a little bit  
40 different question.

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gotcha now. Okay. I remember you talking about  
43 that yesterday too.

44  
45 On the queen conch survey with remote sensing and cameras, whenever  
46 that gets started, if you do come to Saint Croix to do something  
47 like that, I've got three of the best conch divers that they're  
48 willing to take you out there, give you, and show you locations.

1  
2 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** That'll be terrific. Yeah. We're going to take a  
3 year and develop the thing because we have got to develop not only  
4 the gadget itself. Right? This towed thing. Because one of the  
5 things that has happened in the past, I guess, there have been a  
6 number of these things that have been designed, but some of them  
7 were sleds, and when you run into rough habitat, they get stuck,  
8 and we don't want to do that. We want to be able to fly it through  
9 the water basically and maintain a particular distance above the  
10 bottom, consistently, you know, as the bottom changes. And then we  
11 also have to develop the AI. So, it has to learn what a conch is  
12 and what a rock is.

13  
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thanks. Alright. So, we'll break for  
15 lunch. 1 o'clock. That would be your time.

16  
17 **VANCE VICENTE:** Kevin, really quickly. With the methodology that  
18 you have, will you be able to-- I mean, there has to be some ground  
19 truthing to determine which are alive and which are dead. Okay?  
20 That's just my comment.

21  
22 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Absolutely, Vance. Yeah. Yeah. We've got-- that's  
23 kind of year two, once we get it built. And then in the second  
24 year, we'll make sure it's doing what we think it's doing.

25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Thank you. We'll break for lunch.

27  
28 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on December 05, 2024.)

29  
30

- - -

31

DECEMBER 05, 2024

32

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

33

- - -

34

35  
36  
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to get started again. We made  
38 some changes to the agenda again. So, we're going to go with  
39 Jennifer Lee from NOAA on the protected resource division.

40

41 **PROTECTED RESOURCES DIVISION UPDATE—JENNIFER LEE, NOAA**  
42 **FISHERIES/SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE (SERO)**

43

44 **JENNIFER LEE:** Good afternoon, everyone. While they're getting the  
45 presentation up, I will just, again, say I am Jennifer Lee. I work  
46 in the Southeast Regional Office in the Protected Resource  
47 Division. A big part of my job is working with Councils and our  
48 Sustainable Fisheries Division in helping make sure that everyone

1 is informed on Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection  
2 Act related actions to fisheries. So, some of that earlier  
3 discussion about ESA and MSA and how do we integrate, I'm a great  
4 resource and person to talk to. So, today, I'm here just to provide  
5 some updates on various activities that pertain to fisheries.

6  
7 Here you can see, I'm going to start off with just sharing a little  
8 recap of some ESA listing critical habitat rule making this year.  
9 I'll talk about reinitiation of Section 7 on the island-based FMPs,  
10 and then I'll hit on some recovery updates for queen conch, oceanic  
11 white tip shark, and giant manta ray. And then I do have a slide  
12 on the, the revised ESA/MSA integration policy directive. Sam  
13 already went over this, but it's a good reference for you to have.

14  
15 Okay. So, this year, we've completed two actions. We published the  
16 final Nassau Grouper Critical Habitat Rule. There weren't any  
17 significant changes from the proposed rule that was actually  
18 presented to you way back in December of 2022. A fishery bulletin  
19 did go out on January 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year, sharing information on  
20 that.

21  
22 And then, in addition to that, we also completed our queen conch  
23 listing as threatened under the ESA, and I know you had a  
24 presentation by my colleague, Ori, back in April on that final  
25 listing. So, there are links in this presentation if you're looking  
26 for information, you can go and find those rules. For pending final  
27 agency decisions, we do have a proposed reclassification of the  
28 pillar coral from threatened to endanger. That final decision is  
29 still pending. And then we have our Green Sea Turtle Critical  
30 Habitat Rule, for critical habitat again.

31  
32 So though those are the two rules we completed and the two we have  
33 pending, and I will just leave it at that.

34  
35 So, Section 7 consultations. This is where we look at federal  
36 agency actions and their impacts on protected resources. In this  
37 case, we do them both for federal agency actions that do not  
38 involve us, and then, of course, we look at our agency actions.

39  
40 So, we have a complete biological opinion on the three  
41 comprehensive island-based FMPs that we did as a batched biological  
42 opinion, so all three FMPs are analyzed in one opinion. I actually  
43 gave you a presentation on that, I think, a couple Council meetings  
44 ago. We do need to reinitiate consultation, so that means, look at  
45 the impacts again, but specific to new listed species, so the queen  
46 conch listing and then the critical habitat for the five Caribbean  
47 corals and also nassau grouper.

1 So, we've been doing some collaborations in the new ESA/MSA  
2 integration agreement. It actually has some information there  
3 about how we can work ahead of time to try to plan and think about  
4 potential impacts for potential new listings in critical habitat.  
5 So, we've been doing some collaboration on that. Sustainable  
6 Fisheries has requested reinitiation, and we do have information  
7 to move forward.

8  
9 So, Sustainable Fisheries prepared a biological assessment for  
10 queen conch, and then for the other species, we have data in our  
11 recent rule makings that we're using to start that process. So, we  
12 have a team of biologists that are working to complete the  
13 consultation. They're just getting going. We're doing it in a team  
14 approach. So, Ori, who you know, for example, is working on the  
15 conch analysis. Helena, who you know well, is working on coral and  
16 collaborating together.

17  
18 We anticipate having a first draft probably this spring. So, what  
19 I would do is, come to you and share an update at your next meeting.  
20 And, again, we're going to keep you informed per the revised  
21 ESA/MSA integration policy as that consultation progresses.

22  
23 So as far as queen conch actions. I know you are all very familiar  
24 with how we went out in May and conducted a bunch of recovery  
25 workshops. We had four in person workshops, two in Puerto Rico,  
26 one in Florida, and the one in Saint Croix. We had a really good  
27 turnout. You can see over 50 people at the Eastern Puerto Rico  
28 one, over 70 at the Western Puerto Rico one, Florida, we had over  
29 20, and then Saint Croix over 30. So, we had a bunch of different  
30 stakeholders, and some really good discussions, and we appreciate  
31 all the people here and perhaps online that participate in those  
32 workshops.

33  
34 We have started international workshops. We had a recovery workshop  
35 held in Gosier, Guadeloupe on November 5<sup>th</sup>. That was part of the  
36 GCFI meeting. We had over 30 participants, and, again, a pretty  
37 broad group of stakeholders, and a widespread representation, so  
38 that was a good first start. And we've also started to engage with  
39 the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance in Saint Martin and Saba.

40  
41 Where do we go from here? We're going to continue to engage with  
42 our partners, both nationally and internationally. We do have  
43 several virtual workshops with more technical themes in mind,  
44 mainly focused on scientific and enforcement feasibility. When  
45 those are complete, we'll finalize our workshops report so that  
46 you'll get a nice summary of all the discussions and outcomes, and  
47 we'll disseminate that, again, among agencies and with the  
48 Councils. And then, at that point, we'll use that information for

1 recovery plan developments and any 4(d) regulations.

2  
3 Okay. And so, often we're asked about what we're doing with coastal  
4 development and construction and things that aren't fisheries. So,  
5 I wanted to share a little bit about that. When we list a species,  
6 our Section 7 consultation requirements do come into effect right  
7 away. So, we've been working to basically come up with some  
8 guidance for both, the Section 7 biologists that conduct those  
9 consultations and our federal agencies that are having to consult  
10 with us.

11  
12 So, we have some guidance developed that we shared with the U.S.  
13 Army Corps of Engineers for input and suggestions, and we posted  
14 that online in September. We still had some discussions going on  
15 in revision of those documents, but because, again, those  
16 consultations and the requirement happen right away, we wanted to  
17 get information out right away, so there will be updates.

18  
19 I want to point out the queen conch consultation framework, for  
20 those of you who are trying to figure out what the impacts are on  
21 queen conch and how we do things, that consultation framework is  
22 a great tool for anyone if you want to better understand sort of  
23 what we have for information and how we move forward with potential  
24 impacts. The second guidance document there, the queen conch survey  
25 construction conditions relocation reporting guidelines, and that  
26 graphic I have on this slide just kind of shows how these other  
27 federal agencies, like the Army Corps, are working through this  
28 process. It talks about pre-consultations surveys, and depending  
29 on how many conchs you find, what you have to do from there, and  
30 who has to consult informally versus formally.

31  
32 So, there's some nice information there too just because, like,  
33 again, I know a lot of you are very interested in what you're  
34 seeing in your community and the impacts. So, this gives you some  
35 information on how we address those outside.

36  
37 Okay. And then, we'll move into just a couple other slides related  
38 to different species. Oceanic whitetip shark proposed 4(d) rule.  
39 We did publish this back in May, and we also announced, we have an  
40 environmental assessment associated with that. The proposed  
41 regulations would apply all of the section 9 prohibitions, so that  
42 pertains to take, for endangered species to this threatened  
43 species. And then, it just has some exceptions for scientific  
44 research and law enforcement activities.

45  
46 The comment period on that is closed. We did receive a lot of  
47 comments-- let's see. So, we're just working through those,  
48 considering those comments. If you're curious, again, like all

1 other regulations, you can always go online and take a look and  
2 kind of sample what we've got.

3  
4 Oops. Do we have a different order? I just did that slide. Could  
5 you go back one, please? Sure. So, a couple of things. I think the  
6 slides that I had are a little off. I just explained to you all  
7 about the 4(d) rules, but didn't look up and noticed the fact that  
8 you got a different slide in front of you, so my apologies.

9  
10 First up, this slide is on the final recovery plan and notice of  
11 initiation of 5-year review. So, this is a complete recovery plan.  
12 Remember, a recovery plan is a document that outlines our plan for  
13 how we believe that we can work towards recovering the species. It  
14 has required requirements, in terms of, every recovery plan has to  
15 have a description of the site-specific management actions  
16 necessary for the conservation survival, has to have objective and  
17 measurable criteria that, when met, will allow the species to be  
18 removed from the endangered species list, and estimates the amount  
19 of time and funding required to achieve the plan's goal. So, those  
20 are things that we have to have in all of our recovery plans, but  
21 recovery plans themselves are non-regulatory documents, just to be  
22 clear.

23  
24 And then NOAA Fisheries, is required, every 5 years, to ensure  
25 that our listing classification is still accurate. And so, at the  
26 same time we announced that we have a final recovery plan, we also  
27 went out with a notice of initiation of our 5-year review. We  
28 accepted comments through September 9<sup>th</sup> on that. And then, I just  
29 added in a little perspective that we have relatively limited U.S.  
30 Caribbean data on oceanic whitetip sharks and fishery  
31 interactions. And in fact, that batched biological opinion that I  
32 noted earlier, we did find that oceanic whitetips were likely to  
33 be adversely affected, but it was a non-jeopardy finding, and a  
34 relatively small amount of take.

35  
36 So, this is a slide I already covered and just to clarify, in terms  
37 of what a 4(d) rule is. Essentially, a 4(d) rule allows us to issue  
38 protective regulations for species that are listed as threatened  
39 that don't automatically get all of the take prohibitions applied  
40 to them. And so, through a 4(d) rule, we can address various  
41 activities that we believe need management to protect that  
42 threatened species. And so, that's what that is about, but I  
43 already told you actually what we did, so I'll move on. Sorry about  
44 that.

45  
46 And we'll skip up to-- So if we could advance the slide, and one  
47 more time. Oh, no. That's right. Man, I am getting all fouled up.  
48 Sorry. Alright.

1  
2 Giant Manta Ray Draft Recovery Plan. So, this is a draft recovery  
3 plan, not final, which means that now is the time to review that  
4 if you have comments. We also are, again, initiating a 5-year  
5 review for this species as well. So, the plan is available. It  
6 contains those three components I mentioned previously as far as  
7 recovery actions and criteria and timing and funding to achieve  
8 those goals.

9  
10 And let's see. If, I guess, next slide. Oh, there's a slide. Sorry,  
11 I'm having a little issue with my slides. They aren't matching up  
12 obviously. I guess-- I don't know. Anyways, I'll just tell you  
13 what I was going to.

14  
15 The last thing about giant manta ray. I was just going to note  
16 that giant manta rays are vulnerable to incidental hooking  
17 entanglement and vessel strikes. The current biological opinion  
18 actually made it not likely to adversely affect finding for giant  
19 manta rays, so we didn't say that we anticipated take. And really,  
20 there's very, very little information we have in this region about  
21 giant manta ray. So, we are soliciting comments on the draft  
22 recovery plan through December 16<sup>th</sup>, and encourage, if you have  
23 information, to share. We would greatly appreciate that. Okay.

24  
25 And that takes us down to the revised ESA/MSA integration policy  
26 directive that Sam did already cover. I just wanted to put a few  
27 bullets on there for you to look back at. Again, this is our way  
28 of recognizing the Council's roles in the ESA process and the  
29 mechanics of Section 7 consultations and how we can work together  
30 early in the process.

31  
32 It does have a couple additional new guidance for going ahead and  
33 doing that sort of early work, thinking through what we're calling  
34 section 7 action plans, when we have proposed rules, thinking about  
35 how we're going to potentially assess them. And it also has some  
36 information about new information and how we document and consider  
37 that. So, it's really a great document.

38  
39 It actually has a lot of just useful knowledge or, you know,  
40 information on the section 7 process. So, if you haven't, checked  
41 it out, I do encourage you to look at that.

42  
43 Alright. And that's all I have for slides. Sorry, I got a little  
44 fouled up in my delivery there, but--

45

#### 46 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions for Jennifer? Michelle?

1  
2 **MICHELLE SCHÄRER-UMPIERRE:** Thank you for the presentation. I was  
3 wondering if there was any plan to work on the recovery plan for  
4 nassau grouper. And a 4(d) rule, we've all discussed here  
5 previously, would really help our enforcement efforts down here.  
6 So, just your perspective on those two.

7  
8 **JENNIFER LEE:** Sure. Yes. So, right now, we have been prioritizing  
9 our queen conch work. We have been focusing there, just because,  
10 you know, it's a new species, a mollusk, which is kind of a new  
11 challenge for us. And those listing factors, you know, are still  
12 really impacting the species. We don't really have restrictions  
13 right now like we do for nassau grouper, in some cases.

14  
15 So, that does not mean we aren't going to proceed with recovery  
16 planning and a 4(d) rule. In fact, probably, if things go well, we  
17 would be, when we're moving forward with the queen conch 4(d) rule,  
18 we would be also, around the same time, be coming out with a nassau  
19 grouper 4(d) rule, so that's definitely in the works. Right now,  
20 we're just sort of, again, we've been a little more focused on  
21 queen conch just because of, sort of, the priority needs we have,  
22 but that doesn't mean we've forgotten about nassau grouper at all,  
23 and we will be moving forward.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

26  
27 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Jenny, thank you. I heard you a couple  
28 of times mentioning the word funding, and that's a concern for all  
29 the work that still needs to be done and, in this case, in terms  
30 of the rebuilding of the queen conch. So, that recovery rebuilding  
31 issue, you know, it's a concern. So, if you can, think-- and the  
32 Council talked yesterday about identifying additional funds to do  
33 the work that needs to be done. So, if you do know of any funding  
34 RFPs or anything like that, do let us know how we can collaborate  
35 with other NOAA line offices to do the work that needs to be done.

36  
37 So, thank you for mentioning that.

38  
39 **JENNIFER LEE:** Sure. Yeah. I mean, I can tell you that, you know,  
40 unfortunately, when we list a species, it doesn't come with a pot  
41 of money. So, in terms of opportunities, really the best way to  
42 get funding on queen conch and nassau grouper is to take advantage  
43 of the fact that there is a connection to fisheries. And we have,  
44 you know, MARFIN, CRP, Saltonstall, all the kind of fisheries  
45 funding grants are really good opportunities to put in proposals  
46 for funding.

47  
48 Really, the only new source of funding for queen conch, nassau

1 grouper with listing is through the section 6 grant process we  
2 have with the states. So, that is an opportunity. But beyond that,  
3 unfortunately, there's not sort of an automatic when you're listed,  
4 you know, you get an additional funding source. It's really working  
5 through all the existing funding sources that we have.

6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

8

9 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thank you, Jennifer. Do you foresee any other  
10 hard corals, specifically, Scleractinia corals, being listed as,  
11 at least, protected after this vast deadly effect of the hard coral  
12 tissue loss disease?

13

14 **JENNIFER LEE:** We don't have any active petitions at this time,  
15 and I'm not aware of any efforts right now to do status reviews on  
16 other species. So, I guess the direct answer is, at this time, we  
17 are not pursuing or looking into any new listings of corals, but  
18 I can certainly recognize that, you know, it's been a bad time for  
19 corals.

20

21 **VANCE VICENTE:** One more question. Do you foresee, at all, having  
22 any of the demosponges listed as protected or endangered in the  
23 Caribbean?

24

25 **JENNIFER LEE:** I don't really think-- it's not really my place to  
26 speculate on that. I mean, I would just, again, sort of-- you know,  
27 the way a lot of species are-- we sometimes initiate status reviews  
28 independently, and sometimes we initiate them based on petitions.  
29 Those are the two methods that we pursue listings with.

30

31 **VANCE VICENTE:** It was I intended to propose to list, at least,  
32 the sponges. You know, the hippospongia and spongia, both the  
33 commercial, normal sponge and the woods, whatever the common name  
34 is of hippospongia. Because there was trade, commercial trade in  
35 the Caribbean up to the 1950s, then they became literally extinct.

36

37 You may find one individual here and there in refuge areas under  
38 mangroves and things like that. But they were a very common  
39 component. The other one that has become extinct, actually, is the  
40 spheciospongia vesparium, the loggerhead sponge, which is another  
41 large sponge which creates habitat for fish larvae, and it also  
42 has a small ecosystem living within the mesohyl, you know, shrimps  
43 and worms and that, and that's gone.

44

45 I don't know where it has to be published first, in a referee  
46 journal or so. Are there any other ways of approaching any method  
47 to protect these species? I don't know. Just asking. Okay?

48

1 **JENNIFER LEE:** I think you raised interesting questions, but I  
2 don't think I have a response to that at this time.

3  
4 I do want to note just, you know, we've been throwing a lot of  
5 terms at you. I mean, we're talking about recovery plans, we're  
6 talking about 4(d) rules, we're talking about section 7  
7 consultations. I mean, we're deep in the weeds of Endangered  
8 Species Act implementation down here, with the fact that we do  
9 have new species and new critical habitat, and critical habitat in  
10 itself is another term. Right?

11  
12 So, you know, I just really encourage you, if you have questions,  
13 to please come talk to me, reach out by email. You know, I'd love  
14 to help you work through what all of this means. Council meetings  
15 aren't the best forum for sort of, like, education and training.  
16 I mean, you all have a lot to do here, but that doesn't mean that  
17 I'm not willing and ready to help you as you process some of the  
18 information, because I do recognize it's a lot.

19  
20 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you.

21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

23  
24 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Jenny. In terms of process for  
25 deciding to list the species, I was just wondering. So, you  
26 mentioned that for a status review, sometimes it comes from the  
27 agency and sometimes it comes from a petition. Right? So, if a  
28 person had, like, for example, Vance had a concern about a certain  
29 species, is that something that they can bring to the agency for  
30 you to look at? And then, if that would be the case, what is the  
31 process? So, I know that you guys conduct a status review and then  
32 based on the results of the status review-- can you go through,  
33 very quickly, through what the process of ESA is for listing or  
34 deciding to list or not list?

35  
36 **JENNIFER LEE:** Sure. And in fact, I'm also thinking back to when  
37 queen conch was listed and one of the other ones. I know some of  
38 those early presentations really went through the steps, so maybe  
39 I can also share that. But yeah.

40  
41 So, basically, you know, we can be petitioned when someone presents  
42 us information, written information, and says, "you know, we think  
43 this should be listed." And they have to provide a certain amount  
44 of information.

45  
46 So, the first step is a 90-day finding in which we review a petition  
47 to determine if we think it's warranted to move forward to a status  
48 review. We don't automatically do status review just because

1 someone sent us a letter and said they think something should be  
2 listed. But we look at it within the information that's readily  
3 available, and we determine whether or not we think it's warranted.  
4

5 If it's warranted, then we go through and we conduct a status  
6 review and look at the question further. That process usually takes  
7 about a year, in which case the end result is we make a  
8 determination on whether or not we think that listing is warranted  
9 or not.

10  
11 So that that's kind of the basic steps through it.

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson.

14  
15 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Concerning the enlisting of the conch. We have  
16 been diligent in our resource in protecting it. And to the  
17 knowledge that I've obtained in these meetings, America is to be  
18 faulted for the amount of imports that they are bringing in from  
19 other countries. So, are you guys planning to stop those imports,  
20 which I know is the main problem that has been causing overfishing  
21 in other countries? If the demand is not there, the people will  
22 not catch it. I was going to say something very rude, but I think  
23 I will not. But it wasn't offensive anyways.

24  
25 But there is always a demand for something. America has always  
26 lived in importing from other countries. In Saint Croix, we have  
27 overregulated the species and we're still being penalized today.  
28 I'm very upset to hear that we have done so much to protect our  
29 resource and still we have to pay for the consequences of a country  
30 that is importing from other places. I think that we should be  
31 exempt.

32  
33 In my book, we should be exempt from that regulation if it comes  
34 to a closure or use our strict regulation for those other countries  
35 in the amount that they can harvest. And even America, who is  
36 buying the conch, should be limited in what they can bring. And I  
37 believe this can be solved before the little people, the fishermen,  
38 gets the harsh part of this protection that you guys want to do?

39  
40 **JENNIFER LEE:** So, I'll just speak on where you started at the  
41 beginning, which as far as you know, are we going to address  
42 imports? As you know, talking about import regulations was a big  
43 focus of the Puerto Rico workshop, the Saint Croix workshop. It's  
44 all the workshops. In the international workshops, you know, we  
45 also talked about imports. So, the 4(d) rule that we've been  
46 talking about and that's under development and that all these  
47 workshops are working, in part, towards finding the information so  
48 that we can make an appropriate rule. You know, imports will be

1 part of that 4(d) rule.

2  
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Katherine?

4  
5 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Thanks. If I could just add to that. Much  
6 like Jenny described a process where citizens can petition for  
7 species to be listed, there's a similar process where citizens or  
8 entities can petition for 4(d) rules. So, if a group or an  
9 individual has an idea of a 4(d) rule that they would like to see  
10 for a threatened species, they could present those ideas and submit  
11 that to NMFS.

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

14  
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Kate, so in plain language. If a person wants to  
16 elevate the issue of imports, that's the route that they have to  
17 follow. To notify the federal agencies that they have interest and  
18 see if you can-- okay.

19  
20 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** And, again, just to kind of make sure  
21 everyone understands what we're talking about. Section 9 of the  
22 Endangered Species Act has a whole list of things that are  
23 prohibited for endangered species. Those don't apply automatically  
24 to threatened species. It's through the 4(d)-rule process where  
25 the services, NMFS or Fish and Wildlife Service, can say "we're  
26 going to make all of those prohibitions apply to a threatened  
27 species or maybe just some of them." And the word import/export,  
28 right, that's one of them. Take is another.

