

TABLE OF CONTENT

TABLE OF MOTIONS.....	3
CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL.....	4
ADOPTION OF AGENDA.....	6
CONSIDERATION OF THE 185TH COUNCIL MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT.....	7
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT.....	7
UPDATE NOAA FISHERIES/COUNCIL ISLAND-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS (FMPS) ACTIONS AND AMENDMENTS - MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO.....	20
AMENDMENT 4 TO PUERTO RICO FMP: RECLASSIFICATION OF THE RAINBOW RUNNER AS A PELAGIC FISH-FINAL ACTION - MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO.....	32
Questions/Comments.....	39
SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT - VANCE VICENTE, CHAIR.....	41
Questions/Comments.....	45
ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL REPORT - SENNAI HABTES, CHAIR.....	48
Questions/Comments.....	53
PROGRESS OF THE EREPORTING APPLICATION AFTER 4 YEARS IMPLEMENTED IN PUERTO RICO - DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO, FISHERIES RESEARCH LABORATORY, PUERTO RICO DNER.....	55
Questions/Comments.....	58
SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES - KEVIN MCCARTHY, CARIBBEAN FISHERIES BRANCH, NOAA FISHERIES/SEFSC.....	67
Questions/Comments.....	82
FEDERAL PERMITS DISCUSSION - JESSICA STEPHEN, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO.....	96
Questions/Comments.....	107
RESPONSE TO ST. THOMAS FISHERS ASSOCIATION QUESTIONS REGARDING GRAMMANIK BANK MANAGEMENT - SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO.....	114
Questions/Comments.....	121
IRA UPDATE - MARTHA PRADA, CFMC IRA COORDINATOR.....	127
Questions/Comments.....	132
PROTECTED RESOURCES DIVISION UPDATE - JENNIFER LEE, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO...	136
Questions/Comments.....	139
RECAP OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE U.S. CARIBBEAN: A 23-YEAR PERSPECTIVE - BRENT STOFFLE, NOAA FISHERIES/SEFSC.....	141
Questions/Comments.....	152
OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL - JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA, CHAIR.....	158
Questions/Comments.....	160
CFMC SOCIAL NETWORKS - CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ.....	163
Questions/Comments.....	166
CFMC LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS.....	168
ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN USVI - NICOLE GREAU.....	168

Questions/Comments.....	170
PUERTO RICO - WILSON SANTIAGO.....	171
Questions/Comments.....	174
SARGASSUM SEASON UPDATE - JULIO MORELL/LORAINÉ MARTELL, CARICOOS, INC.....	175
Questions/Comments.....	179
WORDS FROM EUGENIO PIÑEIRO SOLER - DIRECTOR OF NOAA FISHERIES.....	182
Questions/Comments.....	182
DISTRICT ADVISORY PANEL REPORTS.....	184
ST. THOMAS, U.S.V.I. - JULIAN MAGRAS, CHAIR.....	184
ST. CROIX, U.S.V.I. - GERSON MARTÍNEZ, CHAIR.....	185
PUERTO RICO - NELSON CRESPO, CHAIR.....	186
Questions/Comments.....	188
ENFORCEMENT REPORTS.....	189
PUERTO RICO DNER.....	189
Questions/Comments.....	190
U.S. COAST GUARD.....	191
Questions/Comments.....	192
NOAA FISHERIES OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT.....	193
Questions/Comments.....	196
ECOSYSTEM RISK ASSESSMENT - LEIGH FLETCHER, BIOIMPACT INC.....	199
Questions/Comments.....	210
SEA GRANT PROGRAM UPDATE - RUPERTO CHAPARRO, DIRECTOR/RENÉ F. ESTEVES, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PUERTO RICO SEA GRANT.....	216
Questions/Comments.....	221
OTHER BUSINESS.....	223
ADVISORY BODIES MEMBERSHIPS.....	224
DAP SAINT THOMAS/SAINT JOHN.....	224
DAP SAINT CROIX.....	226
DAP PUERTO RICO.....	228
OTHER BUSINESS - CONT.....	229
PUBLIC COMMENTS AND NEXT MEETINGS.....	232

TABLE OF MOTIONS

1
2
3
4
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PAGE 40: The Council moves to approve Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico Fishery Management Plan: Reclassification of the rainbow runner as a pelagic fish and submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for review. The Council allows staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to Amendment 4 and give the Council Chair the authority to deem any modifications made to the amendment and regulations as necessary and appropriate for implementing Amendment 4. The motion carried on page 40.

1 **CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**
2 **186th REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**
3 **HYBRID MEETING**
4 **THE BUCCANEER RESORT**
5 **SAINT CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

6
7 APRIL 22-23, 2025
8

9 The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened at The Buccaneer
10 Resort in Saint Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands on Tuesday morning,
11 April 22, 2025, and was called to order at 9:00 A.M. by the Council
12 man Carlos Farchette.
13

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

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, good morning, everyone. I want to
17 welcome everyone to the 186th Caribbean Fishery Management Council
18 Meeting, getting held on Saint Croix at the Buccaneer Hotel. It's
19 09:00, April 22nd.
20

21 We'll start with roll call. I'm going to start on my left with
22 Angie.
23

24 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** María Irizarry, Council Staff.
25

26 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. Buenos días. Cristina
27 Olán, Council Staff.
28

29 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Good morning. Buenos días. Liajay Rivera
30 García, Council staff.
31

32 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Buenos días. Graciela García-Moliner,
33 Council staff.
34

35 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good morning. María López, NOAA Fisheries,
36 Southeast Regional Office.
37

38 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Hola a todos. Puerto Rico DNR, Ricardo López-
39 Ortiz.
40

41 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Good morning. Vanessa Ramírez, Vice-Chair.
42

43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Chair.
44

45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council staff.
46

47 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** Diana Martino, Council staff.
48

1 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, Regional Administrator, NOAA
2 Fisheries.
3
4 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, Office of General Counsel.
5
6 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo, Council Member, U.S.V.I.
7
8 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Kayla Ishida, United States Coast Guard, Sector San
9 Juan.
10
11 **VANCE VICENTE:** Good morning. Vance Vicente, Chair of the SSC
12 Committee.
13
14 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good morning, everyone. Jannette Ramos-
15 García, Outreach and Education Panel Chair.
16
17 **NELSON CRESPO:** Buenos días. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair Puerto Rico.
18
19 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Good morning, everyone. Julia Magras, DAP of Saint
20 Thomas/Saint John.
21
22 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, DAP Chair of
23 Saint Croix.
24
25 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good morning. Nicole Greaux, CFMC Liaison, Saint
26 Thomas/Saint John.
27
28 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto
29 Rico Fisheries Liaison.
30
31 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Good morning. Martha Prada, IRA coordinator.
32
33 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Good morning. Leigh Fletcher BioImpact.
34
35 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos Caraballo,
36 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I know we have some people online.
39
40 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. In Zoom we have Sarah Stephenson,
41 John, Kevin McCarthy, Jesús Rivera-Hernández, Heather Blough, Eva
42 M. Collazo, Jessica Stephen, Mich Walsh, Itsamari.
43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And Roberto Sabater.
45
46 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** And Roberto Sabater.
47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** A little housekeeping here. There's a lunch

1 menu going around. They're going to pick it up at 10:00, so if you
2 can please fill it out and give it to someone in the back. They'll
3 be picking them up at 10:00 AM to make sure that lunch is on time.