29  
30 And so, this is what I'm saying. If, you know, there's a group, if  
31 Saint Croix feels really strongly about trying to address imports  
32 from other countries, there's a venue which citizens can organize,  
33 or an organization can submit a petition and explain why they think  
34 that would be a good 4(d) rule.

35  
36 But, you know, just take that word import or whatever. You know,  
37 think of Section 9 of the ESA as this, like, menu of things that  
38 you could do to help protect a threatened species and then present  
39 the case to NMFS as to why you think it should be this and not  
40 that. That's what I'm saying.

41  
42 **JENNIFER LEE:** And remember, when we come up with the proposed  
43 rule, there will be an opportunity to comment on that. So, all of  
44 this work we're doing now is to front load, essentially, getting  
45 input on this issue. When we actually publish the proposed rule,  
46 then there is still the usual public comment process and more  
47 discussion before any rule would be finalized.

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Clay?  
2

3 **CLAY PORCH:** Yeah. So, we're working with our partners here to  
4 conduct a survey of conch in, you know, the Virgin Islands as well  
5 as Puerto Rico. The Virgin Islands work is about done. So, at the  
6 end of that, we should be able to calculate how many conchs there  
7 are in the Virgin Islands. And so, to Gerson's question about Saint  
8 Croix, suppose we're able to show, I don't know because I haven't  
9 seen the numbers, but let's suppose we're able to show that the  
10 conch populations are as healthy as he says. How does that affect  
11 this particular situation?  
12

13 So, let's say we're able to show that the conch populations are  
14 healthy in the U.S. Caribbean, how does that affect the  
15 interpretation of this ESA threatened species and its application  
16 here?  
17

18 **JENNIFER LEE:** I'm sorry. I was lost in thought, and I think I  
19 missed your final question to me. My apologies.  
20

21 **CLAY PORCH:** So, we're doing a conch survey. Count all the conchs.  
22 Let's suppose, for the time being, that it shows that the conch  
23 populations are healthy in the U.S. Caribbean. How does that affect  
24 the proposed rule and its application for U.S. Caribbean products?  
25

26 **JENNIFER LEE:** Okay. Sorry about that. I mean, all of our rule  
27 making relies on the best available information. Right? So, we  
28 would be factoring that in, in terms of when we're looking at the  
29 data to make decisions on.  
30

31 You know, I can't really speak to exactly what we would do, right,  
32 because it's proposed rulemaking and I'm not really at liberty--  
33 let me rephrase that. At this point, it's just unknown how we're  
34 moving forward. That's why we're working with all the information  
35 and gathering everything that we are.  
36

37 So, but, certainly, when we're making rule making, it's necessary  
38 and advisable. It's what do we need to manage to reduce the  
39 threats. Right? So, if new information is showing that, you know,  
40 this particular place and area is not, you know, having an impact,  
41 then that's something that gets factored and considered into that  
42 rule making process. Does that answer? Sure.  
43

44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The important question that we need to answer  
45 is, can we be exempted from any regulation in the U.S. Caribbean  
46 if we can prove that the queen conch is okay? For example, if you  
47 look at the densities, which is the measure that they use for  
48 determining whether the status of the queen conch is okay, and it

1 varies. In South America, it could be 200 per hectare, and still,  
2 they have problems. Here, you have from 15 to 75, and they are  
3 healthy. The question that fishermen ask, and this is a question  
4 that we have is related to what, Dr. Porch is talking about. If we  
5 can prove, after this study, that the best available information  
6 shows there's no need for implementing any rule regarding  
7 endangered species in the U.S. Caribbean?

8  
9 Can that be done? That's the question.

10  
11 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Jenny, can I answer this one? Because I  
12 feel like, you know, you're a biologist and you're going to give,  
13 like-- well, I'm going to answer the question more from a legal  
14 standpoint in terms of, like, what are the flexibilities under the  
15 Endangered Species Act? And that's the great thing about 4(d)  
16 regulations. They can become really targeted and specific. And so,  
17 you don't have to necessarily incorporate all of the prohibitions  
18 that are contained in section 9 and say that they apply to everyone  
19 and everywhere.

20  
21 You can just say, "We're only going to take the part of section 9  
22 that prohibits imports or exports" or, you know, whatever parts of  
23 it you want, because we think that's what's necessary. And I feel  
24 like part of Clay's question goes to, you know, where the  
25 distinction is in how you look at a species under the MSA versus  
26 the ESA. Right? Under the MSA, you are managing stocks. And so,  
27 you have the Saint Croix stock of queen conch or the Puerto Rico  
28 stock. The ESA, particularly because this is a mollusk, you're  
29 looking at it as a species. How it exists range wide. And so, that  
30 listing determination is based on the status of the species, not  
31 the individual stocks.

32  
33 I think even the listing decision identified places where there  
34 are healthier populations, and I think the 4(d) rule will likely  
35 take those into account. So, you know, you were phrasing the  
36 question more as with, you know, creating an exception. I don't  
37 think that's how the 4(d) rule would read. I don't think it would  
38 say, "Here's the rule. Here's what's prohibited, except in the  
39 Caribbean." I think instead it would read, you know, to be more  
40 targeted about "these are the specific prohibitions we're going to  
41 apply to this species."

42  
43 Right. Does that answer everyone's question? Okay.

44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Kate. Because I don't want people,  
46 fishermen especially, getting out of here thinking that if they  
47 write a letter, everything will be rosy. Once it becomes an  
48 endangered species, it's a hell of a fight to get any species out

1 of it. In the case of the queen conch, it's an international group  
2 that the United States belongs to. So, there are other players,  
3 other things that come in play.

4  
5 Whatever you do, if it doesn't hold water in court, it won't fly.  
6 Exceptions to laws and regulation, they won't fly. So, the best  
7 that we can do is to keep pursuing the collection of the best data  
8 available, so we can use it to present a case in the future. That's  
9 the best thing that we can do.

10  
11 We've tried this before on the national level. Actually, the CITES  
12 group, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered  
13 Species, was ashamed because they had to do the evaluation of the  
14 queen conch twice. The first time they did it in years. The reason  
15 for that is because the first evaluation shows this is what we  
16 need to do, and the country didn't do anything.

17  
18 By the way, the queen conch only occurs in the Caribbean. So, we  
19 are the only ones to blame if something happens to the species.  
20 All the Caribbean, based in the 34 countries. Now, Martha told me  
21 that they're thinking about a third one. That shows that there's  
22 a real issue with the queen conch. Remember, we don't have the  
23 industry they have in Belize. They have processing plants, big  
24 things, and--

25  
26 Anyway, the point is that we want to make sure that the people  
27 understand the mechanisms that we have in place. Once, we have a  
28 species like the queen conch looked at from the point of view of  
29 ESA and MSA, that's that. I believe that we are going to keep the  
30 Council Members and the public abreast of any development.

31  
32 And so, for that, I thank you, Jennifer, for coming here and  
33 talking to us, because it's on the networks. It's everywhere.  
34 Because for many fishermen here, that's the only species, only  
35 queen conch and lobster. That's what they fish for. In other  
36 countries in the Caribbean, they have fishers and fishing  
37 communities that the only thing they fish for is a queen conch.

38  
39 I tell you, if they don't fish for that, they don't have other  
40 avenues. So, that's why this is so difficult. But thank you a lot,  
41 and thank you, Kate, for the explanation.

42  
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson, you still have a question? Or-- Okay.

44  
45 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** It's very worrying for me being part of this  
46 process. I respect everybody here for the job you guys are doing.  
47 But I see unfair-- or when I see unfair, I have to signal it  
48 because we are not the cause of the problem.

1  
2 Now, my point my point is it will be very disgusting to me to lose  
3 the ability to catch a resource that I put in the table of my  
4 people of the Virgin Islands, and some rich guy in the Americas  
5 who is the cause of this situation here today, still be able to  
6 import. So, again, I ask you guys, look into the imports, which is  
7 the root of this cause, and then come back and tell me I can or  
8 cannot continue fishing for this resource.

9  
10 Because we have been diligent. I say again, we have overregulated.  
11 We were catching 250,000 pounds of conch, and we gave it away for  
12 50,000 a year, which is nothing and it's leaving 200,000 pounds  
13 out there to continue reproducing. And we have given our soul to  
14 this Council and everybody that comes and say, "if you don't do  
15 something, we're going to shut you down." And still today, we are  
16 here feeling the same pain I was feeling 20 years ago because I've  
17 been involved in this for a long time.

18  
19 I cannot cry. I cannot get mad, but I have to say what is in my  
20 mind as a fisherman because I pay bills. I pay taxes like everybody  
21 here. And when you take that ability from me, you're putting me in  
22 a big uncomfortable position. So, let we attack the big guys, the  
23 big industries, and give the little fisherman a break. Thank you.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

26  
27 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Miguel, I think that you  
28 are bringing a great point about the things that you asked and  
29 informed about on this table, especially for the people that don't  
30 live off this fishery. In the same line as Gerson, we live from  
31 this fishery, we live from the queen conch. And it's very difficult  
32 for us, as he says, to be part of this table and have the  
33 information and have the situation that we are living in as  
34 artisanal fishers. We are not an industrial fishery, so a small-  
35 scale fishery will not do as hard as all of those big countries  
36 that are importing here.

37  
38 It's not only the amount of pounds that are being imported. It's  
39 also the price that is hitting us really, really hard because we  
40 can't compete with that price. We have a fresh product, but we  
41 can't sell it at the same price that they are bringing it. So, it  
42 is important, the points that Gerson just brought.

43  
44 We need to first look on the big scale at what is really hitting  
45 the queen conch and of course continue with the surveys and  
46 actualize all those reports because we live there every day and we  
47 see how sustainable we have that fishery and the amount that we  
48 receive, and we can't sell because we can't compete with the price.

1 Thank you.

2

3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

4

5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Remember, I don't fish for queen conch,  
6 but the role of everybody around here is to bring the information  
7 so you to make a decision. I would stay a little bit away from my  
8 role and go in the personal way.

9

10 If I were you guys, you and Vanessa, I would sit down with somebody  
11 to write a letter. Talk about the imports because, that way, it  
12 will be part of the record.

13

14 But let me tell you, also, there are people in the Caribbean  
15 writing about imports. And they say, why the hell are you going to  
16 stop with my imports into the United States? My fishery is okay.  
17 So, it goes both ways. But at least, you will have the knowledge  
18 of the mechanism that you have as Kate explained and Jennifer here.

19

20 So, my personal advice would be to-- and we can help you whenever,  
21 and whatever you need or to whom to write the letter or you need  
22 to address that. But I believe that Vanessa and you can put  
23 together a letter and let people know about your ideas, especially  
24 regarding the import. And then they will decide. It doesn't mean  
25 that they will do one thing or the other, but at least it will be  
26 on record.

27

28 And your point about the fishery here, Dr. Porch's point as well,  
29 about this information that they are putting together could be  
30 included in those discussions. So, I am at your service. Graciela  
31 also, if you need any help with that information, let us know.

32

33 Try to do it as quickly as possible in 2025 because, as Jennifer  
34 is saying, they are following a process and in 6 months, or  
35 something like that, we will have something to present to you, if  
36 not sooner.

37

38 **JENNIFER LEE:** And if I may just say, you know, I heard how it can  
39 feel really uncomfortable participating in this process. And so,  
40 one, I just want to let you know how much we appreciate all the  
41 people that participated in those workshops and those  
42 conversations are not lost. I feel like, perhaps, because there's,  
43 a delay in sort of seeing that final workshop report and being  
44 able to read through that, that maybe some people are feeling that  
45 way. But if you recall, I did acknowledge that, you know, we're  
46 continuing with the workshops and then there will be a summary  
47 report that'll come out in which you will get to see your words  
48 and what you spoke of with respect to imports. So, we really do

1 appreciate your input.  
2  
3 That's really the whole point of the workshops is recognizing that  
4 we want to learn more, we want to listen to you, we want to hear  
5 about imports. So, that's really the process that we've been going  
6 down.  
7  
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Jennifer, the last thing. Can you refresh our  
9 memories again about the schedule of the event regarding this  
10 activity? What will happen next? And so, you repeat that again,  
11 please.  
12  
13 **JENNIFER LEE:** Sure. Okay. Yeah. So, we had our domestic workshops.  
14 We've only started doing international workshops. We just had the  
15 very first one. We're engaging in discussion there. We will do a  
16 few targeted virtual workshops, and then we will summarize that  
17 information and prepare a final workshops report. And then, from  
18 there, that information will be used when developing a 4(d) rule.  
19  
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.  
21  
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?  
23  
24 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. Jennifer, are you guys going to do a critical  
25 habitat determination prior to a 4(d) rule for queen conch, or is  
26 there not really a requirement for that? Or is it, considering we  
27 have three other species with similar habitat, use that towards  
28 the 4(d)-rulemaking process?  
29  
30 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Mr. Chair, the legal answer to your question  
31 is, the ESA requires that critical habitat be designated within a  
32 year of its being listed.  
33  
34 **SENNAI HABTES:** That's the next step.  
35  
36 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** The ESA requires that critical habitat be  
37 designated within a year of its listing.  
38  
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Mr. Chairman, that's like a can of worms  
40 because when you have critical habitat, you cannot even look at  
41 the darn thing. So, you know, within a year or two, something will  
42 happen that we'll have to discuss again. But the main point for  
43 everybody in the Council is that we are going to keep inviting  
44 NMFS and whoever is appropriate to discuss these issues, so we'll  
45 be abreast of everything every step of the way. This is not the  
46 last time that we discuss the queen conch.  
47  
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We have to move forward. But before that,

1 when I heard about-- you know, every country has their way of doing  
2 things. I know Belize prohibits the use of scuba tanks to harvest  
3 queen conch. They're harvesting juveniles.

4  
5 That's a juvenile harvesting country. And when they process this  
6 conch-- when we process a conch, you're getting half a pound or  
7 three quarters of a pound when you're selling it to the customer.  
8 In Belize, when they process it, you end up with ounces, and they  
9 dump. They waste a lot of conch meat, the way they process their  
10 stuff. Skin it, do whatever they do, it reduces it to just ounces.  
11 I think that's a problem, but that's a totally different animal.

12  
13 So, I'm going to move on to-- I'm going to make another change to  
14 the schedule. I'm going to have Aging of spiny lobster with Ana  
15 Medina, and then we're going to go to the exemption permit.

16  
17 **ANA G. MEDINA MARTÍNEZ:** Hi, everyone. Can you hear me?

18  
19 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes. Thank you.

20  
21 **ANA G. MEDINA MARTÍNEZ:** Well, can I start?

22  
23 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Yes.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

26  
27 **AGING OF SPINY LOBSTER STUDY--ANA MEDINA, UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO**  
28 **RICO AT MAYAGÜEZ**  
29

30 **ANA G. MEDINA MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Good afternoon. My name is Ana  
31 Medina. I am a recent graduate from the Marine Science of the  
32 University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez. And I'm going to talk to  
33 you today about a brief summary about my thesis project title  
34 Determining the Age Size Relationship of Panulirus Argus in the  
35 Southwest Area of Puerto Rico.

36  
37 To start, well, in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean spiny lobster is the  
38 most viable, economic fishery. This is a nocturnal crustacean.  
39 They grow by molting and when they vacate their own shells, they  
40 absorb water while expanding their body size. This is very  
41 important because this is one of the difficulties in the process  
42 of aging this animal.

43  
44 It is important to know that panulirus argus is the most abundant  
45 lobster in Puerto Rico but also panulirus guttatus is reported in  
46 the catch.

47  
48 There have been signs that this animal has been overfished. Many

1 factors play crucial roles in influencing the productivity of  
2 lobsters, and fish pressure can also be influencing the length and  
3 growth of this animal.

4  
5 So, the objectives of my study were to estimate and construct the  
6 age structure of panulirus argus population in the southwest coast  
7 of Puerto Rico using the novel technique of gastric male ossicles.  
8 In addition, this allowed us to construct length age and weight  
9 age relationship, which are fundamental for stock assessments.

10  
11 Here we can see the site locations. The majority of the lobsters  
12 captured were near the coast of Cabo Rojo. More than 100 lobsters  
13 were captured from this area. Every lobster captured was tagged  
14 with a number and from every location where the lobster was  
15 captured, we have the coordinates, its area, the time, the duration  
16 of the dive, the moon phase, among other information.

17  
18 When we got all the lobsters, we processed them in the Natural  
19 Resources Department in Cabo Rojo. The lab work was to, first,  
20 determine the sex, if the female had eggs or spermatophore. We  
21 weighed the animal and measured the carapace's length. We detected  
22 if it was molting and if it had any wounds.

23  
24 Here, we can see a picture, exposing the stomach, the  
25 hepatopancreas, and in this case, its a female gonad. On the  
26 picture B, we can see the stomach stored in a preservation  
27 solution. Then we proceed to process the stomachs, and here we can  
28 see a stomach open from a lobster. Here we can see the ossicle  
29 exposed. This is the part that we are interested in. This was  
30 caught to be divided into its parts, into two Pterocardiac, one  
31 mesocardiac and two zygodiac. For our study, we only use the  
32 one pterocardiac. This is because it's the best part to manage and  
33 to be able to read its bands. So, this is the best part.

34  
35 For the methodology, for this we had to make a layer of epoxy in  
36 silicone ice cube trays and bake that for 3 hours. Then, we put  
37 the ossicles, and we covered them again with a second layer of  
38 epoxy until we had a clear cube with the sample inside. Then, we  
39 store them in coin envelopes, and when we were ready for the next  
40 step, we used a pair of diamond blades to cut the sample into a  
41 fine cut. That fine cut was then looked under the microscope. This  
42 part was a very interactive process because we had to polish the  
43 slide and be very careful not to damage it or break it.

44  
45 Here we can see an example of one of the images of the ossicle and  
46 showing how the bands could be seen. All ossicles were read by a  
47 total of four readers to confirm the quantity of the bands and  
48 verify band counting position between readers because as we can

1 all see here, we can all vary from really how many bands we can  
2 see because there are some good bands and prominent bands, and  
3 then there are other bands that also can be confused.

4  
5 Each reader made two estimates of the maximum and the minimum bands  
6 that the animal showed in the image. Then the average of those two  
7 estimates were calculated to determine the age.

8  
9 These are graphs showing, basically, the quality control we had to  
10 apply for all of the 100 lobsters because each image captured was  
11 categorized by excellent, good, bad, and regular. And also, the  
12 confidence of the reader in establishing those bands and the  
13 quality of the photo. So, because of that quality control, out of  
14 100 samples, we only use 35 ossicles for the final analysis.

15  
16 So, basically, some of the final results were represented by these  
17 graphs. The first one shows that there is a positive relationship  
18 between carapace length and age and a positive correlation between  
19 weight and years and a direct positive correlation between weight  
20 and carapace length.

21  
22 So, the conclusion was that the age, the carapace length, and the  
23 weight of the Caribbean spiny lobster was determined by a total of  
24 35 individuals from the southwest area of Puerto Rico. The quality  
25 of the images significantly impacted the outcomes, which indicates  
26 that this technique can be further enhanced through continuous  
27 training of new readers and continuous practice of more experience.

28  
29 Even though filtering the images and the readers used in the study  
30 was necessary to reader experience and image quality, the age  
31 length and age weight relationships can be considered in further  
32 analysis of the status of the lobster population in this area. We  
33 recommend ongoing ossicle age training, collaborating with  
34 fishermen and restaurants who can donate the carapace stomach part  
35 to this type of studies instead of sacrificing wild lobster for  
36 this training process and also create a research cooperative  
37 agreement if more samples are needed.

38  
39 We also recommend continuing to promote to the community that it  
40 is illegal to fish female lobsters with eggs and that the minimum  
41 carapace length to catch is 3.5 inches. It is very important to  
42 reinforce the regulations for a sustainable Caribbean spiny  
43 lobster fishery in Puerto Rico. Thank you.

#### 44 45 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

46  
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Ana, any questions for Ana? Okay,  
48 Vance?

1  
2 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thank you for your presentation. Were you  
3 able to determine the correlation coefficients based on the graphs  
4 that you showed between the two parameters?  
5

6 **ANA G. MEDINA MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Yes. I don't have them with me, but  
7 yes, we could determine those coefficient factors.  
8

9 **VANCE VICENTE:** Okay. Thank you.

10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.  
12

13 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez. Thank  
14 you, Ana, for this presentation. It's very impressive for me as a  
15 fisherman, to see how all this science is done.  
16

17 I just have a question. Do you have in your information, how many  
18 pounds was the biggest one and the years of it?  
19

20 **ANA G. MEDINA MARTÍNEZ:** The years I think it was 6.5, the maximum  
21 age we registered. And the maximum pounds I will have to look it  
22 up because I don't remember the exact number. I do remember that  
23 the biggest lobster we captured was 14 centimeters of carapace  
24 length.  
25

26 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Thanks.  
27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Ana? Seeing none. Thank  
29 you, Ana. So, we're going to go to Sarah Stephenson on the Exempt  
30 Fishing Permit.  
31

32 **EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT (EFP) UPDATE—SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA**  
33 **FISHERIES/SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE (SERO)**  
34

35 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Alright. Good afternoon. I'm going to just  
36 walk through a summary of a request that our office received for  
37 an exempted fishing permit.  
38

39 So, just as a brief reminder, an existing fishing permit is  
40 required for any activity that someone may want to do that is  
41 outside of our current regulations. For example, if they want to  
42 catch a fish that's under the size limit that we have on the  
43 regulations, they will need to request an exempted fishing permit  
44 from our office. So, there's a whole process that we go through  
45 when we receive an application. One of which is to inform the  
46 Council of the project. We did send a letter to the Council back  
47 in October, which I hope everybody got a chance to see it and to  
48 read it. It kind of outlines in a little bit more detail the

1 project objectives of this request.  
2  
3 So, sorry, are you pulling it back up? Oh, okay. So, this one.  
4 Thank you.  
5  
6 So, the request came from the University of South Carolina, and  
7 they're requesting the permit to collect a maximum of 60 red hind  
8 from two sites, the Hind Bank Marine Conservation District off of  
9 Saint Thomas and the Red Hind Spawning Aggregation Area, which  
10 we're just going to call Lang Bank off of Saint Croix. And they  
11 want to collect those fish two days before and after the full moon  
12 in this spawning period. So, December, January of 2025, and  
13 February of 2025. And so, they received funding from the  
14 Cooperative Research Program, and I put the link there if you want  
15 to go see the funding.  
16  
17 Then, our office has a web page where we put applications and  
18 status of any exempting fishing permits that we've received and  
19 issued. We have those for all the branches, so not just the  
20 Caribbean branch, but the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic.  
21 But this link here is to our specific web page.  
22  
23 So, the project objectives are to address gaps in the red hind  
24 demographics and life history, which were identified as research  
25 recommendations in SEDAR 35. So, this information could provide  
26 current region-specific information for upcoming red hind stock  
27 assessments. I believe, red hind is on the schedule after the spiny  
28 lobster. So, in the next couple years this could be information  
29 used in that next stock assessment. The project would also evaluate  
30 the effectiveness of the seasonal and area closures through  
31 replication of past collections and analysis of temporal trends  
32 related to size at age, sex ratios, and size age frequency  
33 distributions for red hind during the spawning events. So, they  
34 are mimicking past work that had been done 10 years ago and, I  
35 believe, 5 years ago. So, by targeting the red hind during the  
36 spawning aggregation, the project will collect data on the larger  
37 size fish that are currently not available.  
38  
39 So, the exemptions that we would be granting them if this permit  
40 is issued would exempt them from the area closure of the MCD that's  
41 closed year-round to fishing, and then it would also exempt them  
42 from the seasonal closure of the red hind spawning aggregation off  
43 of Saint Croix, which is closed seasonally from December 1<sup>st</sup> to the  
44 last day of February. So, that's what we would be exempting them  
45 from.  
46  
47 Their research methods include collecting 60 red hinds from each  
48 site, in the 25-to-75-meter depth range. Once those 60 red hinds

1 are caught, they would stop fishing. During each fishing day, the  
2 contracted commercial fishermen would use a maximum of four fishing  
3 rods, each with three hooks. All activities would occur in federal  
4 waters and while adrift, so they would not be anchoring. All other  
5 fish caught would be returned to the water, using a descending  
6 device if necessary.