4
5 Next, have the adoption of agenda. We do have some changes.
6 Graciela?

7
8
9

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, you do have a
11 couple of changes. One is that the Sea Grant presentation,
12 scheduled for today, will pass during the second day under other
13 business. So, we were requesting to see if the progress of
14 eReporting could be moved to the morning session. That would give
15 us a little bit more time for the presentation on the Saint Thomas
16 Fisher's Association letter. And that's what I have in my notes.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We also got a request from Mr. Eugenio Piñeiro
21 to address the Council on the second day, the 23rd, at 01:30PM.

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Before I forget, we have a letter from
24 the commissioner. He would not be able to attend, but he has a
25 letter of proxy for Sennai Habtes sit in his stead.

26
27 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Mr. Chair, one more thing, Dr. Sennai
28 Habtes is going to be a little bit late. He hopes to be here for
29 his presentation at 11:00.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Any other changes to the agenda?
32 Hearing none, we need a motion to accept the agenda as corrected
33 or updated.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** As amended.

36
37 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. Motion to adopt
38 the agenda as corrected.

39
40 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** I second.

41
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** For the record, it's amended, not corrected.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, agenda amended. So, any nays or
45 abstentions? Everybody-- hearing none, everybody say, "aye."

46
47 **GROUP:** Aye.

48

1 **CONSIDERATION OF THE 185TH COUNCIL MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT**

2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion carries.

4
5 Next on the agenda is the consideration of the 185th Council meeting
6 verbatim transcriptions. I do have a couple questions on the--
7 that I saw in the minutes, but I'm going to leave that for other
8 business for tomorrow to discuss.

9
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But you need--

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Si, but we need to know now whether anybody has
13 any--

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'm waiting to see if
16 anybody has any corrections or additions to the transcriptions.
17 Motion to approve the minutes as submitted.

18
19 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. Motion to adopt
20 as submitted.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Need a second.

23
24 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, second.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any nays or abstentions? All in favor
27 say, "aye."

28
29 **GROUP:** Aye.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Motion carries. Next is the executive director's
32 report. Yeah. Roberto, sorry about that, but I needed your yay or
33 nay on the --

34
35 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye. Yeah.

36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, Executive Directors report.

40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thinking about the time,
42 I will compress what I want to say. Just to give you a status on
43 the fundings for the Councils, 2025 will be a challenge year
44 because, as you know, we are mostly at the same level that we were
45 before, maybe 5% more on all the Councils. That means that we have
46 to make adjustments to the Council's way of operating during 2025.
47 María de los Angeles, Angie, and myself, we have identified places
48 where we can save some money and stay within the schedule that we

1 have.

2
3 The fixed cost of the Council is around \$130,000 a month without
4 any meetings. If we have meetings that goes up by a little bit.
5 With the money that we have so far, that would be enough for the
6 end of May, probably June, unless we receive the rest of the
7 funding by 2030-- I mean, September 30th, 2025. The last quarter
8 of the Council is the first quarter of the National Marine
9 Fisheries Service funding, federal money funding, so we are
10 expecting to receive monies, enough, to finish the year.

11
12 If we don't receive any more fundings before June 30th, then we
13 will not have money to operate having meetings. So, the Executive
14 Director and the Chair will monitor the situation to allocate the
15 fundings as needed for the Council activities. That means that all
16 the other Council meetings, SSC, DAPs and everything will be
17 virtual until further notice. You know that the August meeting is
18 virtual, but the main meeting with the CCC in New Bedford will be
19 attended by two staff members and two Chairs. That has been
20 budgeted for already. The monies that were allocated for the fifty-
21 year celebration had been stopped by all the eight Councils until
22 further notice because some issues are relevant to the budget
23 situation that we have.

24
25 The other part of the fundings that you are all aware is the IRA.
26 The Inflation Reduction Act provided money for the Councils, the
27 National Marine Fisheries Service and other areas in the federal
28 government. Good news, most of the proposal that we submitted were
29 approved. We want to scare people once in a while.

30
31 The thing is that, remember, we hired Dr. Martha Prada and she's
32 going to give us a report, a detailed report of where we are
33 regarding the IRA funds. One of the latest approvals was the one
34 for the U.S. Virgin Islands. There was a proposal prepared by Dr.
35 Sennai Habtes, and it has been approved. Now, we are working with
36 some details regarding the contract that we have to issue for the
37 U.S. Virgin Islands to start this project.

38
39 The other part of my report, as you all have seen in the news,
40 President Trump has signed several Executive Orders that touch on
41 fisheries operations. We are talking about the one that calls for
42 a rule that for every new rule you have get rid of 10. In the case
43 of fisheries that's just a little bit tricky, how to do it. Dr.
44 Andy Strelcheck will address that in a few moments.

45
46 They also have one that requires all the Councils, National Marine
47 Fisheries Service to review the fisheries regulations, the way we

1 prepare the management plans and everything. We have 180 days to
2 prepare the documentation for that. We have to wait. All the
3 Council have to wait until we have guidance because this is brand
4 new, April 17th, guidance from the National Marine Fisheries
5 Service to proceed. But, at this time, we want to let you know
6 that the Councils, from now on, we're going to be working on this
7 Executive Order and probably by the August meeting, we'll have
8 some news for you to look at and consider.

9

10 The main point of the Executive Order is to review the way that we
11 regulate the fisheries and see where we can open the fisheries,
12 how can we-- for the betterment of the fisheries. They call it
13 Make the United States Fisheries Great Again. This is not new. It
14 started when President Trump was on his first term, the time that
15 he was president. Now it's an Executive Order.

16

17 The other two, one touches the monuments. As you know, they opened
18 the monuments in The Pacific for fishing. They have a whole
19 presentation. I assume you can see it in YouTube. Last one, not
20 the last one, but another one touches ESA. And there are
21 discussions about any implication of an ESA.

22

23 So, Mr. Chairman, I believe that the fishers also have a letter
24 that they want to present, just to read it for the record. They
25 have been working on this Executive Order for some time now,
26 especially the Fisherman Association of Saint Thomas/Saint John.
27 Dr. Andy Strelcheck, also, can tell us about the ten-one rule. You
28 will have this information at this meeting.

29

30 But remember, these Executive Orders are brand new. We have to
31 wait until we get the guidance from National Marine Fisheries
32 Service on how to proceed. Especially the one that give us 180
33 days, that means that by December this year, we have to have a
34 document that will address the mandates on that Executive Order.
35 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

36

37 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Andy?

38

39 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Chair. Appreciate Miguel kind of
40 teed this up nicely with regard to the conversation. Executive
41 Order 14192 is the one that talks about unleashing prosperity
42 through deregulatory action. There was obviously a lot of initial
43 confusion because that's the one that proposes for every one-
44 regulatory action you have to then implement 10-deregulatory
45 actions.

46

47 So, as Miguel indicated, have received additional guidance. The

1 good news is that the 10 for one provision only pertains to what
2 are considered significant regulatory actions. And those
3 significant actions have an annual effect on the economy of greater
4 than a hundred million dollars. They create an inconsistency or
5 interfere with an action taken by another agency. They materially
6 alter budgetary impacts of grants and entitlements and other
7 factors where they create novel legal issues.

8
9 So, for the most part, the fishery service and the Councils
10 implement very few significant regulatory actions. So, we won't be
11 in an environment where for a regulatory action, we have to create
12 10 deregulatory actions. However, what will relate to the work
13 that the Council is doing, the fishery service is doing is there
14 is essentially a provision that requires that actions have a total
15 cost that's less than zero. Right? So, if we're going to implement
16 a regulatory action that has a negative cost on stakeholders or
17 agency industry, then we have to offset that and actually have
18 deregulatory actions that are greater than the amount that we're
19 imposing with regulatory actions.

20
21 So that's the process that I think is evolving and that we're
22 setting up with the fishery service and that will likely be
23 discussed at the Council Coordination Committee Meeting coming up
24 in the near future. But that'll really be the key, looking at the
25 cost of implementing regulations, the cost of, obviously,
26 deregulating actions, and how that balance sheet kind of adds up
27 over time.

28
29 There will be, I think, guidance that is forthcoming for our FY
30 '26 budget year, and we'll kind of be put into, I forgot what they
31 were calling it, but essentially identifying kind of agencies total
32 incremental costs that we can implement. So, we'll have more
33 guidance coming forward. So, let me stop there because I do want
34 to talk about the Restoring American Competitiveness EO, see if
35 there's any questions.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anyone have questions for Andy?

38
39 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, as Miguel said, there are numerous
40 Executive Orders. So, the other one that was just recently issued
41 was the Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. That one was
42 issued on April 17th. As Miguel said, we are awaiting additional
43 guidance on that implementation, but there's several provisions,
44 obviously, that pertain to the Council, as Miguel indicated, and
45 that the Secretary of Commerce will request the Fishery Management
46 Councils within a 180 days of the order to provide the Secretary
47 of Commerce with updates to recommendations pursuant to a previous
48 Executive Order that reduces burdens on the domestic fishing

1 industry. And so, back in May of 2020, there was an Executive Order
2 that you would have responded to. So, they're wanting first updates
3 on kind of where we're at with any sort of deregulatory work that
4 pertain to that.

5
6 And then, obviously, there's some additional things that they're
7 looking for soliciting public comments, including from fishing
8 industry members, marine scientists, others with regard to
9 deregulation or regulatory actions that could be essentially
10 removed. So, that'll be a process that we'll be setting up. And
11 then, they also want us as an agency to focus on less expensive,
12 more reliable technologies for collecting data and doing
13 cooperative research as well as exemptive fishing permits. So,
14 that'll be another focus of this Executive Order.

15
16 And there's a number of other requirements in it, but those are
17 some of the highlights that I thought were most relevant to the
18 Council. So, happy to entertain any questions on that as well.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions for Andy on that? None. You good?
21 Julian?

22
23 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. I'm to read a letter
24 from the Saint Thomas Fisherman's Association, which was signed by
25 our Vice President, Joshua Quetel and the letter is addressed to
26 Mr. Carlos Farchette, Chairman of the Caribbean Fishery Management
27 Council.

28
29 "Dear Chair and members of the Caribbean Fishery Management
30 Council, on behalf of the Fisherman's Association, I'm writing to
31 respectfully request that the Council postpone any agenda items or
32 actions that may have relevance to the President's, Donald J.
33 Trump's, Executive Order titled Promoting American Seafood
34 Competitiveness issued on April 17th, 2025.

35
36 This Executive Order outlines several specific and time-sensitive
37 directives to be carried out by the Regional Fishery Management
38 Councils, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Health and
39 Human Services, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. These
40 directives involve a comprehensive review of fishery regulations
41 and practices in order to enhance the competitiveness of American
42 seafood, reduce the burdens on fishing industry, and promote
43 sustainable fisheries.

44
45 Given the potential implications of this Executive Order on
46 fisheries management throughout the U.S. Caribbean, we believe
47 that proceeding with any Council action, regulatory or otherwise,
48 that may intersect with the Order could be premature and

1 potentially inconsistent with forthcoming federal guidance or
2 requirements.

3
4 Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Caribbean Fishery
5 Management postpone any such relevant agenda items until full and
6 clear guidance is issued until stakeholders, including our
7 association, have a proper opportunity to review, interpret, and
8 provide informed input on how the Executive Order will impact local
9 fisheries and communities.

10
11 We appreciate your attention to this matter and your continued
12 commitment to inclusive and transparent fisheries management
13 signed by Joshua Quetel, Vice President of the Saint Thomas
14 Fisherman's Association."

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any comments on Julian's, STFA letter? Vanessa?

17
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
19 record. Thank you, Julian, for bringing this letter from the
20 fishermen. I think that, as Andy says, we need more advice on these
21 orders. So, I will suggest or ask to the staff for any concern or
22 any help that you can give us to address this on timeline. Thanks.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I guess that the letter goes hand-in-hand with
27 what's been presented today by Dr. Andy Strelcheck. We are not
28 going include anything in the agenda until we have the proper
29 guidance from the National Marine Fisheries Service on any of these
30 issues and that include participation of the public. We need to
31 have the scoping meetings, public hearings, etcetera. So, the
32 fishing industry will have ample opportunity-- and recreational
33 fisheries --to participate in the discussion before any of this
34 document is submitted to the Secretary for consideration.

35
36 So, the next step is for the eight Councils to wait for the guidance
37 from the National Marine Fisheries Service, from NOAA Fisheries to
38 continue working. And then, it is expected that once we receive
39 the guidance, the Council will work and the staff, with the
40 appropriate documentation.

41
42 Very important is that we need to provide ample opportunity for
43 the public to participate, especially people who are going to be
44 impacted positively or negative by any of these Executive Orders.