7  
8 And then the samples that they collect would be stored on ice and  
9 transported back to a field lab where they would record all the  
10 pertinent data such as length and width. They would take otoliths,  
11 gonads, eyes, muscles, stomachs, and fin clips. Some of which would  
12 be used in this project, and I think some which would be used in  
13 future, analysis.

14  
15 So, the timeline for issuing the permit, we did post in the federal  
16 register a notice that we received it and we're taking comments on  
17 that. And I put the direct link on how to comment. It's open  
18 through December 9<sup>th</sup>, so there's still a few more days if you would  
19 like to comment on this project. This is the means by which you  
20 could do that. We can discuss it here at the Council meeting, but  
21 if you would like a comment to be considered by NMFS, please use  
22 this comment link to do so. You can do it in both venues if you  
23 like, but the one here is the appropriate method for which we will  
24 consider.

25  
26 The permit, if we grant it, would be valid from the date of  
27 signature through March of 2025. It would be required to be on all  
28 onboard all fishing vessels, and it would include the list of  
29 applicants in it and any exemptions like the MCD exemption and the  
30 Lang Bank exemption, and it would also include conditions that our  
31 office would put in place. For example, specific fishing dates and  
32 the number of red hinds that they would be allowed to take from  
33 each management area. If there's gear specifications, which in  
34 this case there are, they would only be allowed to use hook and  
35 line. So, for instance, no traps, no diving.

36  
37 As I mentioned, the permit must be on board. The permit also must  
38 be signed by the applicant. And then, we would also have reporting  
39 requirements. So, those are listed in the permit as well, and they  
40 would send those both to the Southeast Regional Office and to the  
41 Southeast Fishery Science Center. We could also put other  
42 recommendations in there, for example, that they coordinate with  
43 any other overlapping projects that may be occurring in the area.

44  
45 So, all of that would be included in the EFP, which they would  
46 have on the vessel with them in case law enforcement came up and  
47 wanted to know what they were doing fishing in a closed area.

1 So, that that's the permit, as we've received it. As I mentioned,  
2 the comment period is still open. So, with that, I'll take any  
3 questions.

4

5

#### QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions for Sarah? Vance?

8

9 **VANCE VICENTE:** Not a question. Just a statement that, as you well  
10 know, the red hind has been the most commercial grouper in demand  
11 of all grouper species within the federally managed waters. And  
12 that even though life history information has been collected in  
13 the '90s, there are significant gaps addressed in a certain  
14 document that I was able to evaluate and review. So, I hope that  
15 this permit goes through. Thank you.

16

17 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. I totally agree with what Vance said. You  
18 know? The importance of us getting life history information for  
19 when we are doing the stock assessment is very important. And, you  
20 know, the fishers are ready to work with the team.

21

22 If this permit can go through, we're ready to work and get the  
23 fish that they need in order for them to process them and get all  
24 the information needed because red hind is next year, by the end  
25 of next year, early '26. So, we need to gather as much information,  
26 close the data issues that we run into every time we do stock  
27 assessment. So, in this case, we have been offered an opportunity  
28 to be prepared so that when we come to do that stock assessment,  
29 we can have a lot more information to move forward in getting that  
30 process completed. So, I hope that this permit can be approved.  
31 Thank you.

32

33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

34

35 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As Julian says, I am also  
36 really happy to start saying that the commercial fishermen will be  
37 part of this. We have been asking for a long time to participate  
38 actively in collaborations and research, especially because we  
39 know what we have in there, and we know the spots, and we know  
40 that we want to share that expertise with the scientists. So, for  
41 me also, I think that this permit should be approved. Thanks.

42

43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

44

45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, there is ongoing work at the Lang  
46 Bank through the coral reef conservation program grant that was  
47 provided to the Council to determine the abundance of red kind at  
48 the spawning aggregation in Lang Bank. We have deployed instruments

1 for describing the environmental conditions in the area. We have  
2 deployed or we are deploying acoustic instruments to hear the red  
3 hind when the aggregation begins, when the aggregation peaks, when  
4 the aggregation dissipates. We're--

5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, who are we for the record?

7  
8 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** We are the CFMC, Coral Reef Conservation  
9 Grant that has been provided to a group of scientists, including  
10 experts on acoustics, diving surveys, and physical oceanography.

11  
12 So, the idea that the Council was searching for is that this work  
13 was done on two sites already. We're trying to see which one of  
14 all of the other ways of surveying and determining the abundance  
15 of the red hind at the aggregation sites that are already under  
16 protection by the Council can be used in an easier way to determine  
17 abundances at these sites over time.

18  
19 You have three sites off of the West Coast of Puerto Rico, the MCD  
20 that was originally closed for the red hind in 1999, and the Lang  
21 Bank. So, those are specific area closures for red hind. The  
22 monitoring of these areas has been done in a gappy way whenever  
23 there were funds available to determine the number of groupers in  
24 the area. And for the last two years and this upcoming year, there  
25 will be three years of information coming up regarding when they  
26 appear at these spawning sites, how long do they remain, what their  
27 peak aggregation numbers are, and how long does it last between,  
28 November, December, and April.

29  
30 So, that has been already conducted in two sites. This would be  
31 the third site, the Coral Reef Conservation Program. The problem  
32 is that funds will not be available specifically for the Councils  
33 anymore after next year. So, we only have one more year of CRCP  
34 funding to request. I'm saying all this because this is the last  
35 opportunity that we have to really put in all of the efforts of  
36 every type of surveying that can be conducted at depth, because  
37 this is also not necessarily the shallowest part it's now.

38  
39 So, the question is we don't know how many red hinds come to the  
40 aggregation in Lang Bank. We have no idea, really. We know that  
41 they aggregate, and we've been communicating with the fishers and  
42 Carlos in terms of determining the areas that we need to survey.  
43 Not knowing how many fish are at the aggregation, the 60 fish might  
44 be the fish that are aggregating this year to spawn. Then that  
45 might be it. There might be 100, maybe 1000. Well, to-- hold on a  
46 sec. I mean, this is what we're trying to document. Because  
47 remember, there hasn't been any fishing at Lang Bank since it was  
48 closed in 1996. So, fishing has been prohibited since then. No

1 traps were allowed since 2005. So, there have been regulations in  
2 place that really, we don't have any data regarding the red hind  
3 aggregation during the peak months of aggregation.

4  
5 So, given that, you know, the Council has to address the two issues  
6 of, you know, is it worth maybe fishing for the 60 fish that will  
7 be at the aggregation site versus trying to figure out if we have  
8 more fish in the area or not. So, you know, that's one of the  
9 concerns. The second concern has to do with safety because you  
10 should not be fishing at the same time that you have divers in the  
11 water. There's also going to be an ROV. So, there is also the  
12 potential for a crossover from fishing lines and the ROV, etcetera.

13  
14 So, these are the things that we need to talk about in terms of  
15 the decision that needs to be made. They will be diving during the  
16 peak moon phase, and that's probably when most of the harvesting  
17 should be done, because that's when the red hinds will be  
18 aggregated. So, it puts that balance.

19  
20 We don't know if the largest fish will be present, you know, during  
21 that peak or if they should be fishing in deeper water rather than  
22 at the aggregation to collect the larger fish. That's also a  
23 possibility of having the two things being conducted at once.  
24 That's one possibility. So, there are solutions to this problem,  
25 but there is a great concern regarding the efforts that we're  
26 putting into trying to figure out how many fish are really spawning  
27 at this site versus additional information that needs to be added  
28 to the life history in terms of the larger fish.

29  
30 Do the larger fish have to be collected only during the spawning  
31 period, or can they be collected afterwards? And afterwards means  
32 that they would have to be collected most likely at deeper sites.  
33 So, these are the questions that are on the table right now  
34 regarding what the Council needs to do. You don't have to send  
35 comments. The deadline is December 9<sup>th</sup> for the exempted fishing  
36 permit.

37  
38 The people who are involved in the different surveys are commenting  
39 on what they see the problems might be and what solutions they can  
40 offer. So, the Council needs to decide if you want to comment on  
41 the exempted fishing permit or if you want to go ahead and-- but  
42 this is a comment here for the Council. This is not the official  
43 comment site. You have to go to the website and submit your  
44 comments via the website that Sarah put on the on the screen.

45  
46 So, I think I've covered pretty much all the points that, kind of,  
47 cross lines between the two surveys that are being conducted.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have Gerson.  
2

3 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Without offending anybody, there's a say in the  
4 Virgin Islands, the more the merrier. You will not catch the last  
5 60 fish. You will not see the last 60 fish. This year, we have  
6 been having hind in our catches every single day, and I guarantee  
7 you, you will see thousands of fish there. I am against a lot of  
8 what you just said, and this is without offense.  
9

10 We have been doing studies in that area. I was involved with the  
11 Nature Conservancy. I was involved with Rick Nemeth, and I was  
12 involved with Virginia to do studies in that place. There is not  
13 one year were we have not gone to that elbow. The closed area is  
14 2 miles by 2 miles, and everywhere you dive in those drop-offs,  
15 you will see the hind in numbers.  
16

17 I think two studies that involve fishermen should be done  
18 simultaneously because one will be counting, and one will do it be  
19 doing other types of studies with the fish. And as I said at the  
20 beginning, the more the merrier. The more information you get, the  
21 better it's going to be for everybody on this decision-making  
22 committee, to bring to the table everything that can be harvest.  
23

24 I think, and without offense, I say again, it's selfish to try to  
25 take somebody out from doing a study that is involving fishermen  
26 to go out there and show everybody else that you guys are being  
27 proactive in involving fishermen in your studies. If you take that  
28 equation out, you're taking away the interest of fishermen to  
29 involve themselves in helping you guys in the future. So don't  
30 close that door. Keep your minds open.  
31

32 Don't think that those 60 fish that are going to be taken out to  
33 sacrifice for the better of the humanity of fish will do something  
34 better in the future than what you're making it look now so ugly.  
35 I guarantee you, as I said, no offense, but out there, I live in  
36 the water more than I live at home. I've seen things that probably  
37 you would never see in your life, lobsters dancing in front of a  
38 female mating habits, conch climbing in elk horn corals that you  
39 will ask yourself how the hell that conch got on top of that elk  
40 horn coral.  
41

42 We are there every day. That's our office. And we see things that  
43 if I tell you I see in this and the abundance is this way, I'm not  
44 exaggerating. I'm telling you what I'm seeing. So, consider more  
45 studies than just one study. If the funds are there, use them. And  
46 in the future, you will say that big nose fisherman had the razón.  
47 He was speaking the truth.  
48

1 So, as I said, Graciela, no offenses, but I think that everybody  
2 should get equal opportunity in this process. Julian?

3  
4 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just to chime in to what Gerson is saying. I think  
5 these people are scientists that's doing this work. And if you  
6 have two studies going on and you think there's going to be some  
7 kind of issue with diving and fishing and everything, I think  
8 everybody could collaborate with each other. I think a  
9 collaboration cannot happen where Reni and his team is talking to  
10 Virginia and her team, which are the commercial fishers. So, I  
11 don't see why the two services can't be going on at the same time  
12 because I am pretty sure that the times of the survey for each day  
13 might be different. We might be harvesting the 60 fish in the  
14 afternoon, and they might be diving in the morning, or they might  
15 be diving in the afternoon, and we're fishing in the morning.

16  
17 So, there are a lot of factors, and we need to ensure that we get  
18 it. This life history information is important to us, the Fishers.  
19 This is where our livelihood comes in. Just like you counting the  
20 fish, trying to figure out how many fish come there during that  
21 period of time. All of that is important to determine what the new  
22 annual catch limit is going to be.

23  
24 So, you know, I still demand or request that this permit is  
25 approved to move forward. You asked for the fisherman to be  
26 involved. The fishermen are involved in this one. We are not  
27 involved in the other one that's going on.

28  
29 We weren't asked to be involved in that one. But we are involved  
30 in the one where we're going to go and catch a 60 fish, if the  
31 permit is granted. Thank you.

32  
33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Well, I didn't--

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

36  
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** What I brought to the Council was the  
38 two things that are happening. One solution that I offer was to  
39 have one survey conducted on one site, the other survey conducted  
40 at a separate time. The second solution that you can consider is  
41 that we cannot postpone the coral reef conservation program grant  
42 because that ends in September. That's it. We cannot move it.

43  
44 Can the exempted fishing permit be carried on in the next year? I  
45 don't know what the funding is, I think it's cooperative research  
46 funding. So, it depends on what regulation they have regarding the  
47 timing. They are talking to each other, and that's one of the  
48 things that has been happening.

1  
2 So, the issue here is just that I brought to the attention of the  
3 Council. There are two projects going on, and these are the pros  
4 and cons of having them together or separate.  
5

6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And that's it. To remind everybody that this  
7 discussion is for the benefit of the Council, but you still have  
8 to send your comments directly to the address that you have on  
9 board there. What García has presented was all the elements of  
10 judgment for discussion at this meeting. But at another time, we  
11 don't have authority today. You're going to do this. You're going  
12 to do that. Nope. But anyway-- Kate?  
13

14 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Mr. Chair, if I may. So, the discussion has  
15 been interesting, but, you know, what is the Council's role here?  
16 The permit is not presented to the Council to approve or  
17 disapprove, but if the Council wants to take a position on the  
18 permit and make that position known to NMFS, you know, NMFS could  
19 then take that into account. So, I don't know if the request is  
20 that the Council take a position or not take a position, but I  
21 think it would be useful to kind of focus on what is being asked  
22 of the Council to do with regard to this permit application. They  
23 are not the decision maker. They can simply voice an opinion one  
24 way or another or choose not to.  
25

26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's the other point. We also have the no  
27 action. In this case, yeah, I love the no action. So, you can drop  
28 it now here. We have enough element of judgment here.  
29

30 The people who are around the table know that they have to go and  
31 send it. I will encourage the fishermen, especially Julian,  
32 Vanessa, and Gerson to address your concerns directly to them,  
33 because that's where it should be going. If you are in favor  
34 because of the rationale that you're presenting here, the abundance  
35 of the red hind and so forth, that should be sent to the appropriate  
36 channels so they would take that in consideration.  
37

38 We do not disagree that getting information on biology and natural  
39 history is the way to go. Maybe the practicalities or the realities  
40 applied out there, that, may have some tweaking to do. But the  
41 point is that we have to follow the regulation. And what Kate just  
42 said is the way to go.  
43

44 So, Mr. Chairman, what is the pleasure of the Council at this time?  
45

46 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, I think that because  
47 this is already presented in here and we have a great conversation,  
48 we as Council should take a position and at least, write a letter,

1 and put the comments, as they asked in regulations.gov. Not only  
2 individual but also as a Council.

3  
4 Because we need to follow this information. We need to work with  
5 this and also, we need to have that opportunity to support this  
6 kind of exercise and outreach, especially because we know that for  
7 2026, we're going to be working with the red hind. So, if I can or  
8 if someone can help me, I would like to make a motion.

9  
10 No? Okay.

11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

13  
14 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** We keep coming back to SEDAR. So, there  
15 are a couple of things about SEDAR. SEDAR at the last spiny  
16 lobster, which is a single species assessment, discussed the  
17 possibility of doing a procedural workshop regarding either  
18 socioeconomics or a multi-species assessment. So, those are things  
19 that the steering committee of the SEDAR need to hear from the  
20 Caribbean Council about whether they want to go in that direction  
21 or not.

22  
23 So, red hind and hogfish are both in the list of the SEDAR hopeful  
24 list to be done. So, one thing, you know, is to go deeper into the  
25 matrix that the Science Center has provided for us, because at the  
26 last meeting, the correction factors were an issue that should not  
27 have been discussed at the SEDAR data workshop. That should have  
28 been resolved before coming to the meeting, and that's something  
29 that we've mentioned that has to do, and Kevin mentioned, across  
30 the board for all the species.

31  
32 So, there are a number of issues with the SEDAR. So, red hind also  
33 could be for the three islands, for example. I mean, that's still  
34 something that the steering committee can hear from the SEDAR rep  
35 from the Council. So it is on the list, but it's not written in  
36 stone. So, that's why one of the solutions might be if we can  
37 gather additional data in later years if the funding availability  
38 responds positively to that.

39  
40 If it doesn't, which probably it doesn't, then it has to be  
41 collected during the period of time that the survey has to be  
42 conducted, and that would be this season. So, the Council need to  
43 tell us whether we need to do a letter or not.

44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But right now, the question is simple. Do  
46 you want to support that they collect 60 fishes in 4 months? Yes,  
47 or no? Yes.

48

1 So, if you say yes, that will be your comment. We want to collect  
2 and let them collect the entire 60 fish. They probably can collect  
3 that in one Saturday. I don't know. But they need four months to  
4 collect the fish.

5  
6 But that's a question that we need to ask. Ask and answer.

7  
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** But that would be done by responding to that  
9 regulation.gov site. Right?

10  
11 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So, if the Council wanted to take a formal  
12 position and submit that during the public comment period, they  
13 could. If it came after the public comment period, I think NMFS  
14 would still take it into account. I don't think NMFS would ignore  
15 it. But, you know, there's going to be a timing issue. I don't  
16 know when a decision will be made on the permit, so you know if  
17 you got it submitted before December 9<sup>th</sup> that it would be timely.

18  
19 If it comes sometime after December 9<sup>th</sup>, you know, like I said, I'm  
20 sure as long as the decision hasn't been made, it will be taken  
21 into account. But, you know, there's just a risk as to when the  
22 decision will be made.

23  
24 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, I just want to put for the record that  
25 because I am part of the agency that will be making the decision  
26 on the on the granting of the EFP, I will abstain from voting on  
27 this one.

28  
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, are we saying that we need to make a motion  
30 here?

31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** If you want. Go ahead.

33  
34 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think, like, we are not the people evaluating  
35 this permit. One, because we have not fully reviewed the  
36 information submitted on the permit, and two, because we haven't  
37 compared that to the things that are being requested in the permit  
38 associated with SEDAR.

39  
40 In my opinion, without doing a full review of the permit,  
41 evaluating it and putting a recommendation on it would be improper.  
42 Right? There are ways in which the Council can get engaged with  
43 research permits and projects that are going to be submitted for  
44 things that should come prior to the point that these things are  
45 being submitted.

46  
47 In the instance here, if we want to recommend and support the  
48 project doing so, we can easily do that inside the public comment

1 period. There is no problem with stating we support this research  
2 under these requirements. That's a simple decision that can be  
3 made. You can have a conversation. We can make a motion to do that.  
4

5 What we should not be doing is commenting on the validity of the  
6 research because we are not reviewing that.  
7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we're back to square one. So, like I say,  
9 again, should we just make a comment to the to the website? Is  
10 that what I'm asking? Or and then leave it at that. Right?  
11

12 **SENNAI HABTES:** Is that the question that we are deciding? If that  
13 is the case, we should state that. We've had a very-- you know, a  
14 lot of conversations and a lot of things that are being said. If,  
15 as a Council, right now, we're evaluating whether we want to add  
16 a comment to the permit review during the process before December  
17 9<sup>th</sup>, we should pose that question and then determine what it is  
18 that we want to say.  
19

20 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** And just to clarify, the fact that NMFS  
21 shared and notified the Council of this exempted fishing permit,  
22 it wasn't because of anything special about the permit or the or  
23 the two ongoing, you know, potential studies. That is just part of  
24 the process. When NMFS receives an exempt fishing permit  
25 application, it notifies the relevant Council. And, you know, if  
26 it creates the opportunity where the Council can express it's an  
27 opinion, but there's no requirement that they do it, you know, you  
28 could choose to do nothing, you know, and if there's no consensus  
29 then you may just not do anything. But if you want to, you certainly  
30 can.  
31

32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But wait. We don't need consensus for that. If  
33 you want a motion, you use a vote for the darn thing.  
34

35 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** That's what I mean. Like, if there's a  
36 motion to kind of documenting an opinion but the motion fails,  
37 then you don't have the votes. So  
38

39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I have to repeat it again. We are only talking  
40 about 60 fish. The end product is whether they would be-- no matter  
41 what we say, the last word is from the action agency. They will be  
42 determining what to do or not. So, it's good to discuss it here,  
43 but the main point is that the fishermen around here know where to  
44 send their comments and that's there.  
45

46 And then the Council can make a decision to stay away from this,  
47 at this time because of everything that has been said around the  
48 table. That won't change the end product. That won't change the

1 decision of the action agency. I'm sure that they will do what  
2 they need to do, taking into consideration everything that is under  
3 the law. So, the only thing that we need now, Mr. Chairman, is  
4 whether you would like to go the no action way or do you want to  
5 let them know what you think as a Council.

6

7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

8

9 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I agree with him, but I agree with other things  
10 too. I think we have been presented this with a project, another  
11 project. We are facing the fact that very soon we are not going to  
12 have any funding. So right now, we have funding. I think another  
13 study in an area in which we know is critical is going to help us,  
14 some way or another.

15

16 So, I think we should, as a Council, write a letter that we have  
17 read this and explain, we have not seen everything he said, but  
18 that we like the project, and it should be approved, and we are  
19 backing it. Without saying-- and clarify ourselves, you know, we  
20 cover our ass. Excuse me. I'm sorry.

21

22 I think we should pull forward because I look at the future and we  
23 are not going to get too many opportunities like this in the  
24 future. And I think this is a great opportunity to come up with  
25 more data because we need data all the time.

26

27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. I know my concern is, why take fish  
28 from an aggregation when you want to know life history, if you can  
29 catch fish in other places. I know a place north of Green Key  
30 Island where you can catch red hind. So, I'm not sure about why  
31 hit an aggregation area, but I'll let the Council decide what they  
32 want to do.

33

34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You just told everybody to go fish where Gerson  
35 used to fish. So, Mr. Chairman, it's late in the afternoon.  
36 Whatever you want to do.

37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** You want to say something? Chat.