45
46 Thank you, Julian. We'll make sure that the participation of the
47 fisheries is guaranteed through this process.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?
2

3 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. No. I appreciate the Saint Thomas
4 Fisherman's Association letter, I think timing wise, this works
5 really well for the Council. Right? Because you have an August
6 Council meeting kind of right in the middle of that 180-day time
7 frame. We're going to solicit public comment at the Secretary of
8 Commerce level, right, for public input, but that doesn't prevent
9 you from also soliciting public comment and gathering feedback
10 from industry groups along the way.
11

12 So, all of this, I think, sets up well then to get that feedback
13 by August so that any sort of response and reaction going forward
14 thereafter would be in time for that 180-day timeline.
15

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more comments? Gerson.
17

18 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, for the
19 record. My letter is going to come in soon. My wife is typing it
20 as I speak, I have a handwritten one. I would like to read it for
21 the record.
22

23 Due to the fact that we have the ability to redo, I believe in
24 protecting our resource, but some protective areas do blanket
25 closures. In my letter, I will explain, don't believe that we
26 should open the shallow water reefs to any fishing activity, but
27 to the north of Buck Island National Monument, we had a very
28 important FAD that created jobs and created the ability to bring
29 into the market the pelagics, mahi, Tuna and wahoo. I will ask
30 this Council to consider reopening that north drop-off, which is
31 very important for our line fishermen.
32

33 Also, I would like to add that our conch fishery is in jeopardy
34 because of the new-- Well, I don't know. Miguel is shaking his
35 head. --due to overfishing around the world, and we have done our
36 homework here in Saint Croix, the Virgin Islands, to overprotect
37 this resource, establishing longer seasonal closures and also bag
38 limits. So, I will ask that we be considered being exempt, if that
39 closure comes into effect someday because of our excessive
40 protection to the conch resource.
41

42 That would be all. Thank you. My letter will be coming in soon.
43

44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Gerson. Okay. Any more comments on
45 the EOs? Crespo?
46

47 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to read a letter
48 coming from the Conch Legal Fishing Association and other

1 independent fishers.
2
3 "I am going to focus on section four, especially on the topic of
4 modernizing data collection and analytical practice, and I will
5 soon send a more comprehensive letter on this Executive Law.
6
7 We all know that Puerto Rico and the rest of the American Caribbean
8 are considered a data poor sector. Without taking away the merit
9 from the federal agencies and Puerto Rico DNER, the results have
10 not been as expected.
11
12 This is an easy choice moment for Puerto Rico DNER. Are we going
13 to fix the data tragedy or are we are going to keep on lying to
14 the rest of the nation and telling them that everything is alright
15 when they all know we are lying? We need a more creative, simple,
16 mechanical model to capture elusive data that doesn't want to get
17 caught as our friend Bill Arnold suggests to us during informal
18 conversations. For how long will you give us a seminar of excuses
19 for its falling model. We don't deserve this.
20
21 We are Americans disenfranchised by the political system, yes, but
22 nevertheless Americans. We can comply with President Trump's
23 Executive Order, and we don't have the need to raise the catch
24 level. Fish have always been there. Just by searching social media,
25 we can see that there's a different truth than what is being
26 reported of our island. Here, we all know that catches on our
27 island can be five times more than what is reported. We better get
28 to work today.
29
30 Let's do with the voodoo data and start a new regime of real data
31 models, trustworthy data reporting. This is what we need. Now it's
32 up to us to work as a team to improve this and other existing
33 issues and be facilitators for the commercial fishing in the
34 American Caribbean. Let's facilitate and not try and regulate
35 everything ad nauseam in the industry that has never been
36 understood, will never be understood and will never be manage
37 properly if it seats in failing models.
38
39 Also, talking about open center areas. I'm really concerned about
40 the Bajo de Sico. It should have never been removed, the management
41 plan, that have through this moment. And also, it's time to modify
42 the Tourmaline Management Plan and at least open the water column
43 because there's a huge area when the Wahoo season comes, and all
44 the fishermen want to get those wahoos. This doesn't affect what
45 is protected in the bottom.
46
47 And also, have to maintain the Snapper Unit 1 Management Plan as
48 is. Thank you."

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Crespo.
3

4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
5 record. I want to thank Nelson for bringing this letter. You give
6 the exact points that we have and the issues that we have been
7 working with the data collection and also managing areas that we
8 have in the West Side of the coast of Puerto Rico. So, thank you
9 for that and I hope that this could address it and give some
10 leadership for the staff to start working with Puerto Rico FMPs.
11 Thanks.
12

13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
14

15 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. So, great
16 presentation there from my counterparts. And, you know, similar to
17 what our letter speaks about and listening to the Executive Order
18 that came from our President, the Council, here before us, have
19 been overregulating on the fishers. We can take one item, and we
20 have three different rules protecting that one set of species. I
21 think stuff like that is what needs to be revisited.

22 I don't think that we need to have three regulations on one
23 individual group of fish. You have a catch limit. You have a
24 seasonal closure. You have a size limit. You know, stuff like that
25 is what they're looking at as being over regulated. I think we
26 spend so much time and so much money throughout the entire process,
27 not the Council, I'm talking about the entire process. So, much
28 money is wasted for scientists to go there and just beat the
29 species to death. I think that's where they're trying to curtail
30 some of this overspending, I call it overspending and come up with
31 a more simpler way of managing the fishery.
32

33 The fishermen have always been the one to take the beating at the
34 end of the day. Right now, NOAA, all of its employees are walking
35 on pins and needles because they don't know if they're going to
36 have a job before the end of the day. Well, that's how the fishermen
37 have felt for the last 25 years that have been sitting in this
38 room or in any room in meetings. We don't know if we're going to
39 be able to catch a fish the next day, which God has provided for
40 us to catch every day.
41

42 So now the whole world is upside down because it falls on a
43 different set of people, and what they're asking, they're not
44 telling you that you can't have a job, they're asking you to do
45 your job differently and more effectively and look at our fishers
46 throughout the entire world.
47

48 We are the U.S. We are the United States, and we should not have

1 to be importing so much different product when we can harvest it
2 right here. What the fishers have been seeing, right here in the
3 Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, is that every time a rule is put
4 in place, you go to the supermarket a couple months after, here's
5 a box coming from Nicaragua. They know the rules. Let's use a
6 yellowtail snapper as a perfect example. 12 inches tip of the tail
7 to the head. Whole fish are being shipped in by the cases. We're
8 seeing it in every one of our big stores, Cost.U.Less, PriceSmart,
9 Plaza Extra in the islands. Conch the same thing and they know the
10 regulations. The regulations are written on the box.

11
12 So, what that tells me is there is people out there that are part
13 of the process of regulating so they could import the stuff from
14 these countries, and they get a kickback under the table. That's
15 what the fishers have been seeing more and more. It just has become
16 more evident that it's there in our face.

17
18 So, I you know, I'm asking, like we said, we're going to try to do
19 our homework and come up with a list of things that we would like
20 to bring before the Council and the SSC, and we can discuss and,
21 you know, see what we can do and what we can't do. But at the end
22 of the day, we have got to try to make things a little bit more
23 productive and a little bit easier. So, that's my comment for right
24 now. I'll try not to talk too much today.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Julian. Any more comments before I
27 move forward, Miguel?

28
29 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a comment.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a comment but-- wait. ¿Ese es Roberto?

32
33 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Si.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Go ahead, Roberto. I yield to you.

36
37 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I think this Executive Order is a great
38 opportunity for the Council to get away with murder and reinvent
39 ourselves if we have to. To look inside of what we've been doing
40 lately and for so long that maybe we have fallen into our own
41 personal trap, and maybe this thing opens up a way for us to look
42 at ourselves inside and being able to check our balances, our non-
43 balances, and provide a better Council for the future. I went into
44 the statistics, and really, 80% of the fish that is consumed in
45 the United States is imported. It comes from mostly Chile and
46 Canada. So, I think maybe we should be doing something different.
47 Maybe. I don't know.

48

1 I know that, probably, over there, they don't have the regulations
2 we have. One of these days, they're going to run out, but we have
3 to really check ourselves, are we doing it right? Or are we doing
4 it wrong? Or how are we going to do it? Thank you.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Sabater. Miguel?

7

8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just to let everybody know that I told Cristina
9 to publish Executive Orders in our web page because until we get
10 some specific guidance, we will not be able to work on reactions
11 to the Executive Orders.

12

13 As a word of caution, if you read the Executive Order, it doesn't
14 mean that we're going to change everything. So, what we are going
15 to do at this time is just wait until we get this guidance and see
16 what we can do. I agree with Roberto that this Executive Order
17 will look into how we operate from the top to the bottom everywhere
18 to improve the condition of the fishing industry of the United
19 States. And nobody can quarrel with that one.

20

21 So, Mr. Chairman, I believe that we are going to have that
22 information of-- Actually, I distributed the Executive Order to
23 everybody.

24

25 I also want to thank the three top Chairs for the intervention
26 today, because this is the way we are going to be operating. Also,
27 the Order calls for consultations with the public, thoroughly. So,
28 if you don't have the Executive Order, please let me know, we will
29 send you a copy to the DAP members or to whomever.

30

31 I talked to Julian briefly, during breakfast, and I believe that
32 you have all the documents and everything that you have. But if
33 you need anything from us at all, let us know.

34

35 I will wait for Gerson's letter so we can put all the letters into
36 our minutes for the next meeting. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Moving on, we're to go to--
39 Andy?

40

41 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Just a couple of questions for Miguel with
42 regard to budget. I've talked to Carrie Simmons as well. They're
43 in a very similar financial situation. So, our hope is that you
44 would be allocated the remainder of your budget sometime in May,
45 but I've been told that you'll get 30-day allocations of funding,
46 if that doesn't happen where you would get the full budget for the
47 remainder of the year. You mentioned obviously holding virtual
48 meetings until further notice. Has the decision been made about

1 the August meeting? Are you going to wait to see kind of how the
2 funding plays out before you decide whether to go virtual for the
3 August meeting?

4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** In the case of the August meeting, we decided
6 last year to have a virtual meeting because of the hurricanes.
7 That was the only reason. Now we have another reason. Thank you
8 for that because we have two versions. One that they're going to
9 give us the money for the end of the year. And the other one that
10 they only have authority to give us the money until September 30th
11 because that's the end of the continuous resolution. So, we are
12 expecting the first one to be the case.

13
14 If that happens, the next in person meeting will be in Saint
15 Thomas/Saint John in December. But if we need to have any other
16 meeting and we receive the money, we can do that. The other thing
17 that I was going mention to the members here is that we can change
18 any meeting for any valid reason. So, if we need to move away from
19 August, maybe after or before, we can do that with the money that
20 we have.

21
22 The other Councils, they decided to have only virtual meetings. To
23 give you an idea, we have five committees. One Council has 14
24 committees, and they meet every month. They have a large area that
25 they have to cover. So, they are stopping from having in-person
26 meetings at this time because they don't have the money to operate
27 that way.

28
29 The other issue that is happening is, as you all know, the cost of
30 hotels, airfares and everything has increased way beyond the
31 increase of the budgets and allocations that we have. So, all of
32 this is playing at this time. But all the Councils, we are going
33 to discuss that at the main meeting. Before that, we are going to
34 discuss it amongst ourselves to make sure.

35
36 But what you heard from Carrie is a reality for everybody at this
37 time.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

40
41 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We have in the chat, Ricardo, and he
42 said, "I have comments regarding the Order. Will we have an
43 opportunity?" Ricardo Lugo. Mhmm.

44
45 **RICARDO LUGO:** Can I speak?

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Do you have a comment or a questions?
48

1 **RICARDO LUGO:** No. I have a comment, and the comment is regarding
2 the Order, because the Order not only covers fishing as addressed
3 here, but it also covers aquaculture too. This is something that
4 somehow, somehow has to be addressed as part of the response and
5 the data to be collected. Especially, when I heard Roberto, you
6 know, many of the fish are coming from Chile and other Central
7 American Countries are not only necessarily from fishing, but they
8 have aquaculture beef farms, and they're exporting farm fish to
9 the U.S. So, that is something that we will have to address in the
10 Order.

11
12 I don't know specifically, right now it's under the Department of
13 Agriculture, how we are going to incorporate the aquaculture
14 portion into our response on the data collected. That is only my
15 comment.

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Ricardo. Just for the information of
18 everybody, remember that the aquaculture is something that
19 involves the States also. So, not only do we have the federal
20 government working, but the States. That's a good comment.

21
22 But the process to discuss the implementation of these Executive
23 Orders is still a little bit in the future. Because as we speak
24 now, the National Marine Fisheries Service is working on the
25 guidance to implement these Executive Orders. The most important
26 part is that we need to make sure that the public is involved
27 through this process.

28
29 Somebody called me the other day and said, "Miguel, what is going
30 to happen?" And I said, "I don't know. But don't hold your breath
31 on everything that you think is going to happen." Because he wants
32 me to convey to you that he has some ideas about opening a lot of
33 places, changing regulations, etcetera. He also wanted to know
34 whether the federal government can force Puerto Rico to implement
35 some regulations. I said, "Well, that's for other people above my
36 pay rate because Council members that belong to the government of
37 Puerto Rico, they represent the government of Puerto Rico and the
38 Virgin Islands. But Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have
39 their own authority. They pursue management of the fisheries based
40 on the local government's regulations as well as the federal."
41 Just to let you know that some people are thinking about the whole
42 thing.

43
44 Aquaculture and imports for Puerto Rico and the United States. The
45 thing is that we import 80 to 90% of what we eat. The reason for
46 that is that we eat a lot. In the case of Puerto Rico, I made a
47 study a long time ago, in '75 when I thought that we could help

1 fisheries. At that time, we found that 90% of the fish that was
2 consumed in Puerto Rico was imported, but we can only compete with
3 12% because all the other species were not in the tropics, like,
4 for example the salmon, etcetera.

5
6 So, the point is, Mr. Chairman, there's a lot of work ahead of us,
7 a lot of consideration, but the quicker that we receive guidance
8 from NMFS, the better. We have to work from the get-go with the
9 fishing community, commercial and recreational, to make sure that
10 we do the right thing, at least that we submit the right
11 recommendations. Thank you.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Miguel. Right. Next on the agenda is
14 the Update on Actions and Amendment to the Island-Based Fishery
15 Management Plan. María?