39

40 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Dr. Virginia Shervette. "Dr. Shervette  
41 here. My son is having surgery at the moment, so I am not able to  
42 speak. But I do want to point out that no one from Reni's group  
43 has communicated with us about the project. We made it clear to  
44 Sarah that we are happy to coordinate with them though. But we do  
45 not feel it's appropriate for Graciela to state that our ongoing  
46 work in Lang Bank with fishers should be discontinued to allow for  
47 her scientist project.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we need a motion.  
2  
3 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to present a motion.  
4 I don't know if maybe Kate might help me with the words.  
5  
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just tell me what you want to say, and we'll  
7 write it. Yeah.  
8  
9 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** It's just to clarify because before I try to  
10 make a motion someone told me, "No." So, just to do the things the  
11 right way.  
12  
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. *The motion will be to endorse a permit to*  
14 *remove 60 fish from the Lang Bank area.*  
15  
16 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Exactly.  
17  
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. We need to wait until we have the motion on  
19 the screen, and then we talk to death about it, but not now.  
20  
21 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Supposed to be endorsed or support? To support.  
22 Liajay, please. Instead of "endorsing," put "support." "To support  
23 the approval of the permit."  
24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. The motion is for the Council to support  
26 the approval of the permit to remove 60 fish from the Lang Bank  
27 area. To remove 60 red hinds. So, delete "fish." Yeah.  
28  
29 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** And I think it'd be important to say during  
30 the aggregation, like, when that would occur.  
31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, yeah.  
33  
34 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I mean or just say "the permit as described  
35 in the application," and then we don't have to get into the  
36 details.  
37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** During the spawning aggregation, period?  
39  
40 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Actually, I recommend just having it say  
41 support the approval of the permit as described in the application.  
42  
43 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think you also need to put in the motion that it  
44 will be to put in a public comment from the Caribbean Fisheries  
45 Management Council to support the approval of the permit that's  
46 described in the exempted fishing permit application request from  
47 Shervette and Rivera.  
48

1 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Okay. So, a couple of others recommended  
2 modifications. Instead of "to putting in," just "to submit a letter  
3 of support," if it is during the comment period, that's great, but  
4 it really doesn't have to be, and the Council could send that  
5 letter directly to NMFS. It could also do it through  
6 regulations.gov if it wants everyone else to have access to it,  
7 but the Council wouldn't be required to do that for the letter to  
8 be.

9  
10 So, for the purpose of the motion, "to submit a letter of support  
11 of the" let's maybe, like, "exempt fishing permit application  
12 submitted by" "permit" would come before "application." I don't  
13 think you need, "as described in the application," but and then  
14 see if the motioner is happy with that.

15  
16 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Liajay, could you put a little bigger, please?  
17 Sorry. Okay. "Motion for the Council to submit a letter of support  
18 of the exempt fish impairment application submitted by researchers  
19 Dr. Virginia Shervette and Dr. Jesús Rivera."

20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** The motion is by Vanessa. We need a second.  
22 Nobody's second? Then throw it away. Well, you have to second  
23 first.

24  
25 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I second.

26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Second by Roberto Sabater. Now it is open for  
28 discussion.

29  
30 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I think you should read. Okay. Okay. I think it  
31 should read somewhere, "permit application number" such and such  
32 and such and such. Because that's an open letter to anything in  
33 the world. So, it should have a name and a last name or a number  
34 or something like that. Or maybe, I don't know, if it has it or  
35 not, but--

36  
37 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I mean, we could reference the federal  
38 register notice that describes it.

39  
40 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Because that's an open letter to I don't know  
41 what.

42  
43 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I guess to avoid any confusion that this  
44 might be in support of some other application that we may not know  
45 about, we could specify, and if that's the concern, I'm going to  
46 ask my colleague Anne Kersting to read the NMFS docket number  
47 referenced in the Federal Register notice.

48

1 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** It is number 2024-0127.  
2  
3  
4 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Yeah. But then you need, after the word  
5 "application," "referenced in docket number."  
6  
7 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Kate, for that. And thank you,  
8 Roberto, for the suggestion. I accept the motion.  
9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we're going to do, since there are  
11 differences of opinion here, we're going to do a roll call vote.  
12 I want to start with Sennai?  
13  
14 **SENNAI HABTES:** Abstain.  
15  
16 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Abstain.  
17  
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes.  
19  
20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Abstain.  
21  
22 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Yes.  
23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, abstain. And Kreglo?  
25  
26 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Yes.  
27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** *So, motion carries because there's only two*  
29 *yeses. The rest are abstention. three yeses. Alright. Got rid of*  
30 *that.*  
31  
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Congratulations.  
33  
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, now we're going to move into Outreach and  
35 Education. Jannette Ramos.  
36  
37 **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION REPORT—ALIDA ORTIZ AND JANNETTE RAMOS-**  
38 **GARCÍA**  
39  
40 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is  
41 Jannette Ramos-García. I'm presenting the Outreach and Education  
42 Advisory Panel Report to the Council. Cristina, the presentation?  
43 Thank you.  
44  
45 Well, in September 2024, Wilson Santiago, Liaison from Puerto Rico,  
46 and me, Jannette Ramos-García accompanied anthropologist Suzana  
47 Blake from NOAA to Vieques and to Culebra and we interviewed 17  
48 fishermen, and fishers, for the EEJ project. Some of those

1 interviews where women, that's why I say fishers instead of  
2 fishermen. But most important we have found that some of the  
3 fishers are very aware of climate change, global warming, habitat  
4 loss and the decline in fish stocks, which forces them to fish at  
5 deeper levels here in Puerto Rico.

6  
7 We have often talked to other fishers in those interviews, and  
8 they told us about the hazards that they are having with the  
9 fishmongers. Also, we presented the Council at the MREP workshop  
10 that was held in Fajardo, Puerto Rico from August 22 to 25<sup>th</sup>. We  
11 attended the workshops and took part in some of them, in my case.

12  
13 In the update of Outreach and Education products. We have the  
14 illustrated catalog of the fish and invertebrate species included  
15 in the IBFMPs for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint  
16 Croix, and it is in progress.

17  
18 The activities and products for 2024 and 2025 are the fish  
19 identification booklets for children based on the, IBFMPs.  
20 Integration of concepts on marine fisheries ecosystem in the U.S.  
21 Caribbean to the regular education curriculum, the produce of  
22 outreach and education materials to conduct workshops with fishers  
23 and their communities on the issues of climate change and the  
24 impacts of the U.S. Caribbean marine fisheries. Also, we are  
25 willing to produce IBFM fact sheets.

26  
27 Well, we have the outreach and education virtual meeting on  
28 November 21<sup>st</sup> from 9:30 to 3 PM. During the meeting several key  
29 updates were presented regarding IRA projects and efforts related  
30 to fisheries management and conservation in the U.S.V.I. Also, we  
31 discussed a general overview of the ongoing projects including the  
32 storybook initiative and noted that a graphic designer is needed  
33 to help bring the projects to completion. This year on November  
34 21<sup>st</sup>, as I told you, we held that meeting. My first one.

35  
36 Our team brought to the committee's attention the need to produce  
37 materials with less written information and more visuals for our  
38 clientele. While there are several outreach and education ongoing  
39 projects and initiatives supporting fisheries conservation in the  
40 U.S.V.I. and in Puerto Rico, their success heavily depends on  
41 securing additional funding. The materials needed are anything  
42 from calipers to calendars, as I told you, more visual material  
43 instead of the ones that are full of information, written  
44 information.

45  
46 We've also received suggestions from our fishers saying that they  
47 do not like to read a lot. So, that's what I am saying, that we  
48 need more visual materials instead of the written ones.

1  
2 We are working on using the 5-year strategic plan communication  
3 objectives that are the following: Basic concepts of ecosystem  
4 based manage management; islands-based fishery management plans  
5 for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croi;;  
6 sustainable fish and seafood consumption; and marine protected  
7 areas in Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix.

8  
9 Thank you. That's all. Do you have any questions?

10  
11 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**  
12

13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any question for Jannette?  
14

15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No questions. The visuals that you're talking  
16 about are infographics. It's not pictures, my people. So, in the  
17 case of the infographic, what are the things that you think could  
18 be included in the infographic according to the OEAP?  
19

20 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Well, if you remember what we talked about  
21 in the meeting because I don't remember and I don't have the notes  
22 with me right now. But we talked about the closed seasons, what we  
23 have, and we need other rulers, because the fishers asked for them.  
24 I'm trying to--

25  
26 Posters with less information and more visuals.  
27

28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. With less writing stuff.  
29

30 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yes.  
31

32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But the same information--  
33

34 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yeah. The same information.  
35

36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** --in infographics. This idea was presented to us  
37 by Alida Ortiz last year. So, we hope to continue that, provided  
38 the funds are available. Thank you.  
39

40 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you.  
41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sarah?  
43

44 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi. This is Sarah Stephenson. I just wanted  
45 to point out that when we're doing our amendments as they get  
46 closer to finalization, we would love to work with you to put  
47 together a one-page flyer, especially based on what we heard  
48 earlier about what the new regulations are, why we're doing it.

1 So, we would love to help work with you guys to get that out, so  
2 people know, you know, I'd love to do it for the FMPs, but maybe  
3 let's just start small with what the dolphin amendment and the  
4 trawl net Amendment and work from there.

5  
6 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you very much, Sarah. I appreciate  
7 that.

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

10  
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, just to add a little  
12 bit to what Sarah's saying. So, in this process that we went  
13 through to 2024, we had several amendments, several actions that  
14 were completed by the Council, and then they were sent back to  
15 NMFS as final rule to be worked as regulations. Right? So now we  
16 have a bunch of things that are coming out.

17  
18 This is the moment where we need outreach and education to be the  
19 strongest, because we need to ensure that there is compliance with  
20 the regulations. That people understand what exactly we are going  
21 to do. So, we did the phase of outreach and education when we were  
22 working, "Hey. This is what the Council it's intending to do. These  
23 are the actions. Tell me more. How do I prepare this?" But now we  
24 are implementing these things. Right? So, I think it's very  
25 important to get that out. "These are the new rules that are going  
26 to be affecting you."

27  
28 There are going to be rules that are going to be affecting  
29 recreational fishers. For example, the bag limits for the dolphin  
30 and for the wahoo. So, that information needs to be brought to the  
31 recreational fishers in a way that is appropriate for them. And  
32 then we talked about this this morning or earlier today that there  
33 are different types of recreational fishers, so it needs to be  
34 tailored to each individual group, because the success of the  
35 measures that we implement as a Council depend on people  
36 understanding and abiding by the rules. And also, that would help  
37 our enforcement agents to enforce those regulations.

38  
39 So, again, we will work with outreach and education by providing  
40 them with a simplified version of the regulations because, you  
41 know, this is one of the things that our constituents are always  
42 asking us. Just say it to me, like, in simple terms. We know  
43 they're going to work their magic on making it in a way that is  
44 good for different audiences because that's what they have been  
45 doing, you know, during the past years, and I think it has been  
46 wonderful.

47  
48 And then with regards to the island-based FMPs to the actual

1 regulations, we have been waiting a little bit because we have  
2 some stuff that is changing. So, we don't want to be creating--  
3 when I say "we" it is Council and everybody that's involved in  
4 creating documents that are obsolete in three months. Right?

5  
6 So, it's a good time now, I would think, to prepare materials that  
7 explain what are the new regulations that are included. Like  
8 before, we were managing a bunch of species, now we have less  
9 species. What are those species?

10  
11 So, Jannette and team, we will be happy to work with you. So, let  
12 us know what you need. Thanks.

13  
14  
15  
16 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you, María. I took note of everything  
17 that you said and also Sarah. I would like to note or tell all of  
18 you that we have another member, right now, on the Outreach and  
19 Education Advisory Panel. Her name is Telmis Alicea, and she has  
20 a PhD in education. So, we have an expert in that field, and we  
21 are going to use her knowledge to do a better job on the OEAP  
22 Panel. Thank you.

23  
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, I believe that this will be the  
25 priority for the Outreach and Education Advisory Panel. That's  
26 what María mentioned. And now that you have the cooperation from  
27 both of them, I think that the first part of the first quarter of  
28 2025 should be dedicated to that. Get the information that you  
29 need, use the infographics, and also, we are going to be using all  
30 the social networks.

31  
32 Right now, we are reviewing our web page. Cristina is in charge of  
33 that with the web page provider, and this is an opportunity for us  
34 to be able to make it more effective, in terms of the way that we  
35 communicate. So, as much as possible, whenever we find the dollars,  
36 we will help you with that one.

37  
38 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you, Miguel.

39  
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You finished?

41  
42 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yep.

43  
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Liaison officer report with Wilson and Nicole  
45 Greaux on descending devices.

46  
47 **LIAISON OFFICERS REPORT**  
48 **WILSON SANTIAGO-PUERTO RICO**

1  
2 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. Wilson Santiago,  
3 Liaison Puerto Rico Fisheries. This is my 2024 report. We haven't  
4 reported since the last April meeting. Also, I'm going to talk  
5 about all the work that I've been doing for outreach and education,  
6 in 2024.

7  
8 So, we have continued with the PEPCO program. PEPCO program is the  
9 educational program for commercial fishers. This year, we made one  
10 recreational fishery educational program in Club Nautica of San  
11 Juan. So, we are continually educating the commercial and  
12 recreational fishers.

13  
14 We have been distributing educational videos, information for  
15 commercial fishers regarding federal and state regulations via the  
16 WhatsApp broadcast list. The WhatsApp broadcast list has been  
17 growing up in the past month. Maybe something more than 600  
18 fishers, recreational, and commercials. I have them separated.

19  
20 Right now, I have two new broadcast lists with a lot of English-  
21 speaking people, you know, Americans that come to live to the  
22 island, and they are fishing recreational and commercial. That  
23 list is growing, so we are helping that sector too.

24  
25 We have continued giving support to Sea Grant, DNER, and CFMC  
26 educational materials, taking them to fishing villages around all  
27 the islands, including Vieques and Culebra. We continue giving  
28 support to the CFMC and DNER social media and every other social  
29 media regarding management, fisheries management.

30  
31 Channeling problems and concerns from fishers. Like, all the  
32 fishers maybe have my phone number. My phone number is private but  
33 public. So, we continue visiting fishing villages, for orientation  
34 and taking notes on what their needs are, what their concerns are,  
35 and try to fix them. You know? We always, like Jeannette Ramos, we  
36 continue visiting the fishers, and we try to help them the best we  
37 can.

38  
39 So, okay. So, Jeannette Ramos, in her report, spoke about the  
40 interviews with NOAA Fisheries and EEJ personnel and Suzana Blake.  
41 So, we did those interviews. They were pretty beautiful interviews,  
42 a lot of information, life history from different fishers,  
43 especially the old fishers that are, like, second and third  
44 generation, some of them are fourth generations fishers. So, we  
45 have heard a lot of pretty good history regarding the fisheries in  
46 the islands of Vieques and Culebra.

47  
48 Probably next January, February 2025, they'll be receiving more

1 funds, and we are going to continue the interviews around the  
2 island, specifically in the west side and the north. So, we are  
3 continuing to work. After that, they are going to be publishing  
4 those interviews on a NOAA website, I think it is. So, I recommend  
5 the Council, if you can give the opportunity at the next meeting,  
6 the April meeting, so that Suzana Blake or Brent Stoffel can make  
7 a presentation of these interviews. It will be very good. So, I  
8 recommend the Council do that for the next meeting.

9  
10 Okay. Continuing the Puerto Rico MREP program. The next this next  
11 Monday, we have the steering committee. 2024 was a successful MREP  
12 program. It was really good. I don't have any other word to say.

13  
14 We helped fishers apply for financial aid. These past two months  
15 DNER announced that they had financial aid to give to fishers. So,  
16 part of my work has been with DNER, my partners in DNER and  
17 commercial statistics program. We helped them apply for their  
18 financial aids. And lastly, we coordinated descending devices  
19 workshops. The first descending device workshop is going to be on  
20 December 17<sup>th</sup>. And at our next presentation, Nicole and I are going  
21 to present everything about the descending devices. I'm going to  
22 explain more about this.

23  
24 So, HMS workshop. Our HMS workshop, this year we made eight HMS  
25 orientation workshop. Personnel from HMS offices, Delisse Ortiz,  
26 Elsa Gutierrez, and I don't remember the name of the Branch Chief.  
27 So, personnel from the HMS office came to Puerto Rico. We  
28 coordinated eight different workshops. So, they explained  
29 everything about the federal permits, the HMS permit to  
30 recreational and commercial fishers, and the participants were  
31 able to fix, renew, and apply for their fishing permits. So, it  
32 was pretty helpful. Around 139 commercial and recreational fishers  
33 took the workshop.

34  
35 So, they're waiting to see what funds they have in 2025, and we  
36 are going to continue. And they told me too, Nicole, they are  
37 thinking about going to U.S.V.I. so be prepared.

38  
39 So, my next steps as a liaison in 2025. We will continue bringing  
40 educational materials to fishing tournaments, fishing village, and  
41 educational events. This past year, 2024, we went to a lot of  
42 events with the CFMC materials education table. So, we have been  
43 invited each year for more events. So, let's hope 2025 will be the  
44 same. I will continue with the PEPCO program, educational programs  
45 for commercials and recreational programs.

46  
47 I give the educational program for recreational fishers with Helena  
48 Antoun. Helena Antoun is the one that created the presentation,

1 the program, as it is. So, we are working, in 2025 we hope to go  
2 to more places and attend the recreational sector. So, continue  
3 sending informative and educational publications via the WhatsApp  
4 broadcast list. And for this, I want to thank Cristina Olán. She's  
5 always, all week, sending me information regarding management,  
6 closures, blah blah blah, everything.

7  
8 Also, the descending devices workshop. Work closely with the  
9 Outreach and Education Advisory Panel and continue hitting fishing  
10 villages around the island. So, maybe during January and February,  
11 we are going to be coordinating with Jeannette Ramos to travel  
12 around the island and give fishers, again, a hand and see how  
13 they're doing.

14  
15 So, I think that will be all. Any questions? That is my contact  
16 information.

#### 17 18 **QUESTION/COMMENTS**

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Question for Wilson.

21  
22 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to make a  
23 comment and thank you. Not only to you, Wilson, but also Jannette  
24 and all the staff that works day by day with the fishermen and  
25 then bring all that information that is really necessary to get it  
26 out in a way that they understand it and around the social medias  
27 and the WhatsApp group. Especially because you are always on the  
28 phone taking their inquiries and answering the questions that they  
29 have. Thank you.

30  
31 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Thank you, Vanessa.

32  
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anyone else for Wilson? Hearing none, Nicole.

#### 34 35 **NICOLE GREAUX-SAINTE THOMAS/SAINT JOHN**

36  
37 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good afternoon. I am Nicole Greaux, the fisheries  
38 liaison for Saint Thomas and Saint John. So, piggybacking on what  
39 Wilson said.

40  
41 Some of the activities and events that happened for this year did  
42 include a large amount of it being the descending device workshops  
43 that are coming up, which we're going to be discussing in the next  
44 slide. But some of the activities were homegrown.

45  
46 So, fishing tournaments were a really big thing this year. I  
47 attended four of our annual fishing tournaments, which gave me the  
48 opportunity to collect more phone numbers and information from

1 some of our new license holders for line fishing commercial  
2 fishermen and also to meet with a lot of the crew to add them to  
3 my WhatsApp broadcast so they can be aware of upcoming events that  
4 Fish and Wildlife is having or anything that might be of interest  
5 to them through the Caribbean Fishery Management Council page. So,  
6 those links were sent to them as well, to let them know that they  
7 can subscribe to our YouTube channel that we have for CFMC, and  
8 also let them know that there are very good links to the NOAA  
9 website that can be utilized on the CFMC webpage.

10  
11 Fish markets visit for this year. I completed 48 fish market  
12 visits. I do want to let the Council know that there is a general  
13 consensus that the fishermen of the Virgin Islands are beginning  
14 to feel, not only a little bit forgotten, but they're also asking  
15 for information to be specific to us here in our territories. I  
16 spoke with Jannette about OEAP. Perhaps, hopefully, if we have  
17 funding next year, putting together specific information in the  
18 form of flyers or media or maybe some social outlook, some social  
19 media outputs so that we can have it done for the U.S.V.I.  
20 specifically.

21  
22 The upcoming workshops for the descending devices for us in the  
23 V.I. will be taking place. The first one, hopefully on December  
24 20<sup>th</sup> with a follow-up one in January. And then we have our  
25 sustainable seafood initiative, which is the reef responsible  
26 program. We are recruiting new restaurants to help the people that  
27 come in and open up restaurants understand that targeting the  
28 sustainable seafood initiative is the way to go by purchasing from  
29 our fishermen as opposed to purchasing from off island or having  
30 fish flown in flash frozen from the closest state to us. Some of  
31 the restaurants are very interested in contacting these fishers,  
32 but I have not had feedback from them doing so as yet.

33  
34 This is my fun stuff. So, every presentation for the end of the  
35 year I put together a collaboration of some of the fun things that  
36 I do as a fisheries liaison. And this year, with tournaments and  
37 with different events that we had going on on island, there was a  
38 lot of fun stuff to do. I want to bring your attention to the photo  
39 that is on the very far right-hand side of the screen. We've got  
40 a descending device that's sitting right there on the edge of that  
41 table, which garnered a lot of interest and curiosity. And the  
42 information that was handed out was very well received on our  
43 descending devices.

44  
45 The poster that's there are compliments of Sea Grant. That is a  
46 photo or a poster of fish that are prevalent in the U.S.V.I. and  
47 Puerto Rico, and I have already requested some more of those  
48 posters. They were very, very popular. What you see on the far-

1 left hand side, which is locally caught, locally sourced fish,  
2 which is what I think all of our restaurants really should be doing  
3 for the sustainable seafood initiative. So, the upper and lower  
4 photos are of pelagic and of reef fish that you see there. We have  
5 at the very top, snapper that was done sashimi style, and then the  
6 pictures that you see on the bottom of the fish, those are all  
7 pelagic species that were caught by local commercial fishermen,  
8 who brought it into that particular restaurant.

9  
10 The gentleman. The young man that you see on the lower right-hand  
11 side, he is playing one of our fish identification sustainable  
12 fishing games, that the Division of Fish and Wildlife came up with.  
13 Those games have been very useful in helping younger children and  
14 also their parents understand things like seasonal closures, the  
15 size limits on particular fish, and then what fish we probably  
16 want to have more of in the oceans to help with our coral health  
17 and reef ecology. The game itself is on the lower center of the  
18 slide.

19  
20 Now, I am going to apologize for this blank space in the middle.  
21 When I got here and I was trying to transfer the slide, I was  
22 having technical difficulties with my equipment, so I was not able  
23 to transpose my text in the very center.

24  
25 What you're looking at, fortunately and unfortunately, is the Fort  
26 Mylner area where we had one of our most active East End Fish  
27 Vending Sites. The fishers that are there, do want me to make note  
28 so that our commissioner and the person in charge of our  
29 enforcement can understand that they still feel like a disservice  
30 was done to them by not having a place for them to sell their fish  
31 on that side of the island. The two fishers that are on the right-  
32 hand side are the ones that frequent that particular area,  
33 sometimes twice a week to vend their fish. So, the opportunity to  
34 improve and assist our fishers in, not only supporting them with  
35 maybe obtaining another area for them to vend fish on the east end  
36 of the island, but also giving them opportunities to sign up for  
37 or to be readily available for assistance, for help with grant  
38 applications, which we are having many of. There are grant  
39 application opportunities that have been forwarded to myself and  
40 to the division in regard to funding for EEJ opportunities.

41  
42 Also, I have been in contact with the Saint Thomas Fishing  
43 Association, which is a very wonderful resource, for contacting  
44 and getting information out to all of our fishers on Saint Thomas  
45 and also Saint John about opportunities through Eagle to obtain  
46 not only federally funding grants, but also federal assistance.  
47 There are workshops to help the fishers and also the Saint Thomas  
48 Fishing Association staff in how to write grant proposals and also

1 where the best opportunities are for grant source funding.

2  
3 So, collaboration with them and myself and also with the division  
4 is growing and I'm very pleased with the fact that we now have  
5 better communication between all three of those particular  
6 entities.

7  
8 And this is the end of my presentation. Thank you all for your  
9 time.

10  
11 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nicole. Any questions for Nicole?  
14 There's a chat.

15  
16 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Elizabeth Ban. "Are there any lists  
17 of restaurants that serve fresh, locally caught Virgin Islands  
18 fish? If so, is it shared with hotels, Airbnb's, etcetera?"

19  
20 **NICOLE GREAUX:** The restaurants do purchase from local fishermen.  
21 As far as it being shared to the local hotels, there are lists of  
22 local restaurants that are easily available to them, whether or  
23 not the hotels promote those restaurants, I'm not sure. We do have  
24 a reef responsible section in our phonebook and there's also a  
25 reef responsible social media page that we will put up our  
26 spotlight restaurants every month. So, the local restaurants, if  
27 they go on to the V.I. tourism sites and some of our social media  
28 sites, they're easily accessible. Phone numbers and what  
29 restaurants purchase from local fishers.

30  
31 But I also do want to add, to the lady that asked, as a caveat,  
32 please make sure that you know that it is a verified restaurant  
33 that is selling actual locally caught fish and they don't have it  
34 listed as local fish, as in it's a local species, but it was not  
35 locally sourced. That's really important.

36  
37 Thank you for your question.

38  
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Katherine.

40  
41 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Hi. Thank you for that information. Sort of  
42 similar, because we heard earlier about a problem of recreational  
43 fishermen selling their catch. You know, is there any way to know  
44 what local restaurants are buying their fish from properly licensed  
45 commercial fishermen?

46  
47 **NICOLE GREAUX:** So, now that we have a new fishing license that  
48 has been supplied to charter fishers that are now holding a

1 commercial fishing license. The photo that I showed earlier of the  
2 fish and the sushi, that was purchased from a charter fisher who  
3 now holds a commercial fishing license.

4  
5 So, one of the issues is if you go to a restaurant and they say  
6 that it's locally caught fish, and they tell you that it came from  
7 a charter fisher or a recreational fisher, and the fisherman wasn't  
8 verified as a commercial license holder, that can be an issue. But  
9 the only way to find that is to get the name of who supplied them  
10 with the fish. Yeah.

11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian.

13  
14 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Hey. Great presentation. But I wanted to chime in  
15 a little bit on Kate's question.

16  
17 So, these fishers that just got these licensing that run charter  
18 boats, they're still not supposed to be selling their catch.  
19 They're only supposed to be selling their catch when they go out  
20 as a commercial trip and not a recreational paid-for-hire charter.  
21 That fish that comes in is not supposed to be sold to restaurants  
22 or to the public. That's one of the big issues that us commercial  
23 fishermen have because they already have been paid for their day.  
24 Before they left the dock, they were paid to go there, take the  
25 tourist fishing, catch fish, not to come back and sell it into our  
26 market, that hampers our sale. So, I just wanted to clarify that.

27  
28 As far as the restaurants buying locally codfish, we have several  
29 restaurants that do buy local fish, but some of them also choose  
30 not to buy anything locally.

31  
32 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Correct.

33  
34 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, I just wanted to clarify that point to Kate's  
35 question. Thank you.

36  
37 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I wanted to clarify, because we tried with the  
38 Department of Natural Resources some years back to create a paper  
39 trail to figure out where the fish were coming from. Because we  
40 have that big problem here with the recreational, because there is  
41 no enforcement to it. Lack of enforcement. They do sell to  
42 restaurants every day.

43  
44 We tried to put a paper trail on where and how you bought the fish  
45 and everything. We set up the whole thing with a lady over there,  
46 but it was never implemented. We wanted a paper trail like the one  
47 they have right now with the marlin, the blue marlin. You know?  
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?  
2  
3 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Yeah. Just wanted to make a comment. Here in  
4 Puerto Rico, like, all people, when they come to me asking "Where  
5 can I find local fish?" So, in my case, what I do, I just call  
6 some fishers from the area and ask them. So, if you want to know  
7 where they sell, legally, their catch, just go to a fishing village  
8 or a commercial fisher near you and ask them "Where do you sell  
9 it?" Okay? And promote those restaurants.  
10  
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Nicole? Yeah.  
12  
13 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Just to clarify a little bit  
14 from Mr. Magras's comment, there are times when sale of  
15 recreational catch is allowed. That is if the permit holder has an  
16 HMS charter or head boat permit in collaboration with a commercial  
17 sale endorsement and a local recreational/commercial license. In  
18 those instances, the sale of tuna, the base species bluefin  
19 yellowfin, bigeye, albacore, and skipjack, under the limits based  
20 on the HMS permit are allowed. I think that's 3 per person. They're  
21 also allowed swordfish under the general endorsement for  
22 swordfish.  
23  
24 So, in those instances, sale from recreational catch, if they have  
25 those permits, along with a local commercial license, is allowed.  
26 All other instances, Mr. Magras is correct, sales from any sort of  
27 charter are not allowed. The issue in the U.S. Virgin Islands is  
28 that the Division of Fish and Wildlife does permits for commercial  
29 license, and we are in the process of setting up a recreational  
30 fishing license. That, however, is not operational as yet.  
31  
32 The head boat or charter license currently is managed by a  
33 different agency. That's DLCA, or Licensing and Consumer Affairs,  
34 and their process by which they review what can be sold at  
35 restaurants is different from ours. And so, there are ways that we  
36 need to coordinate that. It's been difficult. What we are trying  
37 to do is by instituting the rules and regulations for recreational  
38 licenses to create another process by which we can monitor and  
39 keep sales going from charters by limiting it at the point of  
40 issuing licenses to the charters.  
41  
42 In addition to them having to now pay for and register for a  
43 license, they will also have to do mandatory reporting from charter  
44 trips. Both of those will allow us to have a much better  
45 understanding and keep track and limit sales when they should not  
46 be done.  
47  
48 My hope is that we will have that up and running next year.

1  
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more comments for Nicole or Wilson?  
3 Okay. Hearing none, I want to thank both of you for the awesome  
4 job that you all are doing. I think every meeting that we have,  
5 you put on an excellent presentation.

6  
7 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Thank you.

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. So, we'll be doing descending  
10 devices.

11  
12 **DESCENDING DEVICES—WILSON SANTIAGO/NICOLE GREAUX**

13  
14 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** So, Nicole and I, we are doing this presentation  
15 together, but we have separate slides. So--

16  
17 **NICOLE GREAUX:** So, the information effort on the descending  
18 devices has been an ongoing thing. It was put on hold for a little  
19 bit because our dear beloved Alida was trying to get healthy and  
20 make sure that she had the best support possible, and she was  
21 really taking care of herself.

22  
23 This was picked up recently in the last four months, and we have  
24 been moving forward with just trying to make the descending devices  
25 something that a lot of fishers were aware of and also letting  
26 them know that there was a mandatory device requirement that is  
27 probably coming down the pipeline really soon.

28  
29 So, the really cool thing about the descending devices that I found  
30 during my time was when I was dealing with fisher engagements.  
31 Because of my benefit of being the fisheries liaison, I was able  
32 to interact with several different types of fishers who use  
33 different types of gear. And each of those particular fishing  
34 industry reviewed or reacted to the descending devices  
35 differently. So, I had four opportunities for multiple interaction  
36 with different types of fishers.

37  
38 So, the dolphin tournament, of course, that's recreational line  
39 fishers. That took place in April. Ten devices were given out  
40 during that particular event. The Bastille Day tournament in July,  
41 21 devices were given out at that event to just the whole spectrum  
42 of fishers that we have. So, commercial, fish charter and  
43 recreational. At the fish vending sites, which did not surprise me  
44 at all during the time between August September, only three devices  
45 were handed out to commercial, line and trap fishers. And there is  
46 definitely a reason for that.

47  
48 The Weekend, No Wave Warriors! is what I call them, simply because

1 these are fishers that go out in their boats when it's not too  
2 choppy, there's not too much of a swell. They're doing it for fun.  
3 It's not something that they're doing to help supply their  
4 refrigerator or their cupboards. It's just that they want to go  
5 out and go fish. For them between the months of May to October, 18  
6 devices were given out to these fishing enthusiasts. And there is  
7 definitely a very direct tie in to these particular fishers and  
8 the amount of the devices that were handed out.

9  
10 So, the response to the outreach, as I mentioned earlier, was quite  
11 varied. Interactions varied in relation to the type of fishing  
12 activity, whether they were a commercial fisher, a recreational  
13 fisher, and in this sense when I say recreational fisher, I mean,  
14 someone who goes out and fishes outside of the 3-mile line, the  
15 charter fishers, the fish for-hire people, all of that falls under  
16 the recreational fisher in this particular instance. The reactions  
17 range from very excited interests in the case of the Weekend  
18 Warriors to somewhat suspicious, when it came to the commercial  
19 fishers and that was understood once they explained to me what  
20 their reason for hesitancy and suspicion was.

21  
22 And then there was definitely a lot of questions on what  
23 constitutes "mandatory" of having the descending device on board  
24 my vessel? One fisher asked, "So, Nicole, is it going to be like  
25 having a life jacket?" So, the Coast Guard requires you to have a  
26 life jacket on board a boat, but you don't necessarily need to use  
27 it. Right? You just have to have it. So, I said, "Well, I'm not  
28 sure. That is a very good question, and I will find out. So, then,  
29 the other question was, so, is it mandatory that I have a device  
30 that looks like this onboard my boat? Or can I show that I have a  
31 descending device that I already utilize if I feel the need? Or  
32 does it have to look like this descending device? So hopefully,  
33 once the regulatory part of that comes into play, I will be able  
34 to answer those questions.

35  
36 Alright. You guys, this one is this is just a really good visual  
37 for you all to see what the percentage of usage is going to be for  
38 these descending devices as of my communications with the fishing  
39 groups that I spoke to. So, the 56%, or that orange slice of the  
40 pie, those are our weekend warriors. Those are our people that go  
41 out and fish for fun. They were all about grabbing devices. They  
42 were the ones that took most of the descending devices. I sent  
43 them the links to the videos, both the one that the Caribbean  
44 Fishery Management Council has and the one that I obtained from  
45 Florida Fish and Wildlife, which by the way, I'd like to let the  
46 Council know, it is a lot more engaging than the one that the  
47 Council has. So, if you all want to see a really entertaining, fun  
48 video on how to utilize a descending device, Florida Fish and

1 Wildlife. Go on their link. Check it out, their descending devices.  
2 It is amazing. It is. It's really good.  
3  
4 Line Fishers were the other group that decided that they would  
5 also be happy to utilize the descending device every now and then.  
6 The for-hire or the charter fishers, they were really into using  
7 the fishing descending devices. They're our second largest group  
8 and there is definitely a reason why they choose to have these  
9 descending devices on board. Some charter boat captains do have  
10 several of them, boxes of them, on board their vessel.  
11  
12 The smallest, the 7%, that yellow piece of the pie, that is our  
13 trap fishers. And they have very specific reasons why the  
14 descending device that I had available for them was not something  
15 that they would have been too interested in utilizing.  
16  
17 This is the why behind all of it. So, a lot of the commercial  
18 fishers that I spoke to told me that they had their own methods of  
19 handling fish with barotrauma. There are different methods of  
20 getting a fish back down to the required depth for it to be able  
21 to swim down freely. If there is time for the line fishers to rig  
22 a fish to a descending device and send it down, that is what they  
23 will do. Some of these line fishers told me that they will  
24 occasionally vent their own fish if they have barotrauma and  
25 there's one out of two ways to do that, to toss the fish back over,  
26 and then have it descend on its own power to hopefully get out of  
27 the way of predators.  
28  
29 The charter crew and the captains love the descending devices  
30 because it is just another way to utilize the guests that they  
31 have on board. So, if there are people that are not fishing, if  
32 there are people that just realized fishing was not for them, if  
33 there are little kids that are on board during a fishing trip, if  
34 there's one person that's hooked up to a line and another person's  
35 not doing anything in particular. One of the charter, the fish  
36 for-hire companies did tell me that they would show that to the  
37 younger person or the person that's not engaging in the fishing  
38 activity, how to hook up the fish to the descending device and  
39 then they'll help them sound the fish, which also gives the guests  
40 a chance to learn about sustainability and what exactly barotrauma  
41 is. Like, why is the fish throwing up its stomach? Like, what is  
42 this air bubble? Why is there a balloon in the fish's mouth? This  
43 was a good way to engage their guests and also teach them a little  
44 bit about conservation.  
45  
46 Recreational fishers are the most likely and consistent to use the  
47 device, because not only do they have the time, but they're out  
48 there leisurely and having fun. And I was told by several of them

1 it makes a really good Instagram photo. So, that is the reasoning  
2 behind the percentages.

3  
4 We have workshops that are coming up, both myself and Wilson. So,  
5 there's one planned for the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. This is going to be  
6 mostly done for the people that are using line fish, that are the  
7 charter fishers, the recreational fishers, the people that are  
8 probably not too knowledgeable on barotrauma and how to get these  
9 fish back down to a depth where they can swim away freely, where  
10 they are less susceptible to predation.

11  
12 And then there is a round table meeting that I would like to have  
13 with the commercial fishers, and I'm looking forward to potentially  
14 letting that happen in January. But this is where I'm going to  
15 approach the Saint Thomas Fishing Association because this is where  
16 I'm going to need input from our fishers on the best way to do  
17 this. And then also some of the fishers, as I mentioned earlier,  
18 do have questions on the requirement for having a descending device  
19 on board.

20  
21 And that is my part of the descending device.

22  
23 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Regarding the descending devices meeting in  
24 Puerto Rico, we have, Nicole and me, with Miguel Rolón and Cristina  
25 Olán, we have a July meeting. We've talked about doing separate  
26 workshops for the for the different sector, commercial and  
27 recreational. For the commercial fishers' workshop, it will be  
28 held at four different Villas Pesquera. And for the recreational  
29 fishers, it'll probably be held at two Club Náuticos.

30  
31 So, on the on December 17, we have our first descending device  
32 workshop in Mayagüez, at the Villa Pesquera El Dockey in Mayagüez.  
33 We are preparing to coordinate in January and February, all three  
34 other workshops in the different Villas Pesquera. At the Dorado,  
35 which is in the North, Ponce in the South, and Ceiba in the East.  
36 So, for the commercial sector, we are attending the four areas in  
37 Puerto Rico.

38  
39 For the recreational sector, it will be in the Cabo Rojo Club  
40 Náutico Boquerón, and in the San Juan Club Náutico with which  
41 Roberto Sabater can help us with that, and he has been helping. He  
42 helped me coordinate an educational workshop for the recreational  
43 areas. So, those are the two Club Náutico that where we are going  
44 to talk to the recreational sector.

45  
46 So, in those workshops, we're going to be presenting the video,  
47 the Salva Peje, and we are going to see the video that Nicole  
48 recommended to us from Florida. I think their slogan is "Return

1 'Em Right." I think, right?

2

3 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Yeah. That's correct.

4

5 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** So, I'm probably going to invite them, I have to  
6 talk to them. I know I talked with Nelson Crespo, but I'll talk  
7 with Marco Hanke, Nelson Crespo, or Anthony Elizo, to bring them  
8 to the workshop, so they can be a fisher talking with fishers. You  
9 know? It's not the same me, as a liaison or educator, explaining  
10 to them how to do something. I can tell them, "Okay. There is this  
11 amendment that is coming. It is probably coming and it's going to  
12 be mandatory in the EEZ. Probably in state water, when we get the  
13 compatibility" but it's very different when a fisher talks to the  
14 fishers.

15

16 Okay, so that will be all. The photo is thanks to Nicole.

17

18 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Yes. Those are V.I. fish. Thank you very much.

19

20 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** If any questions, comments for us?

21

22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

23

24

#### QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

25

26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. Thank you. This is great. We're  
27 really thankful that you guys are taking the initiative to promote  
28 the use of the descending devices, clarify questions. We talked a  
29 little bit about this when we had the outreach and education.

30

31 We know that Fishers have some questions. You may have some  
32 questions that you may need clarification from us, so you can pass  
33 that information to the fishers. So, we can meet and talk about  
34 that. I do have a question about your presentation.

35

36 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Sure.

37

38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I am very curious to see why the fishers were  
39 suspicious about the descending devices.

40

41 **NICOLE GREAUX:** So, anytime a rule of regulation is implemented--  
42 and I'm very glad that I have Mr. Magras here in the room with me,  
43 they usually want to know the why behind it. So, one of the reasons  
44 that they were suspicious about it is because they figured that it  
45 was just a new way to regulate how they do things that are quite  
46 effective to them right now.

47

48 One of the issues that they had was they feel like "whoever it

1 is," and this is a direct quote, "that is saying that we need to  
2 have mandatory descending devices is not taking into consideration  
3 the time that it will take out of a fisherman's day, out of a  
4 fisherman's haul, to take a fish that is either in a trap that has  
5 barotrauma or a fish that came up and to stop and hook it up to  
6 this descending device and then put it away or put it back in the  
7 ocean."  
8

9 And then also, as long as you all don't want a number of returned  
10 fish, specifically utilizing the descending device, then that's  
11 fine. Because a lot of times, if they do have things-- like I've  
12 seen or I've heard of fishermen doing things like, well, okay,  
13 they're just not going to take it out of the trap and, you know,  
14 it's just going to go back down with the pot or if it does come up  
15 and they have, like, either a milk crate or they have a lot and  
16 they put them all in the water, and then the trap goes back in  
17 with it, is going to help them go down to the bottom, and that's  
18 some kind of protection for the fish before the predators get  
19 there.  
20

21 So, it's time consuming for them. It does take a lot out of their  
22 fishing time and their hauling time. And when they're out there,  
23 they want to get out, get it done, and get back in, especially if  
24 it's rough weather. Yeah.  
25

26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** And thank you for that. I think the important  
27 thing here is not that you have to use it, you know. The requirement  
28 is to have it available and ready for use, and it's at the  
29 discretion of the fishermen to use it. Right?  
30

31 So, part of the education, I think, the important thing is, you  
32 know, we're trying to protect that fish that is returned to the  
33 water. We're trying to minimize mortality of that fish. Right? So,  
34 the fishers need to understand, right, and it's our role to explain  
35 it and find a way that is understood by everybody, what barotrauma  
36 is, when is a fish showing barotrauma symptoms, and when is it  
37 appropriate to use. Right?  
38

39 Not all fish are going to be experiencing barotrauma, not all fish  
40 need to be returned to the water. There's going to be fish that  
41 you have to return to the water. For example, a regulatory discard.  
42 You get a nassau or any other fish that is experiencing seasonal  
43 closure at the time, you have to return it to the water.  
44

45 So, if I cannot keep the fish, I would rather return the fish, so  
46 their purpose is fulfilled. Right? The seasonal closure is meant  
47 to be there so that the fish can survive, so they can reproduce,  
48 so there can be more fishies. Right? So, if I return the fish to

1 the water and the fish is suffering from barotrauma and something  
2 is going to eat it or because the fish cannot go down, then we are  
3 not protecting that fish.

4  
5 So, there may be different ways of explaining that, but the  
6 important thing here is, like, there's different ways to create a  
7 descending device. We have requirements in the regulations-- we  
8 will have requirements in the regulations as to what they have to  
9 have. They have a minimum of, I believe, 16 ounces of weight, and  
10 they should be capable of bringing the fish down to the, I mean,  
11 it's an estimate, right, of where you caught it, etcetera. So, I  
12 think that's the important thing to know in here, and they would  
13 probably use whatever works best. But the important thing is, for  
14 purposes of the regulation, to comply that they would have to have  
15 it available and if they need to use it, they will use it.

16  
17 You know, it's not that they have to use it every time that they  
18 want to return something to the water. You know, it's up to their  
19 discretion when a fish is exhibiting signs of barotrauma that, you  
20 know, they should use it, but it's not a requirement to use it.  
21 That will be a nightmare. That will be a nightmare to enforce, I  
22 would think. But it's about best fishing practices, you know, and  
23 that's something that we can promote, as part of the Council, you  
24 know, promote what can we do?

25  
26 It's not that I'm putting more regulations on you. It is, what can  
27 I do to ensure that the fish that my kids depend on, my future  
28 depends on, is healthy? So, I don't know. But thank you for what  
29 you're doing.

30  
31 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Thank you. Well, once those regulations are put  
32 together and we have information to give to them, I'm sure that  
33 they would appreciate that. And, yeah, that pretty much sums it up  
34 with the life jacket analogy. Thank you, María.

35  
36 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** So, other thing that, like, when Sarah told later  
37 that, you were going to work with Jannette Ramos, the OEAP Panel,  
38 and we can work on something, an educational material or  
39 publication, regarding descending devices, and everything that you  
40 said, María, and to report them then. Specifically, to the  
41 commercial sector when they return them, report them.

42  
43 But it is important for us to know the statistic reports. You know?  
44 So that will be all. And thank you.

45  
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Clay?

47  
48 **CLAY PORCH:** Yes. Thank you. I also wanted to commend you for this

1 work, and I commend the Council for taking up this issue. Your  
2 sister Councils in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic do have  
3 descending device regulations. And of course, they can't really  
4 practically enforce the use, you know, because somebody would have  
5 to be right there, you know, looking. But they can at least require  
6 you to have the venting tools. And then, through education, we  
7 encourage people to use them.

8  
9 The Gulf of Mexico has the Return 'Em Right program which I'm sure  
10 you're familiar with. That's a massive educational effort. I think  
11 people get really excited about that.

12  
13 But it's absolutely critical because, in both the South Atlantic  
14 and Gulf of Mexico, for some fisheries, there are more dead  
15 discards than are actually landed. And in some cases, you actually  
16 can have overfishing just from the dead discards. So, even if you  
17 didn't land a single fish, people catching fish, releasing them,  
18 and then they die from barotrauma, sometimes hook trauma, which is  
19 why there's also circle hook regulations, and also depredation.  
20 Right?