16
17 **UPDATE NOAA FISHERIES/COUNCIL ISLAND-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT**
18 **PLANS (FMPs) ACTIONS AND AMENDMENTS - MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA**
19 **FISHERIES/SERO**

20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good morning. This is María López with NOAA
21 Fisheries SERO Caribbean branch from the Sustainable Fisheries
22 Division. I'm going to be presenting, as I usually do, at the
23 beginning of each one of the meetings, a summary of the actions
24 that the Council and NMFS are working with. Also, we're going to
25 be talking about the projects that have been set as priorities for
26 2025 and the plans the Council has discussed to do with those and
27 for consideration for moving forward or making decisions later.
28 Next slide.,

29 Okay. So, this slide, we are showing the actions that we have been
30 currently working with. And so, the first three actions are
31 Amendment 2 to all the island-based FMPs is the trawl, net gear,
32 and descending devices. As you may recall, this amendment submitted
33 last year. It was submitted by the Council for approval by the
34 Secretary of Commerce. It all went through, and NMFS worked on the
35 regulations. There was where the proposed regulations were
36 published for a comment period for both the amendment and the
37 proposed regulations. When that ended, NMFS prepared the final
38 rule. That final rule, right now, is pending approval and
39 publication.

40
41 For this amendment, the proposed regulations were also proposing
42 that the implementation of the descending device requirement to be
43 ready for use, if needed, in a fishing vessel be delayed until
44 they could give the Council more opportunity to continue working
45 in the outreach and education for the fishermen to know how to use

1 it and to obtain the appropriate tools to either create their own
2 descending devices or that they could obtain the descending devices
3 that the Council has available for their use. So, as I said, right
4 now, this final rule is pending approval and publication.

5
6 We want to thank everybody that has already been using descending
7 devices and learning how to use it and teaching other colleagues,
8 other fishermen, to use the descending devices even if this is not
9 a requirement that has been implemented, because, as you all know,
10 this is something that is good for the sustainability of our
11 fisheries, to ensure that the fish that you return to the water,
12 has an opportunity to survive.

13
14 So, the next action that we have is Amendment 3 to all the island-
15 based FMPs. This is the management measures for dolphin and wahoo.
16 This is another one that the Council approved to submit it to the
17 Secretary of Commerce for approval. There was a proposed rule that
18 was published and a notice of availability of the amendment. There
19 were periods for comments. When that closed, NMFS prepared the
20 final rule, right now it is pending approval and publication. I
21 want to remind everybody that the final rule contains the responses
22 to the comments that were submitted. Right now, as I said, that
23 final rule is pending approval and publication, and we will let
24 you know any updates on those rules.

25
26 The third one is the Framework Action 3 to the Puerto Rico FMP, and
27 this is based on the results of the SEDAR 80 queen triggerfish
28 that would modify management reference points for the triggerfish
29 stock complex in Puerto Rico based on the stock assessment. This
30 one was also approved for submission by the Council last year, and
31 there was a proposed rule, and a comment period that was open.
32 When that closed, NMFS prepared a final rule. That final rule is
33 also pending approval and publication. So, for these three final
34 rules, NOAA Fisheries will ensure that we keep the Council updated
35 on the progress on these final rules.

36
37 So, the other one that the Council worked with, and this was in
38 December 2024, was Framework 3 to the U.S. Virgin Islands FMPs.
39 This is also a modification of the management reference point for
40 the queen triggerfish for Saint Croix and for Saint Thomas/Saint
41 John based on the stock assessment that was conducted on the queen
42 triggerfish. This one, during January and February, the staff, the
43 IPT finalized the action, and then the Council submitted it to for
44 approval by the Secretary of Commerce in March. So, this is an
45 action that the Council had already take final action and approved
46 it. However, there were some things that we needed to finish. If
47 you recall from the motion, it gives authority to the Council Chair
48 to approve those changes.

1
2 So, those were submitted to the Council Chair, and they were
3 submitted in March. Right now, staff is developing the proposed
4 rule. And then, when that proposed rule approved and ready for
5 publication, then, as usual, we will communicate that to the
6 Council and constituents through the Fishery Bulletins.

7
8 So, the other action that we have today-- we have one action to
9 take an action on --is the amendment to the Puerto Rico FMP, the
10 reclassification of the rainbow runner as the pelagic species. As
11 you may recall, during the last Council meeting in December 2024,
12 we gave a presentation to the Council where we discussed what the
13 action included, which is basically reclassifying the rainbow
14 runner from a reef fish to a pelagic fish. The Council has seen
15 this presentation several times. However, the staff needed to make
16 some adjustments to the documents, so that's why, although it was
17 scheduled to take final action in December, it was not done, and
18 we requested if the Council would review the document at this
19 meeting so that they can take final action.

20
21 So, we will be giving a presentation, after this one, with the
22 information for the rainbow runner, so you can all make a decision
23 if you want to take final action on this one. If you do decide to
24 take final action, then there is a codified text that will be in
25 the regulations that you will need to review.

26
27 Then after that, the plan is after the Council submits the
28 document, then this is the phase where the Council process stops
29 there, and then NOAA Fisheries takes over to prepare the
30 regulations. However, just remember that the public participation
31 continues and the Council participation continues once a proposed
32 rule and that amendment is published because there's an open
33 comment periods that are available for both, the amendments and
34 the regulations.

35
36 So, give me a moment here. I need to adjust my microphone. Thank
37 you for that.

38
39 Okay. So, the next slide is going to be the projects that the
40 Council set for priorities for 2025 on the December 2024, Council
41 meeting. So, if you can go-- okay. Perfect. Is there feedback?
42 Okay.

43
44 So, these are actions. The first action that we're going to be
45 presenting is the Federal Permits Management. This is a
46 presentation that will be given by Dr. Jessica Stephen from NOAA
47 Fisheries. As you all recall, there was a first presentation in
48 December 2023, and the Council wanted to receive additional

1 information, obviously, on the permits, how the permits were going
2 to or could be developed because there was an interest to develop
3 a federal permit for certain species in Caribbean waters. Right?
4 So, at that point, the Council did not have a clear idea of where
5 they wanted to move forward to, and that was understandable because
6 there was a lot of information about how the federal permit process
7 goes and that the Council did not have. That's why NOAA Fisheries
8 prepared this presentation that we're going to be getting today by
9 Dr. Jessica Stephens.

10
11 This presentation will focus on the background information that
12 the Council should know, starting with the phases of permit
13 planning, an idea, what would be an idea, vision, research and
14 planning, implementation, evaluation. And also, what are the
15 differences between the different types of permits, like open
16 access, moratorium, limited access permits, what are the MSA
17 requirements? These are all background information that is very
18 important for everybody to know, because if there is a decision
19 later on to move forward with a permit or whatever form that takes,
20 then we think that this is very important for them to know so we
21 can start thinking about how something will look like. And then
22 the presentation would also walk through an example of creating a
23 commercial federal permit program just as an example so you know
24 how the process would be.