21  
22 So descending devices will help with barotrauma and sometimes help  
23 with the depredation by getting the fish down quicker. Doesn't  
24 help with the hooking mortality that requires a circle hook or  
25 something. But the bottom line is there is definitely, particularly  
26 for recreational fisheries, but some commercials as well. A lot of  
27 dead discarding going on. It is not just the fish that die  
28 immediately and just don't sink but later suffer trauma and die.  
29 So, I think this is a really important step to take.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

32  
33 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. So, I'm going to touch just a little bit on  
34 this. I am in favor of the descending device, but the commercial  
35 trap fishermen. When the traps come in the boat and we have  
36 discards in a trap, we're like this.

37  
38 We're throwing the fish out of the trap overboard. They're going.  
39 Now if we have a large grouper, we have tools already that we use.  
40 We have venting tools that we use that were given to all the  
41 fishers that we use. But the descending device is good for, like,  
42 a big nassau grouper. The [inaudible], they just disappear in a  
43 second because they're such a powerful fish. So, the smaller fish,  
44 we're just releasing them as quickly as possible so they can  
45 survive. If we had to take the time and had to put a descending  
46 device in each one of those fish, we would only pull one trap maybe  
47 sometimes in a day. Because sometimes we could have 20 discards in  
48 a trap. And that's why we did the trap reduction. I mean, the

1 bycatch reduction program that we did before, and we are getting  
2 ready to do another one with Fish and Wildlife.

3  
4 So, we do, the commercial guys do have their own methods of  
5 releasing fish with barotrauma. This is great for the recreational  
6 fishers and stuff like that because they've never used anything  
7 before. So, this is going to be coming-- that's what you're seeing  
8 in the pie chart that was shown us at 7% where, but the other  
9 people at a higher percentage because they've never seen anything  
10 like this and they're the ones that's just going out and catching  
11 a few fish for their household or whatever. So that's going to be  
12 very useful for them.

13  
14 But we do have our ways of doing stuff, and we will have this on  
15 our boat where we will use it if we have to. So, I just don't want  
16 people to think that we're just trying to fish out there and  
17 they're dying. We have some very, very good ways of doing stuff.  
18 We have bins. And what we would do is, while we dump them in the  
19 bin, some of us put water in the bin. We take out a good one and  
20 we just dump that whole bin over. So, the fish are just darting,  
21 going up, down, across. So, they're going right back into the  
22 wildlife.

23  
24 So, I just wanted to make that clear. It's a little different now  
25 than when you go deep dropping for the goldeye, the blackfin, and  
26 stuff like that. Now if it's out of season, then when the  
27 barotrauma is set up here, then with the descending device will be  
28 very useful for something like that. Because those fish, their  
29 eyes are popping out their head. They swell up.

30  
31 So, you know, Nelson can tell you that. So, there are different  
32 levels that how we fish is what we use. So, I just wanted to put  
33 that on the record.

34  
35 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Thank you for the validation of my information,  
36 Mr. Magras. I appreciate that.

37  
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to table social network report  
39 by Cristina and the Chef workshop by Jannette for April. So, we're  
40 going to take a quick break and then come back to do the Lionfish  
41 Derby report by Michael Funk.

42  
43 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alrighty. We're going to get back to business.  
46 Next on the agenda is Lionfish Derby by Michael Funk. I'll do a  
47 little intro on Michael and then he'll do a little more talking  
48 about himself.

1  
2 Michael Funk is a member of the Saint Croix Fisheries Advisory  
3 Committee. He represents the recreational dive sector and he's  
4 also the vice-president of CORE. So, Mike?

5  
6 LIONFISH DERBY REPORT—MIKE FUNK  
7

8 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Well, good afternoon. Thank you very much for  
9 allowing me to come here and talk about Lionfish. I don't know  
10 what you know about Lionfish, but-- About 10 years ago, we thought  
11 lionfish were going to eat every other fish in the sea. There were  
12 a lot of them around. But then, in about 2016, there was a  
13 population collapse of about 90%. And that was in the Western  
14 Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, all along.

15  
16 I take a group out a couple of times a month, on the west end of  
17 Saint Croix, there are 10 divers in one area. Our record in 2014  
18 was 156 lionfish. In 2018, the same group of people diving in the  
19 same area, we got 15. The population just went down. For a while,  
20 we were thinking lionfish were like an endangered species, you  
21 know, but they've come back a little bit. Can we do the next slide,  
22 please? I only have a few slides.

23  
24 Our first Lionfish Derby was in Saint Croix, it was in 2014, and  
25 there were 615 Lionfish removed. Now that was a relatively small  
26 group, mostly commercial fishermen. It was kind of a fiasco. There  
27 were a lot of problems with organization. We had to switch the  
28 date right at the last minute and things like that. But still. 615  
29 lionfish in one day.

30  
31 This year, we had 515 lionfish removed. Again, one day. We had  
32 about half commercial fishermen, and about half recreational. The  
33 largest lionfish was, you can see up there, is 15 inches long,  
34 almost 16 inches long. Smallest was 3 inches long. That was double  
35 the number that we got in 2013, about the same number of fishers  
36 diving, pretty much the same area, but it was double the number of  
37 fish. So, the population does seem to be replenishing.

38  
39 This was Saint Thomas. So, this is the first time we've had a derby  
40 in Saint Thomas. Saint Thomas and Saint John. Saint John, we were  
41 not allowed to hunt in the National Park area, so that really  
42 limits where you could go in Saint John. So, we only had 222  
43 lionfish removed there, and I have the sizes and things like that.

44  
45 The main purpose of this, we're trying to educate the population,  
46 generally, about lionfish. We're also trying to get commercial  
47 fishermen to be more open to bringing their lionfish back in and  
48 making them available to some of the restaurants.

1  
2 In 2023, when we did the derby, we kept all of the lionfish, and  
3 we gave a lot of them away. Most of them we gave away to some of  
4 the restaurants. We also had, where we did our award ceremony, a  
5 lady there who prepared them. So, we gave her a whole bunch of  
6 fillets, and she prepared lionfish so people could taste it.

7  
8 In 2024, the fishermen, they could keep their lionfish if they  
9 wanted to. If they donated it to us, we, again, had some cooks  
10 there that cooked them up and they got a free lunch out of the  
11 deal. But most of the commercial fishermen donated their fish to  
12 us. They did not take them out and sell them.

13  
14 Most of the people who hunt lionfish in the Virgin Islands are  
15 recreational, so we keep a scoreboard on our website, corevi.org.  
16 And, so to date, we have 2,523 lionfish have been removed from  
17 Saint Croix waters. We've also given back about \$8,000 in prize  
18 money to the lionfish hunters. That was in 2024. 2023, it was about  
19 \$7,500, and a total of about \$16,000, which includes all of the  
20 other stuff that goes along with running the Derby.

21  
22 I guess that's about all. I have a couple more pictures, I think.  
23 So, this was a group of people that were involved in organizing  
24 the Derby in 2023.

25  
26 So, this guy, he said he went in the water, snorkeling at about 8  
27 o'clock in the morning. He came in at 3:30 in the afternoon with  
28 his cooler. You can see his red cooler there full of ice, he had  
29 one lionfish. That little, tiny one you see up there. He spent all  
30 day, and he came back with one little, tiny lionfish. And he got  
31 the prize for the smallest lionfish which was \$1500. Yeah. It was  
32 crazy. [laughter]

33  
34 And, again, our goal, one of our goals for the foundation is to  
35 promote this idea that lionfish are consumable, and we're trying  
36 to encourage commercial fishing community to harvest them. We have  
37 a lady who makes lionfish jewelry, and she pays \$2 for the fins on  
38 every fish. So, there's a couple extra bucks to be made on lionfish  
39 fins. And that's really about all I have to say.

40  
41 Any questions?

#### 42 43 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions for Michael Funk.

46  
47 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Hopefully, we'll be able to continue to do them  
48 next year. María?

1  
2 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, thank you for the presentation, for  
3 bringing that to our attention. So, how are people receiving the  
4 fish in terms of food? Right? Are they still careful? I mean, it's  
5 a really ugly fish. Right? But I know it tastes delicious. So--  
6  
7 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Well, I do some other things where I cook up  
8 lionfish, I let people taste them and things like that. But there  
9 are still a significant number of people who think that lionfish  
10 are poisonous. They're not poisonous; they are venomous. The  
11 spines, as long as you don't get stuck, you're going to be okay.  
12 You're not going to die if you do get stuck. I can tell you  
13 personally.  
14  
15 But a lot more people, I have people call me up all the time and  
16 ask me if I've got some lionfish, and I give them away to them.  
17 But there are more and more people who realize they're really good.  
18 Gerson, he doesn't sell his. He keeps them. Thank you very much.  
19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Any more question for Michael Funk?  
21 Sennai.  
22  
23 **SENNAI HABTES:** Mike, what kind of things can the Council do to  
24 support your efforts at CORE, and to help kind of either if you're  
25 interested in expanding the program or sustain the program in the  
26 U.S. Virgin Islands?  
27  
28 **MICHAEL FUNK:** A couple of things that we do is train people how  
29 to safely hunt lionfish. We do a lot of community outreach things  
30 where we're trying to teach people about lionfish, you know, that  
31 they're good to eat. So, we'd like to work a little bit more with  
32 reef responsible. I've come up with some more ideas about things  
33 we could do with them. You know, we need money.  
34  
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You came to the wrong place.  
36  
37 **MICHAEL FUNK:** I know everybody does. So, you know.  
38  
39 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Thank you for your presentation. Has there  
40 been any effort into looking at the stomach contents of these  
41 things?  
42  
43 **MICHAEL FUNK:** So, I do that a lot, looking at stomach content.  
44 There's been a lot of research. A few years ago, I was at a  
45 presentation, and a lady from the University of Florida did a DNA  
46 analysis of gut content of lionfish. What she found was that 26%  
47 of lionfish gut content is lionfish. They eat their babies. Yeah.  
48 they're opportunistic feeders, and anybody that's small enough in

1 front of them, they will eat it. So, they will eat their young.  
2  
3 But I've found a little barracuda, a baby barracuda in the stomach  
4 of one. I got a permit to hunt lionfish around Buck Island. All of  
5 the lionfish, all 4 lionfish that we got there had crabs in their  
6 stomach. No fish, just crabs.  
7  
8 But, generally speaking, we'll find everything. If they're on the  
9 on the reef, they'll have baby angelfish and baby parrotfish and,  
10 you know, whatever's around.  
11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Funk? Clay?  
13  
14 **CLAY PORCH:** Yeah. Thank you for your presentation. One more  
15 question. I'm just curious--  
16  
17 **MICHAEL FUNK:** I get paid by the question, so go ahead.  
18  
19 **CLAY PORCH:** I'm curious about, you know, what fraction of the  
20 lionfish population do you think you extract from each of these  
21 kinds of tournaments? Like, if you went diving over the same areas  
22 again, do you pretty much get them all in that area and then, just  
23 in general, you know, it's kind of a dent and you'd really have to  
24 expand to make a big impact on the population or do you get a fair  
25 fraction of what's out there?  
26  
27 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Thank you for asking that question. I actually meant  
28 to address that, and I forgot about it. You know, back in the day  
29 when there was the big expansion, we thought that having derbies  
30 and, like, me taking our group out, and calling lionfish would  
31 really make a difference. Research showed that it didn't. Really,  
32 we're not making that much of an impact.  
33  
34 If you think about it, you know, there's 75 miles, at least, of  
35 reefs around Saint Croix, and we only-- you know, the south side,  
36 hardly anybody ever goes out there except me. A few crazy people.  
37 And I'm probably the only one that hunts lionfish out there.  
38  
39 So, we just can't reach them all. And, they've been found, anywhere  
40 from 6 inches to 3,000 feet deep, so there's just no way we can  
41 get them all. And, these days, there are certain people who think  
42 that lionfish are just endemic now. They're here. They're  
43 established. There's not much we're going to be able to do about  
44 it, and that's pretty much true.  
45  
46 A lady did some research that, if we can maintain the population  
47 to a certain level, the native fish, their populations will stay  
48 about the same. But there's a tipping point when the population of

1 lionfish gets to a certain point where the native fish drop off  
2 pretty quickly. And, I mean, there's so many other factors that  
3 are affecting the reefs and the reef population, the reef  
4 ecosystem. We're seeing a lot less of all kinds of fish on the  
5 reef now.

6  
7 So, I don't know. I like to hunt them. You know, it's a fun thing.  
8 My freezer is full. They're good to eat, so we'll keep it up.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Roberto.

11  
12 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Have we found any predator for them?

13  
14 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Another very good question. So, again, back in the  
15 day, we used to think that if we fed them to the sharks, the sharks  
16 would learn to-- but that's not what they learned. They learned  
17 that a guy down there with a spear or a person with a spear is  
18 going to be a free meal. And so, they'll chase us around. But they  
19 don't actually go out. But, eels, moray eels have been seen to  
20 hunt them down, and nassau grouper also have been found to hunt  
21 them down as well. So, seeing the nassau grouper population  
22 increase is a really good thing.

23  
24 I've seen a nassau grouper hunting lionfish before. So, I think  
25 that might have something to do with it.

26  
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anyone else? No.

28  
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. No. I just want to thank you. Thank you for  
30 this presentation. Also, we discussed this a long time ago when we  
31 started looking at the lionfish. I personally have seen a reef in  
32 La Parguera covered entirely by lionfish.

33  
34 And we found that the only way-- It's the only fish that can tell  
35 the fishman, go ahead and kill and kill. Right? Drill, baby drill,  
36 like they say now. They say kill, and they go after the fish. But  
37 what we found in several meetings with people from Florida is that  
38 the price of it has started increasing. It used to be around 50¢.  
39 It's now \$5 a pound, something like that.

40  
41 The fishermen are selling it in fillets. Actually, the queen of  
42 the lionfish is right here with us, Jannette Ramos. She went around  
43 the island helping people develop recipes for lionfish. And that  
44 developed a market for lionfish. Actually, that increased the price  
45 of lionfish.

46  
47 That's the only way we are removing them. I keep telling them, you  
48 know, remove it before somebody comes with the bright idea of

1 protecting the lionfish. Anyways, it's a topic that's really,  
2 really interesting.

3  
4 Regarding the question whether we make a dent. Biologists tell us  
5 that we don't. As you said, from 6 inches to 3,000 feet, they're  
6 here to stay. Luckily, the population is getting to level off  
7 somehow. But before they level off, they destroy more than 150  
8 species of commercially important fish, because they eat them, as  
9 you know, when they are juveniles. So, anyway, that's a really  
10 refreshing talk.

11  
12 **MICHAEL FUNK:** About the commercial value of lionfish. Another  
13 group of people came down to the Virgin Islands and they did a  
14 study. They asked commercial fishermen how much they would expect  
15 to get paid for lionfish, and then they ask restaurants how much  
16 they would expect to pay. The restaurants will pay more than the  
17 commercial fishermen thought they would ask. So, there should be  
18 a good market for it. But, you know, they are small fish, it takes  
19 a lot of them, and I can understand why the commercial guys just  
20 don't want to mess with them, you know. But--

21  
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. They're here to stay.

23  
24 **MICHAEL FUNK:** Okay. Thank you.

25  
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.

27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Mike. So, our Fisheries Committee on  
29 Saint Croix, every month, holds a Christmas party for all the  
30 members, and Mike supplies the lionfish ceviche. Very delish. I  
31 might join the derby now that I heard a 2-inch lionfish is racking  
32 up \$1500.

33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Keep a small one in your pocket.

35  
36 **SENNAI HABTES:** So just to clarify, Mr. Chair, it is our regular  
37 monthly meeting. If people happen to bring things to eat and drink,  
38 it just happens at the same time. Yeah.

39  
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. It's a coincidence.

41  
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next are the enforcement reports. We're starting  
43 with DNER.

44  
45 **ENFORCEMENT REPORTS**  
46 **PUERTO RICO-DNER**

47  
48 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Cristina, do you have the report to--

1 okay.

2  
3 So, this is the Puerto Rico DNER Rangers Corp Enforcement Report,  
4 from April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024. We want to thank Edwin  
5 Rodríguez Ruiz, Commissioner, and Yamiré Pérez, from the Ranger  
6 Corps. The report was prepared by, Ricardo López.

7  
8 Basically, that includes law 278. This is the Puerto Rico fishing  
9 law and also the Puerto Rico fishing regulations, the regulation  
10 number 7949. This regulation has probably 100% of the fishing  
11 regulation limitations, fishing licenses, fishing permits,  
12 everything is there.

13  
14 In this slide, the gray columns represent the time period between  
15 August to November 2024. The red columns represent the time period  
16 from April 24 to July 24, and the blue columns represent October  
17 2023 to March 2024. And at the top of the graphic, you can see  
18 from the Puerto Rico fisheries law 278, basically, only 10  
19 infractions or interventions were made, and also approximately 68  
20 interventions during this period of time from fishery regulations.  
21 So, that means, closed season, fish caught during their closed  
22 season or under size limits, under the legal-size limit  
23 interventions. There are probably 1,000 interventions of  
24 navigation and safety. But 68, are related to the fishing activity.

25  
26 The rangers mentioned to us that they have also several  
27 investigations, because they found dead, in different locations of  
28 the island, some turtles. So, many of them were hit by boats and  
29 fortunately they were found. At the moment, nobody has been accused  
30 of provoking these accidents.

31  
32 Also, they mentioned they had an intervention with eight mackerels  
33 that were under the minimum legal size.

34  
35 In the next slide, we can see the 3 mackerel species common in  
36 Puerto Rico. At the top of the list, the left side at the top is  
37 the cero mackerel. In Puerto Rico we call it alazana, sierra  
38 alazana. Okay. And at the top right, we see the spanish mackerel,  
39 and in the bottom, we see the king mackerel. La sierra carite is  
40 the largest one.

41  
42 It looks like in the intervention by the Rangers, they had probably  
43 three species but two were undersized. The cero mackerel and the  
44 king mackerel.

45  
46 This is a picture of the injured sea turtle, and that was caught  
47 alive. Also, a picture of some landings during a regular  
48 inspection. We don't know if that was an intervention or an

1 infraction. Just a picture. And that's it.

2  
3 That's all folks.

4  
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Daniel. Any questions for Daniel?  
6 Hearing none, we don't have U.S.V.I. So, we'll move on to NOAA  
7 OLE.

8  
9 NOAA FISHERIES/OLE

10  
11 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Miguel  
12 Borges. I'll be presenting for NOAA, Office of Law Enforcement.

13  
14 So, in Puerto Rico, we participated in a couple of workshops that  
15 have been mentioned in previous presentations. One of them, the  
16 Queen Conch Workshops. There were three of them, two in Puerto  
17 Rico and one in San Croix. I participated in all three of them.  
18 That was after the ESA listing of the queen conch. I also  
19 participated in the HMS workshops, which wasn't mentioned earlier,  
20 in Arecibo, Dorado where HMS personnel, Delisse, and others were  
21 present in those workshops and had a computer there, and we did  
22 many new applications for HMS, either renewals or new ones.

23  
24 In the training side, I've done several trainings with U.S. Coast  
25 Guard Partners and DNER. We did two with DNER, along with Michelle  
26 Schärer. She did mostly fish IDs and grouper. And I did federal  
27 fishing regulations and case packages. And two trainings with DNER  
28 officers.

29  
30 In the U.S.V.I., we had to announce that the enforcement officer  
31 in U.S.V.I. is no longer there. He transferred out of Saint Thomas.  
32 Management is in the process of hiring another one and replacing  
33 that enforcement officer position. But while he was there and since  
34 the last meeting, he did several patrols at the airport and mostly  
35 with seafood importations with the SIMP program and IUU fishing.  
36 And he was also president in the Queen Conch Workshop.

37  
38 In recent cases, we've been working with the vessel grounding in  
39 Culebra, which was located in Flamenco. That vessel has been  
40 removed already, and we're still working with the assessment  
41 divers. We've also done several northern right whale cases. Those  
42 are seasonal management areas in the East Coast of the United  
43 States through the Atlantic that have speed restrictions for  
44 vessels over 65 feet. And there's so many cases that they are  
45 assigned through all the federal agents, throughout the states,  
46 throughout the nation. I've been doing several of those cases.

47  
48 In HMS, we referred some cases to DNER in territorial waters. It's

1 been a few months ago already. The biggest update is the EEL case.  
2 If you remember in February, we had a criminal case where U.S.  
3 Coast Guards stopped a vessel that was intercepted North of Puerto  
4 Rico, that at first failed to heave and the Coast Guard had to use  
5 disabling fire in order to stop that vessel. They were found with  
6 22 bags of juvenile eels, also called elvers. There were  
7 approximately 100,000 of those eels. You can see, that's a picture  
8 of them right in the middle.

9  
10 Those eels were caught in the rivers of Puerto Rico and were being  
11 smuggled out of Puerto Rico to Dominican Republic. That's to later  
12 be sold to the Asian market. Their estimated value is between  
13 \$3,000 and \$4,000 per kilogram. So, it's a very lucrative business.  
14 The two subjects that were smuggling them were two Dominican  
15 Republic Nationals.

16  
17 They were detained by the Coast Guard and are our joint partnership  
18 with them. Andrew is here present, called me and we started this  
19 case, along with the AUSA who accepted the criminal case. They  
20 were brought to shore, and we took custody of them with the help  
21 of DNER. Ricardo was a great help as well identifying the eels and  
22 helping with their biology. So, we're grateful for that, and the  
23 Coast Guard did that interdiction, passed out the case to us, and  
24 we prosecuted this case with the local AUSA.

25  
26 We had the sentencing this past month in November, which was a  
27 successful case. They had plead guilty a few months ago. And in  
28 November, like I said, just a few weeks ago, they were sentenced  
29 to two years of prison, each of the defendants. There were two of  
30 them, well, two years each, plus, two more years of supervised  
31 release. And that's all our report.

32  
33 If you have any questions.  
34

#### 35 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

36  
37 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** I have a question regarding the eel. I  
38 remember that you, in a past meeting, presented also a case about  
39 eels. Is that case the same one or different persons, different  
40 case?

41  
42 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Yes. it's the same one. Same case. Yeah. It started  
43 in February and then it ended not a couple weeks ago, which is  
44 really fast for a criminal case to be concluded in just a few  
45 months. Yes.

46  
47 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Thanks.  
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other question for OLE? Miguel?

2  
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a question, but this case became so important  
4 that it hit the newspaper. It was en el periódico El Día and  
5 others. One person called me, and they didn't know that they had  
6 such value. He didn't even know that they were here. So, he asked  
7 me what the Council was doing about it, and I said, "well, we work  
8 with NOAA and that's the best that we can do at this time." But  
9 the value of the eels is really high. That's why they have such a  
10 demand. It seems like this is not the only case or the only people  
11 doing it.

12  
13 So, I don't know, Miguel, in your investigation, do you expect  
14 this activity to occur again, or do you think that that was very  
15 unique? Just speculation. I don't know. I know you don't have the  
16 data.

17  
18 **MIGUEL BORGES:** To address your first point about the value. Yes,  
19 they were very expensive. One of the reasons is because they have  
20 not been able to reproduce in captivity, so they need the influx  
21 of that wild caught. They are caught in this juvenile stage and  
22 then they're exported to Asia where they're farm grown to maybe a  
23 couple pounds and then sold for sushi or just the Asian market.  
24 So, that's why it has such high value. At the same time, it's a  
25 dedicated resource as they spawn at sea, but then come upriver and  
26 live in freshwater most of their lives. So, it's pretty  
27 interesting.