25
26 So, for this action, the logical next step will be to scope, to
27 continue gathering information from fishermen, from the DAPs, from
28 the general public. I want to remind everyone that this is
29 envisioned as a long-term action. This something that there's a
30 lot to learn before the Council may decide to move forward or not.
31 So, I just wanted to make that clear. And, also, the idea is, with
32 this presentation and through all the scoping, that the Council
33 can provide guidance to staff in what would be the purpose and the
34 need for an action just like this.

35
36 As I said, the presentation will be given today. And then
37 potentially, if, you know, continues information gathering
38 throughout the year. And I mentioned in here the DAPs, because the
39 DAPs at the last Council meeting and the one before, they were
40 very interested in getting or obtaining information from, like,
41 the same presentation and be able to ask questions. The idea at
42 that time was that we will have this presentation today and then
43 have the DAPs meet and discuss what they learned today and be able
44 to have an opportunity to have questions. So, if the Council is
45 interested to pursue that, the DAP meetings, later, this will be
46 one of the topics that could be discussed.

47
48 Okay. So, the next item that we will be discussing today, that

1 staff will be bringing to the Council for their discussion is the
2 response to the Saint Thomas Fisherman's Association questions
3 regarding Grammanik Bank Management. The Council will-- Sarah
4 Stephenson is going to go through the document. The document is
5 included in the briefing book. It's like a white paper answers to
6 the questions that the Saint Thomas Fisherman's Association had on
7 this topic. Then, you know, from that, the Council will provide
8 guidance on how they want to move forward, whatever form that
9 takes.

10
11 Okay, so the next topics that we have included in here are topics
12 that we brought during the December meeting. These are things that
13 the Council considered as priorities for 2025 or 2026. So, one of
14 the things that needed to be done and that was brought to the
15 Council attention is the status of species with prohibited harvest.
16 So, this is species that, when the island-based FMPs were created,
17 these are species that the ACLs were set at zero. We're talking
18 about corals, sea cucumbers, sea urchins, and other fish, for
19 example, parrotfish, nassau, goliath. These are species that have
20 an ACL of zero. However, the SYL, the sustainable yield level was
21 not set. That's something that needs to be set because the SYL
22 will tell us information for determination of the status in terms
23 of an overfish status for the species.

24
25 So, Sarah gave a little presentation, a short presentation about
26 that. It was something that we were requesting the Council to
27 consider tasking the SSC to look into the numerical SYLs based on
28 the information, specifying numerical SYLs or the Council to base
29 on information available for each stock and the Council to consider
30 whether these stocks or stock complexes should be moved to an
31 ecosystem component species. So, what we are requesting the Council
32 is last time we talked about having this action be perhaps set in
33 2026 based on the timing, because there were other things that
34 needed to be done. However, the staff would like to request if
35 this could be considered as a 2025 priority because some of the
36 topics that were discussed that we were going to be taking care of
37 during the year, which is the SEDAR, the results from the SEDAR 84
38 and the SEDAR for the spiny lobster may not be ready in time with
39 recommendations until the end of the year. So, that means that the
40 staff will not be able to start working on amendments on anything
41 like that related to those topics during 2025. So, that opens the
42 possibility to work with other actions.

43
44 That doesn't mean that we're going to be taking final action or
45 anything. It's just giving staff the guidance to start working on
46 changes that need to be done. For example, to comply with the
47 requirements of the MSA that we have to have status determination
48 for those.

1
2 Anyways, we also wanted to take this opportunity to review the
3 species to determine the need of for conservation and management.
4 Right? So, this and other things that staff will be doing through
5 the year that has been tasked by the Council to start working on,
6 will give an opportunity for reviewing what information is
7 available for the species to determine if those species should we
8 continue fisheries management of those species. And for that, we,
9 the Caribbean branch of the Sustainable Fisheries Division in SERO
10 already started creating a matrix of information of all the species
11 that we're currently managing.

12
13 This is something that we have been working with for a while. This
14 is not something new, right? Because it's important for us to be
15 able, if we are going to have actions that are intended to modify
16 the management reference points, then we think that as part of
17 that effort, we should also be reviewing what information we have
18 available for the species, what is the need for management, what
19 is the management that is currently done, for example, in the
20 states, etcetera. So, we're putting all that information together
21 and we will bring that to the Council so that the Council can, at
22 least for this action, for the status prohibited species, review
23 that and then may task the SSC to look it into that.

24
25 Okay. So, the other action that the Council wanted to take is
26 actions to take when pelagic's AMs are triggered. As you all know,
27 pelagic species are new to management. They were added to
28 management in the island-based FMP, which became effective on 2022.
29 At that time, the Council set an ACT, with the ACL and then if the
30 accountability measures were triggered and needed to be
31 implemented, that accountability measure is not like in the other
32 species like reef fish and spinal lobster which will close the
33 fishery. The decision was to then have the Council review the
34 overages and make a decision as to what would be the next step.
35 Right?

36
37 During the last Council meeting, the Council wanted to task the
38 SSC to look into that. So, staff will prepare a document, put
39 together a document or prepare materials to provide to the SSC so
40 that when SSC meets, they can take a look at that and may be able
41 to provide some recommendations to the Council, then the Council
42 can discuss those recommendations and other things that they would
43 like to discuss to see how we're going to move forward with the
44 pelagic species.

45
46 So, the idea for that is, you know, we will be working on preparing
47 the document, the background information, provide that to the SSC,
48 and then when the Council decides that the SSC needs to meet, then

1 they will have that ready.

2
3 The next action that the Council discuss is a revision of
4 accountability measures for spiny lobster. This is an action that
5 we will request the Council to schedule for discussion for the
6 August meeting. This is something that we also brought during the
7 December 2024 as a priority. This is because, in Puerto Rico--
8 this action is mostly for Puerto Rico. It's because, you know, the
9 ACL continues to be exceeded, and the Council wanted to evaluate
10 if there was an accountability measure. Right now, it's closing
11 the federal waters to all fishing if the accountability measure
12 needs to be implemented. However, we all know that most of the
13 harvest of spiny lobster occurs in states water. So, the Council
14 wanted to look different measures that can be taken through an
15 accountability measure that would provide more flexibility on how
16 to deal with an exceedance of the ACL. And this will also take
17 into consideration that there is a SEDAR process schedule for this
18 year that is already ongoing, that is looking into assessing the
19 species as well.

20
21 So, all of that is related. However, again, we will be preparing
22 materials, to present to the Council at the August meeting, either
23 like a white paper and an options paper, which, again doesn't mean
24 that that's how you need to move forward, but it will provide some
25 ideas on how this could be modified. And then if you decide, you
26 can task your SSC if you want them to look into that, of course.
27 Also, remembering that these actions are needed to prevent
28 overfishing of the species. So, that's why the Council wanted to
29 entertain this.