28  
29 It was very-- there is not a lot of information about them in  
30 Puerto Rico, so not many people knew about them, including us. So,  
31 we were also surprised when we got that case. There are probably  
32 more people catching them in Puerto Rico. So, the investigation  
33 continues, so we'll see what happens next. But, yes, we suspect  
34 that they are because of the value.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more questions for OLE? Hearing none,  
37 we'll move to the U.S. Coast Guard with a presentation on  
38 requirements for Caribbean vessels.

39  
40 **U.S. COAST GUARD—CG REQUIREMENTS FOR CARIBBEAN VESSELS**

41  
42 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Good afternoon. Thank you. This is Andrew  
43 Mcgraw-Herdeg from the U.S. Coast Guard Sector San Juan. So, I've  
44 actually got two documents today. I do have an enforcement report  
45 with some highlights. But first I can walk through just some  
46 resources for the public, for the Council about points of contact,  
47 and where to find our safety regulations for commercial fishing  
48 vessels.

1  
2 So, just as an overview. For the Coast Guard, our program for  
3 commercial fishing vessel safety is distinct from our fisheries  
4 enforcement. Regulations I'll discuss here are only referring to  
5 safety gear that's required to be carried on commercial fishing  
6 vessels. This doesn't have anything to do with required or  
7 prohibited fishing gear, anything about particular species, but  
8 these requirements are applicable to any vessel that is engaged in  
9 commercial fishing regardless of the type of vessel itself. So,  
10 these two pictures could both be considered a commercial fishing  
11 vessel. That's based on whether the operator intends to sell their  
12 catch.

13  
14 So, typically, someone who's rec fishing or charter boat would not  
15 be automatically covered by these regulations. Those would be  
16 different safety regulations. Also worth noting that these are  
17 applicable in any U.S. waters, not just the EEZ.

18  
19 So, probably the best quick reference I can recommend for the  
20 public to be in compliance with these safety regulations is our  
21 CFV exam guidebook. This is a publicly available document that  
22 Coast Guard has on their website, and I've included a short link  
23 there. It's, I think, approximately 65 pages. It's got lots of  
24 pictures, lots of charts. It's really difficult to summarize these  
25 requirements, because they vary completely based on how long your  
26 vessel is, where it's operating, and how many people are on board.  
27 And the regulations get much more complex as you have, kind of, a  
28 larger crew operating further out from shore.

29  
30 But this is the best reference I can recommend. It's what our  
31 examiners use, and it's what the folks up at District 7 recommend  
32 for preparing for one of these examinations. I'd also note that  
33 Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are not pictured on the cover  
34 there, but we are in District 7 headquarters in Miami.

35  
36 So, just an example of the kind of contents that fishers could  
37 expect to see. These are the same regulations that would be  
38 enforced during a dock side exam as if you were, say, boarded at  
39 sea, randomly, and just going through a safety inspection. So,  
40 either way, following these regulations would have you prepared  
41 for either one of those inspections.

42  
43 And then, another tool that was recommended by our District 7 staff  
44 was this safety gear checklist generator. So again, there is  
45 another link here for where you can find that. Fishers could enter  
46 information about their own vessel, their crew, and where they  
47 plan to operate. And then, if you go to the next slide, I can show  
48 an example of kind of input and output there. That will produce a

1 checklist that the fisher could then keep with them themselves,  
2 make sure they are in compliance. And then, because that is based  
3 on our CFV exam guide, it would then mirror exactly what the  
4 inspectors, pier side, would go after or what a boarding officer  
5 would go through on their own checklist. That is a good resource  
6 to have.

7  
8 Then, just a note about periodic dockside exams. Those are required  
9 for certain commercial fishing vessels, not all. In order to be  
10 required, that's typically vessels that operate more than 3  
11 nautical miles from the baseline, or certain HMS permit holders  
12 are considered automatically CFVs for this purpose and would be  
13 subject to these dockside exams.

14  
15 If you go to the next slide, I have probably the best contact info.  
16 So, we do have funding for a permanent billet for a CFV examiner  
17 in San Juan. Unfortunately, the person in that billet just recently  
18 retired, so we don't have a particular person right now. However,  
19 they referred me to our prevention department for domestic  
20 inspections. If there's any specific questions about, am I a  
21 commercial fisher, do I fall into x y z regulation, this duty phone  
22 number is a good point of contact for the public, as well as that  
23 email, ssjdomestics@uscg.mil.

24  
25 And again, I'm more on the enforcement side. So, I would probably  
26 refer anything safety inspection related to these people. But if  
27 there's any questions or comments, I'm happy to field what I can  
28 here. That's all I have for this document.

29  
30 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I just want to tell Cristina to make a note so  
35 we can put this in our web page. It's a common question that  
36 occurs, and this is excellent.

37  
38 **U.S. COAST GUARD FISHERIES ENFORCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS**

39  
40 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Okay. In that case, we'll move on to some  
41 of our recent enforcement highlights. So, the first item on the  
42 top there, I just wanted to reiterate that our strategy continues  
43 to be mostly targeting the waters between the Western Puerto Rico  
44 and the Dominican Republic. That's mostly where our migrant and  
45 counter drug missions for the Coast Guard are most active. Because  
46 we have eleven statutory missions, it's kind of difficult to find  
47 time and funding and dedicated resources to do federal fisheries  
48 enforcement. So, for us, it's more opportunistic where and when we

1 can. But for us, the main vector continues to be Western Puerto  
2 Rico and then everywhere else where we can.

3  
4 Additionally, I'd mentioned that last year it was announced, due  
5 to fleet-wide budget constraints, that there's been a reduction in  
6 patrol boats. We used to have seven cutters home port in San Juan.  
7 It's now down to five. However, thanks to great support with  
8 training, especially from NOAA OLE and our District 7 counterparts.  
9 Right now, every one of our patrol boats does have at least one  
10 boarding officer with that advanced Caribbean LMR specific  
11 training. So, specific allowed gear, prohibited gear, species ID,  
12 and all those enforcements capabilities.

13  
14 That second note there, just a case study to highlight kind of  
15 recent. We do, sometimes, see EEZ incursions from foreign fishing  
16 vessels. We've had Venezuelan vessels in the past. This particular  
17 one was actually two, Dominican Republic vessels with Dominican  
18 Nationals. In this case, this was assessed as just good faith  
19 navigational error, because the two vessels had very small amounts  
20 of snapper and grouper and did not have any nav equipment. So, our  
21 cutter conducted an LMR boarding, checked their paperwork, and  
22 tucked down the information and kind of gave them a warning about  
23 EEZ encroachment.

24  
25 And then, the third item I have here, just to kind of repeat what  
26 Miguel mentioned, this was a fantastic case of collaboration with  
27 the Coast Guard. This is actually our station San Juan who did  
28 that disabling fire intervention and then thanks of course to NOAA  
29 OLE and Fish and Wildlife for the investigation in that case, the  
30 follow-up, and then the U.S. Attorney's Office for getting that  
31 prosecution.

32  
33 So, that's all the enforcement highlights that I have. Of course,  
34 there's always ongoing operations that we're planning, wherever we  
35 can, limited by operations and budget. So, open it up to any  
36 questions or comments for myself.

#### 37 38 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions for Coast Guard? María?

41  
42 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, for being available and presenting  
43 information and the links for the requirements for fishers, for  
44 fishing vessels because that was one of the things that was  
45 requested at the Marine Resources Education Program, that took  
46 place, I think it was in August. I don't remember very well. But  
47 yeah.

1 So, they had concerns about what were the requirements because, of  
2 course, the size of the boats varies so much that the type of  
3 fishing vessels that they use and also the miles, etcetera. And I  
4 see that you provided a link and they kind of have to look into it  
5 and see which category they fall into. But thank you for providing  
6 that and we should be able to put that somewhere so that they can  
7 access the information and pass on the information that you  
8 provided too, if they have any questions. But thank you.

9  
10 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** Thank you.

11  
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?

13  
14 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** Yes. Thank you. Does this information-- does the  
15 Coast Guard have, like, a website, social media that can be shared  
16 with the fishing communities? And, well, that's one question.

17  
18 And the second one is, is this information in Spanish?

19  
20 **ANDREW MCGRAW-HERDEG:** So, thank you for that question. As far as  
21 social media outreach, that's yes. We do have dedicated feeds.  
22 They, as far as I know, cover all of our mission areas. I don't  
23 think there's a fisheries specific Coast Guard feed, but that's  
24 something I'm happy to look at and get back to the Council.

25  
26 As to your question about Spanish language resources, I know for  
27 sure that, that CFE exam guide, there is at least one older version  
28 that is available in Spanish. However, I couldn't validate myself  
29 that it has the most up to date information, and I didn't want to  
30 share a link to that without that being validated.

31  
32 If you get in touch with that contact info I shared with the  
33 domestics and prevention department, they may know more than I do  
34 about most up to date regulations. But to my knowledge, just to be  
35 as correct as possible, I only wanted to link the most up to date  
36 one I could validate. But thank you.

37  
38 **WILSON SANTIAGO:** No. Thank you.

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for the Coast Guard? Hearing  
41 none. Okay. Thank you very much. Next would be Advisory Bodies  
42 Membership.

43  
44 **ADVISORY BODIES MEMBERSHIP**

45  
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Caribbean Fisheries  
47 Management Council had a close meeting to discuss Advisory Bodies.  
48 I'd like to thank Diana Martino, she's really sick at home with

1 bronchitis, but she was able to send me the tables and  
2 recommendations in terms of vacancies. So, we started with the DAP  
3 Saint Croix. There are two vacancies. We encourage Council Members  
4 or members of the public to submit names. The meeting in April  
5 will look at candidates for all the Advisory Bodies, and, of  
6 course, we would hope that by that time we can have some names to  
7 be considered for the two seats at the DAP, Saint Croix.

8  
9 Regarding the OEAP Panel. As you have heard Alida Ortiz, Dr. Alida  
10 Ortiz is retiring because of health reasons. So, the group decided  
11 to advertise in the social network that we have a vacancy for a  
12 person that could replace Dr. Alida Ortiz with a similar background  
13 in terms of academic background and experience in outreach and  
14 education of marine resources. One motion that we need is for the  
15 group to decide to reappoint Andy Maldonado for another term in  
16 the OEAP.

17  
18 So, I'll stop here for the motion of Mr. Chairman.

19  
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

21  
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, moved.

23  
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Second?

25  
26 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Second.

27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say "aye."

29  
30 **GROUP:** Aye.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion  
33 carries.

34  
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the case of the DAP  
36 Puerto Rico-- By the way, all the other panels are okay in terms  
37 of the tenure. Theirs memberships will end on '26, '27, and we  
38 will address that when the time comes. However, in the case of  
39 Puerto Rico, it was informed by the Chair, Nelson Crespo, that Mr.  
40 Gustavo Cruzado has retired. He decided that he no longer could be  
41 a member of the Advisory Panel. So, Nelson submitted the name of  
42 Miguel Ortiz, we discussed it a little bit.

43  
44 Miguel Ortiz has been working in fisheries, especially in the area  
45 of Guayama for many, many years. He's a well-known commercial  
46 fisherman, and he has the qualifications to be a member of the  
47 DAP, and that's why Nelson submitted his name. Actually, Nelson  
48 interviewed Mr. Miguel Ortiz, and he said yes, that he would like

1 to be considered as a member of the DAP Puerto Rico.

2  
3 So, at this time, Mr. Chairman, we would like to hear a motion  
4 from the Council appointing Mr. Miguel Ortiz to the DAP Puerto  
5 Rico.

6  
7 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** So moved.

8  
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Need a second.

10  
11 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Second.

12  
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say "aye."

14  
15 **GROUP:** Aye.

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion  
18 carries.

19  
20 **OTHER BUSINESS**

21  
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. In other business. We received a letter  
23 from the University of Puerto Rico. I mean, excuse me, the Virgin  
24 Islands signed by Richard Nemeth and Elizabeth Kadison. This is in  
25 relation to extending the Grammanik Bank seasonal closure from  
26 January 1<sup>st</sup> through May 15.

27  
28 So, I will read this for the record, and then probably you can  
29 take note of it. Yeah. Quieres leerla tú, for the record. Es que  
30 tu voz se oye mejor que la mía.

31  
32 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you. Sorry about that. So, the  
33 letter is dated December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. It is addressed to Mr. Carlos  
34 Farchette. It refers to the extension of the Grammanik Bank season  
35 closure from January 1<sup>st</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>.

36  
37 "Dear Mr. Farchette, we respectfully submit this letter for  
38 consideration by the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council for  
39 modifying the closed season for the Grammanik Bank to enhance  
40 protection for the endangered nassau grouper.

41  
42 In February 2004, the University of the Virgin Islands Center for  
43 Marine and Environmental Studies submitted a formal request for an  
44 immediate emergency action to protect a multi-species spawning  
45 aggregation site for grouper and snapper, including small number  
46 of endangered nassau grouper, epinephelus striatus. The Grammanik  
47 Bank seasonal closed area was established in 2006 and protected a  
48 small 1.5 square kilometers mesophotic reef from February 1<sup>st</sup> to

1 April 30<sup>th</sup>." He cites the federal register. "Since that time, the  
2 number of nassau grouper aggregating at the Grammanik Bank has  
3 increased from 30 fish in 2004 to over a 1000 fish in 2024 (R.  
4 Nemeth, unpublished data).  
5

6 Despite the success in increasing their spawning population over  
7 a 20-year period, the nassau grouper is still critically endangered  
8 and highly susceptible to fishery bycatch in and around the  
9 Grammanik Bank. Several scientific papers provide evidence that  
10 the nassau grouper spawning season starts as early as January and  
11 continues into May. (Rowell et al. 2015, Nemeth et al. 2023)." He  
12 includes a figure that makes reference to this citation. "This has  
13 been especially evident in recent years where nassau groupers seem  
14 to be shifting their spawning season earlier in the year, with  
15 peak numbers occurring in January." And another figure that shows  
16 that evidence. The citations are included here.  
17

18 So, that's figure one, the number of individuals for 2007 to 2013,  
19 for the months of January through December. "Figure 1. Summary of  
20 acoustic telemetry detections of tagged nassau grouper, (n equals  
21 26) on the Grammanik Bank from 2007 to 2013 (modified from figure  
22 2 in Nemeth et al. 2023) Figure 2, Percent mean abundance of nassau  
23 grouper counted on underwater visual surveys from 2004 to 2023  
24 (presentation by Nemeth et al. 2023 Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries  
25 Institute, Nassau, Bahamas, November 2023)"  
26

27 The letter then continues, "Nassau Grouper is protected in both  
28 Federal and Virgin Islands territorial waters, but they are still  
29 very vulnerable as bycatch because fishing is allowed on the  
30 Grammanik Bank in January and May. This can cause unintended  
31 mortality from fish being brought up to the up from depth, and  
32 fishing on the spawning site can disrupt important courtship  
33 behaviors, thus reducing reproductive success. For example, in  
34 January 2024, multiple boats were observed fishing on the Grammanik  
35 Bank daily during the week after the full moon. During the same  
36 time period, we conducted visual surveys and documented over a  
37 1000 fish per dive. At present, there is no prohibition to fishing  
38 the Grammanik Bank in January and no enforcement to ensure that  
39 nassau grouper is not harvested. These data and observations  
40 emphasize the urgency for action to modify existing Grammanik Bank  
41 regulations.  
42

43 The most impactful change to continue the positive population trend  
44 of nassau grouper is enhanced protection during its spawning  
45 season. We recommend modifying the seasonal closure for the  
46 Grammanik Bank to extend from January 1<sup>st</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup> each year.  
47 Other priority management recommendations concerning the  
48 boundaries of the Grammanik Bank can be found in Nemeth et al.

1 (2023). Previous management regulations have made significant  
2 contributions to facilitating the recovery of the nassau grouper  
3 in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Adapting management actions as new  
4 information becomes available is essential for continued success.  
5 We look forward to your favorable consideration in this matter.

6  
7 Sincerely, Richard Nemeth, PhD and Elizabeth Kadison, MS.”  
8

9 And it sends copies to Mr. Andrew Strelcheck, the Regional  
10 Administrator, Dr. Nicole Angeli, Director of the Division of Fish  
11 and Wildlife, U.S.V.I. DPNR, Mr. Red Bailey, Chair, Saint  
12 Thomas/Saint John, FAC.  
13

#### 14 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

15  
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Graciela. Miguel?  
17

18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Let me just ask María. When we receive a letter  
19 like this, what are the appropriate steps that we can take? Just  
20 for the record.  
21

22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. So, I think it will be for the Council  
23 to decide how they want to move forward. If they want to-- perhaps  
24 if they think that there's merit to reviewing this, you can send  
25 it to the SSC and have them evaluate the science behind the  
26 request.  
27

28 I mean, this is not the first time we hear about this. This was  
29 brought to our attention a couple of years ago, if I'm not  
30 incorrect. The Council decided to, I think, set it aside for a  
31 while until more information was compiled. But I think if the  
32 Council decides that they would like to look into this, then  
33 something to do would be just to send it to the SSC so they can  
34 evaluate the merit and then come with any recommendations back to  
35 the Council.  
36

37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, María.  
38

39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the original request had to do with  
40 the extension of the Grammanik and the MCD, to close-up that area  
41 in between. This one is a request to extend the seasonal closure.  
42

43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's what I was going to mention. No, there  
44 are two questions. But anyway, this is not for discussion at this  
45 time. So, the instruction will be to allow the SSC to take a look  
46 at both communications and then report back to us in due time.  
47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Katherine.

1  
2 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** So that is a path forward, if that's what  
3 the Council decides, but that would require some Council discussion  
4 and action. Yeah. Okay.  
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?  
7

8 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. I know at the Ponce meeting, the Fisherman's  
9 Association read a letter into the record, which discussed the  
10 alleyway and the same issue on the timeline was discussed as well.  
11 At that time, Jack McGovern sat in the Chair, and he instructed  
12 staff to do a white paper to answer all of the questions that the  
13 association had. So, I just want to make it clear that that was a  
14 process that's supposed to be happening before we jump to even  
15 attempt to try and put any more hardships on our fishery. Because  
16 there's a lot of information out there that showed that the only  
17 reason those fish were there was because of that lunar cycle  
18 change.  
19

20 The Grammanik Bank was not closed for the nassau grouper. The  
21 Grammanik Bank was closed for the [grammaniks?], the yellowfin  
22 grouper, tiger grouper, and the black grouper, yellowmouth  
23 grouper. Back in 2005, at the hotel in San Juan, at the airport is  
24 when we did the SFA, and we put the seasonal closure in place for  
25 the Grammanik Bank to protect those species. It wasn't to protect  
26 the nassau grouper. The Nassau Grouper Bank is actually inside the  
27 MCD. But this is a spillover of the quantity of fish that are  
28 coming back to the shelf.  
29

30 So, when they say that they're coming to the Grammanik Bank to  
31 spawn, this is outside of the major spawning that's taking place  
32 inside of the MCD. And we requested the information, in our letter,  
33 to be looked at. Now he says in the beginning of his letter that  
34 as of 2024, there's 1,000 fish. He hasn't done the assessment for  
35 2024 yet. When was the assessment done? He hasn't published any of  
36 these papers, but in the coming period, we have a member from our  
37 fishing association, Elizabeth Ban, who wants to read a statement  
38 directly from the Saint Thomas Fisherman Association into the  
39 record.  
40

41 But I have a lot of concerns before we jump the gun to start  
42 talking about more closures, more hardships. I have an issue with  
43 that. Because in January, you're seeing the boats there; we are  
44 fishing the red hind. That's what we are there to do. We don't use  
45 no bottom gear. We're fishing with hand lines, catching strawberry  
46 groupers and red hind. That's why we're in the area for, because  
47 there's no bottom gear in that area.  
48

1 And then it's closed from February 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>. It's been  
2 closed for 19 years, and that was to protect the yellowfin grouper  
3 and other groupers in that grouper complex.

4

5 So, I just want to put that in a record. Thank you.

6

7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That's why I asked María because the mere fact  
8 that we received the letter doesn't mean that we're going to go  
9 like a headless chicken doing things that we receive. We have to  
10 follow a procedure.

11

12 So, I believe that during the next SSC meeting, whenever that  
13 occurs, we'll have all these correspondences that will be looked  
14 at by the SSC. And then, from that meeting, we will expect to hear  
15 a recommendation from the SSC as to the way to go with this one.  
16 From the SSC to the Council, you have a recommendation, and then  
17 the Council has to decide how to proceed with it and the next step  
18 to go and everything.

19

20 So, do not expect to have this back immediately, the very next  
21 morning kind of things, because that's not the way it happens.

22

23 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** We have Elizabeth Kadison and Elizabeth  
24 Ban waiting for turns to speak.

25

26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Go ahead with Ban.

27

28 **ELIZABETH BAN ROHRING:** Okay. Can you guys hear me?

29

30 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.

31

32 **ELIZABETH BAN ROHRING:** Okay. I'm going to read this because I  
33 tend to go off topic, so bear with me.

34

35 My name is Elizabeth Bann. I am a member of the Saint Thomas  
36 Fisherman's Association; a former NOAA employee where I served as  
37 the National Sea Grant Extension Lead in the National Sea Grant  
38 Office; and the former Marine Advisor for the Virgin Islands Marine  
39 Advisory Service at U.V.I., partnering with University of Puerto  
40 Rico Sea Grant.

41

42 My comment is about the proposal to extend the Grammanik Bank  
43 seasonal closure in the U.S.V.I. and is, to quote Dr. Nemeth, in  
44 support of enhancing protections for the endangered Virgin Islands  
45 fishermen. I have no doubt that Dr. Nemeth and his team have done  
46 solid ecological research on the Grammanik, but there's a  
47 considerable lack of social science research on the impacts of  
48 this and other closures.

1  
2 In fact, there's been a lack of fishery social science research in  
3 the U.S.V.I. writ large. We need more information on the  
4 relationships between fishing and food systems, food security,  
5 cultural community ties, and non-market values of the fishing  
6 community. This information has been sorely underrepresented or  
7 missing altogether in the fisheries research that leads to  
8 management actions.

9  
10 That said, I understand that there is a lack of funding and on the  
11 ground research, and researchers are scarce. But that does not  
12 mean that the social implications of these actions can be ignored.  
13 I'm going to summarize quickly National Standard 8 in the Magnuson-  
14 Stevens Act about fishing communities, where it says conservation  
15 and management measures shall take into account the importance of  
16 fishery resources to fishing communities by utilizing economic and  
17 social data in order to provide the sustained participation of  
18 such communities and minimize adverse economic impacts of such  
19 communities. The U.S.V.I. fishing communities withstood continued  
20 and increased closures threatening their culture and livelihood.  
21 As they've said, they have become an endangered species.

22  
23 We need social science research to inform management and inform  
24 the impacts of fisheries management actions on marginalized  
25 fisheries populations, such as these in the U.S.V.I. As Dr. Nemeth  
26 said in his letter, adapting management actions as new information  
27 becomes available is essential for continued success. But this  
28 must include social science research. We need to include that to  
29 adapt our management actions. Also, Dr. Niemann has benefited from  
30 continuing funding to study the ecological impacts of the Grammanik  
31 Bank closure, but there has been no such funding or funding source  
32 to study these social implications.

33  
34 Without it, we're not seeing the entire picture, and we're  
35 necessarily omitting the impacts on our community in the process.  
36 If the stock is rebuilding, as the letter also states, then  
37 expanding the closure, spatially or temporally, is an unnecessary  
38 burden on the welfare of the U.S.V.I. fishing community.

39  
40 I implore the Council to consider the potential social impacts of  
41 further closures in the Grammanik before taking actions.

42  
43 Thank you.

44  
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Elizabeth Ban. Cristina, we'll hear  
46 from Kadison.

47  
48 **ELIZABETH KADISON:** Hi. I'm sorry. I had some technical

1 difficulties there. Elizabeth Kadison, for the record. I am a  
2 research technician at the University of the Virgin Islands.

3  
4 Yeah. I would like to, first of all, thank the Council for reading  
5 this letter and bringing it up at the last, as you know, way  
6 overtime at the meetings today. We wrote the letter and brought it  
7 back to the attention of the Council because we feel like it's  
8 something that needs to be looked at and addressed again.

9  
10 Basically, we really believe that, temporally, the season on the  
11 Nassau grouper needs to be adjusted, because of the research that  
12 we've been doing, the timing that we've seen change, the number of  
13 fish, the recovery that we're starting to see on the Puerto Rican  
14 shelf, not only in Saint Thomas and Saint John, but also in Puerto  
15 Rico. And we feel like this is really, really important.

16  
17 I can't, of course, speak to the social implications because that's  
18 not my field. But our feeling is that to make the least impact on  
19 the fishermen, on the lives of the fishermen and probably the most  
20 impact on the recovery and the viability of the spawning  
21 aggregation would be to shift, well, include the month of January  
22 in that closed time period.

23  
24 Julian, we did collect data in 2024, January, February, March,  
25 and April. In 2024 we were out there. We were collecting data. We  
26 have that. That again showed the bulk, the majority of the fish,  
27 by far respawning in January. So, that's our concern.

28  
29 We would really like this. We weren't suggesting an emergency  
30 closure or anything like that. Of course, we know that this has to  
31 go through the SSC and go through the Council and go through the  
32 ropes but just bringing it back to the attention of the Council.

33  
34 Thank you.

35  
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. So, we're going to get all  
37 this information from the speakers just now and from the letter  
38 and get together with the SSC at their next meeting and have them  
39 do research on it. María?

40  
41 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mr. Chair, so, I'm going to retract myself a  
42 little bit of what I said before. So, we're looking at the record.  
43 There was a discussion. I know it was a different request, but,  
44 yes, thank you, Julian, for reminding us about this. We had a lot  
45 of work; this was in August 2023. What was said during the meeting  
46 was something to look at in 2024 depending on workload. Right? So,  
47 there was a request, not a motion, a request to work on a white  
48 paper exploring all the things that had been discussed here.

1  
2 So, with that said, I think that the appropriate way of dealing  
3 with this is how it was said to be worked on before. Like, let  
4 staff take a look at the information that is available and put  
5 something together and then continue the discussion, if that is  
6 amenable to everyone, before sending this to the SSC because those  
7 were the instructions that we got before.

8  
9 So, in terms of timing, we'll need to work that into what the  
10 Council thinks is a priority because we have a list of stuff. But  
11 if this is a priority, then that's why we need a list, to kind of  
12 put things into priority. But thank you for the discussion. This  
13 has been very helpful. And thank you to our participants online,  
14 because that's really good information that we received in  
15 addition.

16  
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Do you have a chat?

18  
19 **CRISTINA OLÁN MARTÍNEZ:** Elizabeth Ban, "Are there any social  
20 scientists or those with social science expertise on the SSC? I  
21 don't believe it can be adequately reviewed without that expertise.

22  
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes, the answer is two members are social  
24 scientists.

25  
26 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Tarsila and Walter.

27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance, do you want to go ahead and repeat those  
29 names?

30  
31 **VANCE VICENTE:** Vance Vicente, Chair. The two members that are  
32 dealing with social and cultural issues are Tarsila Seara and  
33 Walter Keithly.

34  
35 **SENNAI HABTES:** It's Walter Keithly and Tarsila Seara. In addition,  
36 we have members from NOAA's socioeconomic group in Miami that come  
37 down frequently to meet with fishers. The amount of work that we're  
38 doing to represent socioeconomic efforts is increasing  
39 continuously year after year as we're trying to represent a better  
40 understanding of those impacts.

41  
42 What I will remind the Council of and what we should really keep  
43 in mind is that this is an endangered species. We have no direct  
44 actions that have been taken in terms of management associated  
45 with this species. That is a problem with regards to understanding  
46 the impacts and what we are actually doing to manage it. There are  
47 clear requirements under the ESA. I think what we should take a  
48 step back and understand is when small management recommendations

1 are made, that we can do to take a direct action, that is a  
2 simplification that can improve benefits to that species, it can  
3 head off much larger and stronger impacts that will hurt the  
4 fishing industry a lot more in the future. And I think what we  
5 have to do is very carefully look at those things and weigh them.

6  
7 This is a 45-day extension on a seasonal closure. Right? It's not  
8 expanding the area. It's not changing like the length of it. But  
9 it's something we should take seriously because currently there  
10 isn't a management plan or rebuilding plan in place for the  
11 species. And in the last 20 years, the only time we've seen an  
12 increase where you can count population changes to this species  
13 have been the last four years. That's a very limited growth of the  
14 species under the requirement of the ESA.

15  
16 Anyone looking carefully at the management actions and the work  
17 that's being done on this could have a real bone to pick and could  
18 lead to a lot of much larger problems if we don't start doing some  
19 sort of small management actions to head that stuff off in the  
20 past. I think we should take that into account and take the  
21 recommendation seriously by looking at it and evaluating options.  
22 There is no action that's being recommended here by this Council.  
23 All we're doing now is saying, possibly take a look at what  
24 potential options could be associated with that.

25  
26 I think people have to remember the type of rules that are in place  
27 by the specific regulations associated with the ESA. And if we  
28 don't want something to have much worse problems to deal with,  
29 look at taking small actions that could head that off. That's all  
30 I'm saying.

31  
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sennai.

33  
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I think that we should stop this until it  
35 gets to the SSC. The idea is not to debate the whole issue at this  
36 time. The instruction that we need is from the Council. What is  
37 the best way to operate?

38  
39 So, Kate, do we need to have a motion to send this to the SSC or  
40 do we have enough?

41  
42 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** I think you stepped out, but, you know,  
43 really very grateful to Julian for reminding us of all the history.  
44 I was able to look up the minutes from the August 2023 meeting,  
45 and it was at that meeting, like María said, even though there  
46 was, like, a different request that kind of prompted a  
47 conversation, there was going to be work by staff. And I think it  
48 was unclear in the minutes whether that was going to be Council

1 Staff or NMFS staff, but ultimately it was decided then that there  
2 wasn't going to be any motion.

3  
4 You made it clear, Miguel, then that everyone had a lot on their  
5 plate, and no one was going to be able to turn to it until 2024.  
6 Here we are, it was worthy to bring back up, but then, as María  
7 said, when we get to a conversation about how the Council wants to  
8 prioritize things for 2025, they need to identify where this lies  
9 in that priority. So, whether it's NMFS staff or Council Staff,  
10 they know where it's going to go. And depending on where it is in  
11 the priority list, that'll determine how quickly they can kind of  
12 amass whatever information they want to compile. But that does  
13 seem like a more appropriate step before kicking it to the SSC.

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Graciela?

16  
17 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, one other request that I think the  
18 Council can make to the enforcement group, it's either to the Coast  
19 Guard to survey the area, especially in January for the detection  
20 of illegal nassau grouper fishing, and throughout the period of  
21 the seasonal area closure of Grammanik. The same thing for NOAA  
22 Enforcement and for the local enforcement agents.

23  
24 So, you know, there are reports of nassau being fished, and that's  
25 illegal. So, it would be something to contribute too to the  
26 discussion in the future. Thank you.

27  
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you.

29  
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Sorry for stepping out, but I had a call, and I  
31 had to-- anyway. So, María, at this meeting, we decided to look at  
32 the list of things before we leave, and we can include that there.  
33 And it is to prioritize issues.

34  
35 When they get to that point, because now we can do it, are we ready  
36 at this time to do it, do you think?

37  
38 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I mean, if the Council is ready to look at  
39 the list, I sent it to-- well, Cristina sent it to all of the  
40 Council Members last night. The only new thing that would be added  
41 is this request right now that is, like we said, brought up from  
42 before. I don't know, Cristina, if you can, present that on the  
43 screen and then note that it doesn't have-- whenever you have a  
44 chance, and sorry for that.

45  
46 Note that, obviously, this is new to what I sent her because it's  
47 from today. So, maybe we can take a look at it. I can start talking  
48 about it.

1  
2 So, we had a couple of things that were listed. So, we had the  
3 SEDAR 84 potential amendments based on outcomes. Just as a  
4 reminder, SEDAR 84 was a yellowtail snapper in Puerto Rico and  
5 Saint Thomas/Saint John and stoplight parrotfish in Saint Croix.  
6 This is an ongoing process, and it was estimated that around the  
7 summer, there may be some recommendations coming to the Council.  
8 Okay? So, this would be actions if there are recommendations, from  
9 the SEDAR, which would be the expectation from the stock  
10 assessment, then there will be some potential amendments to work  
11 on that.

12  
13 In the meantime, obviously, the SSC will be engaged in the  
14 evaluation of the stock.

15  
16 Yeah. That one is fine. So, can you go to the last slide, please?  
17 Thank you.

18  
19 So, then we had SEDAR 91, spiny lobster, depending on what comes  
20 out of that, that's something that's going to happen in late 2025.  
21 And, again, these are potential amendments to the island-based  
22 FMPs based on the stock assessment outcomes that are happening  
23 through SEDAR 91.

24  
25 The other thing is the spiny lobster potential revision of  
26 accountability measures to address ACL and OFL exceedances and  
27 adding to that also the pelagics. Remember, we talked about that  
28 yesterday. This is something that was tasked to the SSC. The SSC  
29 is going to be looking at that, hopefully, in their upcoming  
30 meeting in April.

31  
32 We have a revision of catch limits for stock that may continue to  
33 exceed the ACLs due to enhanced reporting. This is for all FMPs.  
34 This is one that is going to need some triage of information so  
35 staff can determine which are those stocks that would benefit from  
36 that. Meaning, maybe they put the stocks that are more important,  
37 that we will benefit from revisiting the ACL and also because we  
38 don't have recreational data. Maybe we don't have enough  
39 information to do that. Right? So, we don't want to waste time.  
40 But that means that we need to go do that before we can move  
41 forward and assign this to the SSC as well.

42  
43 The other thing we have is federal permits. Again, federal permits  
44 are not going to be an action that will require amendments or  
45 anything this year. This is going to be the year of exploration.  
46 We're going to be finding out if the Council wants to move forward  
47 and how they want to proceed if they want to move forward.

48

1 Next is the management of sea cucumbers, corals, and sea urchins,  
2 and other species with prohibited harvest for which we need to  
3 make status determinations. This is what Sarah presented  
4 yesterday. We also talked yesterday about not being necessarily a  
5 super priority for 2025. But it's something that if we have time  
6 to do in 2025, it will be advisable to do it because we have to  
7 take care of it. This is something that also needs to be sent to  
8 the SSC.

9  
10 And then yesterday, on petition of Carlos Farchette, Mr. Chair,  
11 compatibility of regulations with the U.S. Virgin Islands EEZ,  
12 which would involve coordination with the U.S. Virgin Islands state  
13 agency, to go through the list of regulations and see what the  
14 needs are so we can start developing that. There was also a request  
15 from Puerto Rico to do some sort of assessment of the sea urchins.  
16 That's not very clear to me what it is at this time or what it  
17 would involve. But, again, sea urchin is not something that has a  
18 lot of information out there, but it was a request.

19  
20 Another thing that we have to do is to finalize the triggerfish  
21 framework action for U.S. Virgin Island. This is the final rule.  
22 This is something that falls on NMFS staff because NMFS is the one  
23 that works on those regulations, but I want to bring that to your  
24 attention because that still needs to be done. The amendment still  
25 needs to be finalized. There are reviews, etcetera. So, that's  
26 something that's going to happen, well, possibly when we go back  
27 to the office next week.

28  
29 And then lastly, what we just discussed about the modification of  
30 the days of closures for the Grammanik Bank to address the nassau  
31 grouper.

32  
33 So that is the list of actions. There are two things in there which  
34 are, obviously, SEDAR 84 and SEDAR 91. In my opinion, obviously,  
35 SEDAR 84 is something where if there are outcomes that come in the  
36 summer, something that we will want to take care of. The other  
37 thing that is kind of like already assigned, we assigned it  
38 yesterday is the spiny lobster. I think that's something that has  
39 a high priority, and it's already something that the SSC can start  
40 working on in April.

41  
42 So, I would like to hear from you, Mr. Chair, to see what you think  
43 we should do and start working on. Yep.

44  
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Before we do that. First, I want to thank, María  
46 and Sarah for the excellent work that you do. It's a lot of work.  
47 So, in our side of the woods, we have Graciela, Liajay, and  
48 Cristina working on issues that we are dealing with. So, the

1 question is really for María at this time. The question for you  
2 is, that list of the things that you read now, do you think that  
3 2025-- Do you think that those things can be done in 2025? Or are  
4 there any of those that probably have to be sacrificed, for lack  
5 of another word, because of the priorities that we have now.

6  
7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** I need to consult with my colleague here.  
8 Give me one moment, please.

9  
10 Okay. So, as I said, the priorities, I think, for Council  
11 consideration would be the spiny lobster AMs, and the Pelagics. I  
12 think that's something that should be priority number one.

13  
14 The other priorities. SEDAR 84, once those results are ready. The  
15 Grammanik Bank issue that was brought to our attention, so we can  
16 start working on that. We're a little late. And then, if possible,  
17 not for this upcoming--

18  
19 And remember, all of these are going to need the SSC to be tasked.  
20 Right? So, there's a lot of work for the SSC, so that needs to be  
21 coordinated as well. Right?

22  
23 So, we would say, pelagics and spiny lobster, SEDAR 84, the  
24 Grammanik Bank so we can start working on that white paper to start  
25 guiding the discussion. And then, if possible, the management of  
26 the sea cucumbers, corals, and sea urchins.

27  
28 That will be my recommendation at this time. We'll like to hear  
29 from other Council Members.

30  
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

32  
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. Just my 2¢ worth. I believe that those  
34 priorities, actually, will take a lot of time for the whole staff.  
35 That doesn't mean that we are not going to take care of all the  
36 other stuff that we have here, but at least we could guide the  
37 staff as to what are the top priorities that we have.

38  
39 So, we have 1, 2, and 3 priorities there, and then if time permit  
40 during 2025, we can take others. The permit, the federal permit  
41 system we already said that we are going to have a presentation.  
42 Actually, we are going to have a joint meeting of the EFP, a  
43 virtual meeting to look at one as an example. So, that's something  
44 that can be done rather easy. But the priorities that María  
45 mentioned, do you all agree that those are the priorities?

46  
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

48

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I motion we accept the five priorities María  
2 mentioned in that order as she stated them.

3  
4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I second.

5  
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All in favor, say "aye."

7  
8 **GROUP:** Aye.

9  
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion  
11 carries.

12  
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What is next?

14  
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have a 5-minute public comment period.

16  
17 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

18  
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Tienes a alguien, Cristina.

20  
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kreglo, are you talking?

22  
23 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** This is James Kreglo. I did say aye.

24  
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Okay. Thank you, we heard.

26  
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** He's still alive. We are going to take this  
28 opportunity to recognize James Kreglo. He's had a health issue,  
29 and he couldn't travel back here but he accepted to attend  
30 virtually. I believe that that's something that we should  
31 recognize, you know, what he did. He has been instrumental and at  
32 least being able to hear what he needs to hear and also vote on  
33 the issues that we have at this meeting.

34  
35 So, no public comments. You can close the comment period. But  
36 before adjourning, we have the next meetings.

37  
38 **NEXT MEETING**

39  
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. April.

41  
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. As I said, we have an issue with the  
43 budget. If we receive the bad news that we are thinking that we  
44 are going to receive, we have to cut about \$420,000 from our  
45 budget. That would affect everything. Angie, Graciela, and I will  
46 meet in the coming weeks to go over this.

47  
48 But regarding the Council meetings, one possibility until we have

1 more money, is to look at the rotation that we have. The next  
2 meeting will be in Saint Croix because the hotel people were able  
3 to cancel everything without charging any money to us. So, we told  
4 them, "Okay. For the April meeting we could go there."  
5

6 Then we have August. Remember, according to NOAA people, the  
7 intensity of the hurricane and the force of the hurricane is going  
8 to increase in the next 10 years. August is in the middle of the  
9 whole thing. So, we were thinking, and this is something that we  
10 did also with the CCC, maybe to consider having a virtual meeting  
11 at the August meeting. Because if that meeting is canceled, we do  
12 not suffer a lot. You know, we don't spend a lot of money. And  
13 certainly, the people traveling from NOAA, that are in continental  
14 U.S., will also be able to switch their traveling plans easier  
15 because they don't have to travel here. That's one possibility.  
16

17 The other is, I was talking to Julian some time ago and we were  
18 thinking of going back to the rotation where we had the meeting in  
19 Saint Thomas and Saint John during Christmas time. Is it still a  
20 good idea? Okay. So, he said yes.  
21

22 That way, we can have the next meeting, April 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> in  
23 Saint Croix at the Buccaneer Hotel. August. And then, on December  
24 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> in Saint Thomas, 2025. But then the question is, do  
25 you think that you can leave to the discretion of the Chair whether  
26 to have the meeting virtually or not?  
27

28 Because the importance of that meeting is that that's when we have  
29 a switch or a change of the Council Members' terms. And that's why  
30 we usually have that meeting around the 12<sup>th</sup>. For example, if you  
31 have a new Council Member, the Council Member first day would be  
32 August 11<sup>th</sup>. The last day of the old guy will be August 10<sup>th</sup>.  
33 That's the reason why we have the August meeting. So, if we are  
34 offered that flexibility because of the budgetary concern that we  
35 have, we can have that meeting virtually.  
36

37 The budget petition that we submitted for the monies for the next  
38 four years had three in-person meeting, hybrid meetings of the  
39 Council. The Advisory Bodies will have one meeting and the other  
40 will be virtual.  
41

42 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, the August meeting would have been in Puerto  
43 Rico and then December in Saint Thomas. So, you said Saint Thomas  
44 for August, but--  
45

46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. That's what I mean, can we switch it?  
47

48 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** But August here in Puerto Rico. If that meeting is

1 in August here, it will give a lot of people that travel a lot  
2 more opportunities to get here and to get to Saint Croix. I think  
3 that's what killed us with that meeting canceled, because there's  
4 only one or two flights into Saint Croix.

5

6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Exactly.

7

8 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Were here, you have a lot more flights and you can  
9 wait a little bit longer. Because we had this discussion--

10

11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes, I agree. Yep.

12

13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** --and that storm was coming. I guess I wanted to  
14 remind you about that. So, if you decide to have an in-person and  
15 it's here, you know, it opens up a larger window for you.

16

17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. So, if we all agree then we have Saint Croix  
18 in April. August will be Puerto Rico, virtual or in person. And  
19 then, we go back to Saint Thomas during the December meeting.

20

21 And the dates are April 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> for the spring meeting; August  
22 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> for the second meeting; and December 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> for the  
23 last meeting of the year. Remember, in between, if we have an  
24 emergency or something, we can have a one-day meeting if we need  
25 to, to discuss any issues related to Council action, a particular  
26 Council action.

27

28 For 2025, we do not see any emergency at this time, but we also  
29 have the door open for that possibility. And that's all we have  
30 for next year's meetings, Mr. Chairman.

31

32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Miguel.

33

34 **SENNAI HABTES:** Can I just-- what was the date again that you had  
35 mentioned for the December meeting? Just trying [crosstalk]

36

37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, August 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>,  
38 April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>.

39

40 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thank you.

41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, I want to thank everyone for bearing  
43 with me with all the different changes in the agenda and all this  
44 extra time that we took with some items. It's important to hear  
45 people's comments and questions and concerns.

46

47 I want to wish everybody happy holidays. Meeting adjourned. The  
48 185<sup>th</sup> Council meeting adjourned. It is now 5:48. Oh, you wanted to

1 say something? Go ahead.  
2  
3 **VANCE VICENTE:** It won't be long.  
4  
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Before people leave, Vance—  
6  
7 **VANCE VICENTE:** Real rapidly, regarding the SSC meetings,  
8 forthcoming meetings. I understand that the Council is going under  
9 a tight, you know, economic situation. I think that the virtual  
10 meeting with the intensity that the SSC meetings go is not going  
11 to work. But I'm willing to negotiate. I mean, of the 11 members  
12 that we have, five live in Puerto Rico. So those should come and  
13 maybe we can use your facilities at the Council, for an in-person  
14 meeting. And then the northerners can do it virtually. That will  
15 save some money and at the same time, we will have enough members  
16 in contact with each other to deal with matters that would require  
17 presence. That's my comment.  
18  
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, we'll take that into consideration. Just  
20 to give you an idea, an SSC member costs \$65,000 to \$85,000 every  
21 time that we meet, and we do that. I follow what you're saying. We  
22 save a lot of money but at the same time we are able to have a  
23 better exchange of information between the people who are here and  
24 the people who are virtual. Yep.  
25  
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?  
27  
28 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. Thank you. Do we-- I heard all the dates  
29 for the Council meetings. Have we said anything about the SSCs?  
30  
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not yet because we need to-- Graciela will talk  
32 to the people involved and see if we can set up the date and the  
33 time, as soon as possible. Yeah.  
34  
35 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. So, but it will be the typical week or two  
36 before or do we anticipate something different than that pattern?  
37  
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. It will depend. I believe that-- that's  
39 why I leave the door open for Graciela to consult with all of you  
40 to make sure--  
41  
42 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I mean, my main concern is getting SEDAR 84 and  
43 just planning for that. So, maybe we can chat sooner rather than  
44 later. Yep. About those dates. But that would be April 1. After  
45 that I'm less concerned. Thank you.  
46  
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. So, I know that the meeting is closed but  
48 Merry Christmas to everybody. I thank all the people involved.

1 Fishers, staff, and especially these ladies here help us a lot.  
2  
3 And also, I want to congratulate our new Chairperson of the OEAP.  
4 She almost killed me when I told her that we wanted her to be the  
5 Chair of the OEAP, but you have done excellent work and thank you  
6 very much.  
7  
8 I wish you all the best during Christmas and a happy trip back  
9 home. We'll see you in April.  
10  
11 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 05, 2024.)