30
31 So, the request will be to bring this to the August meeting so
32 they can observe that. Mr. Chair, I think you have a question or
33 a comment.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

36
37 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julia Magras, for the record. So, once again, we're
38 talking here about more regulations again. As it pertains to the
39 lobster for Puerto Rico, I have put it on a record at the last
40 three meetings. The SSC, when setting the annual catch limit for
41 that species, determined at that meeting that they were setting
42 the annual catch limit lower than what the original models called
43 for, and they were setting it there with the intentions of
44 revisiting it if it's overrun. It was overrun twice; the Puerto
45 Rican fisherman take two closures on that species. And up to this
46 day, it still has not been revisited.

47
48 We did the Tier process. That meeting took place-- That was the

1 last meeting that took place at the Council office. The SSC used
2 to meet in the Council office. It was said, and it's on the record.
3 You guys need to go back and look at the minutes and from there
4 you would see that the original number, and I could be wrong, was
5 769,000 pounds. We toned it down from that, and we set it at
6 whatever the number is right now. We need to go back to those
7 meeting minutes and revisit the lobsters of Puerto Rico. Revisit
8 the process that was done.

9
10 Here, we are talking about, "oh, well, we need more accountability
11 measures, more is harvested in state waters than in federal
12 waters." We're not doing our job. Who is taking the penalizing
13 here again at a fisherman? You're going to end up closing the
14 lobster fishery down altogether for Puerto Rico, and it's not
15 needed. There's a reason why we are overrunning is because the
16 annual catch limit is set to low. It would not be continuing. It's
17 not because there's more fishermen, there's more of this, more of
18 that. It's the same set of guys or even less fishermen harvesting.

19
20 It's because the stock is healthy. And when we, and I say we
21 because I'm part of the process, set the limits, we know we were
22 setting it wrong. And we put it on a record back at that meeting
23 that, "remember what we said here today, we will revisit," but we
24 still have not revisited and they have taken two closures and
25 headed towards a third closure.

26
27 So, I'm putting it on a record again. Before any more regulations
28 are set to the Puerto Rican lobsters, we need to go back and look
29 at the data that was provided back then and reassess, are we
30 actually setting a limit that is needed?

31
32 Same thing with the dolphin and the wahoo. We made a decision,
33 we're going to set the annual catch limit on dolphin and wahoo,
34 which is not needed. It's not needed. What's needed is the size
35 limits because it's a species that is passing through. It's a
36 migratory species that just channels through and makes the whole
37 run of the world.

38
39 But this is exactly what the Executive Order is talking about. We
40 have different managements for the same species, and we continue
41 to add more management now because there's an overrun of the
42 dolphin and wahoo because they finally came through. The fishermen
43 caught. We want to set a closure on it to regroup the loss of the
44 overrun. That's wrong. It was said right here in this meeting. We
45 say it in all the meetings; it's not everything we need to beat to
46 death.

47
48 And this is why the association wrote the letter that it wrote.

1 This is the opportunity for us to take each one of the managements
2 that are in place right now and say, "do we actually need to have
3 three different types of management on one species?" This is the
4 problem that we are having. We are really, really tired of the
5 over regulations of our fishery. And all that happens when you
6 overregulate the fisheries is that our markets are being flooded
7 by imports. That is killing us.

8
9 When we, the fishers, should be under commerce, which we are still
10 making money, but we can't harvest because we went over the limit
11 that was set, and the limit that was set was incorrect. Thank you.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I have Andy and then a chat.

14
15 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. I appreciate the comments. I'm going to
16 respectfully disagree with some of them in that we do have a SEDAR
17 91 spiny lobster assessment coming up. Right? That is our
18 opportunity to get the best available science and determine what
19 the catch level will be. And based on the requirements of the
20 Magnuson Act, we will look at that. The SSC will review it. They'll
21 provide their recommendations to us, and we'll update our catch
22 limits based on that for spiny lobster, right, for Puerto Rico,
23 hopefully, Saint Thomas, Saint John, Saint Croix.

24
25 With that said, we, the fishery service, have seen that this
26 accountability measure is not functioning well. And we've talked
27 to our colleagues at Puerto Rico DNER, and they don't believe
28 there's a problem with lobster. Right? And so, we've had those
29 conversations. So, we think there's a need to change that
30 accountability measure to something that is more workable, that
31 looks at the science, that looks at the data, that looks at other
32 options, that doesn't just require federal waters to be closed
33 because we know that that's a limiting factor in terms of harvest
34 because most of it occurs in state waters. Right?

35
36 So, this is an opportunity, in my view, maybe not deregulatory,
37 but to change the regulation in a way that better works for both
38 managers and the industry members going forward. And so that's
39 really our goal with that action coming back to you in August to
40 just start to present some options to see what's available. And I
41 think it leads in nicely then to that stock assessment report and
42 whatever the annual catch limit increases will come in December
43 and thereafter.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** On chat?

46
47 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Kevin McCarthy.

48

1 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. I think Andy covered my points, so
2 I'll just pass.

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Kevin.

5

6 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Thank you. So, continuing with the other
7 topic that the Council discussed, it was that there's some species
8 that when the ACLs were set, for example, for the U.S. Virgin
9 Islands, we talked about there being a need to revise the catch
10 limits for species that have enhanced reporting. This is when the
11 ACL is being monitored every year for overages. These are species
12 that will, and have in the past couple of years, gone over the
13 ACL, not because there was an increase in actual landings, but
14 because there was enhanced reporting for this species. Therefore,
15 NMFS determined that there's not a need to implement accountability
16 measures or closures on those species because it is due to enhanced
17 reporting.

18

19 This is something, as you heard in the December meeting, that will
20 continue to happen until the ACLs are revised, right? We also
21 talked to the December meeting that is just not for this species
22 that will have enhanced reporting that has a need for catch limits,
23 which are a requirement under the MSA, to be revised. It is also
24 for other species. I think we all agree that there's a need to
25 look into what information is available and determine, first of
26 all, like I said earlier, the status of the species. Let's look at
27 what is the need for conservation of management on some of the
28 species, and through that process, also see what information is
29 available, if data is available, what else can be used to revise
30 those catch limits, not just for those species, but also for other
31 species.

32

33 So, at least for the catch limits for species with enhanced
34 reports, and which, again, it's going to continue happening, the
35 Council considered that that should be taken care of in 2026 based
36 on the information, and again, because there were other things
37 like, for example, the SEDARS that were happening. However, staff
38 will ask the Council to consider this, just looking into that for
39 those revisions in 2025 and start that process.

40

41 So, the Caribbean branch and sustainable fisheries, we have already
42 started putting together a matrix of information for those species.
43 What is the information that it's available? Remember the catch
44 limit, the island-based FMP came into place in 2022, but it was a
45 process that took a couple of years and we want to see what
46 information is now available that is more at the species level.
47 For example, for groupers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, for hogfish,
48 etcetera which are species that before they were all reported as

1 an aggregate, like a category like groupers or triggerfish,
2 etcetera. Then after, I believe in 2012, there were changes in the
3 catch report forms, and then they started to report in the species.
4 So, with the idea that that will provide us with better
5 information, and if that is better information, then it should be
6 used to revise those catch limits instead.

7
8 But anyway, staff has already started that process and putting
9 together that matrix, and we would like to present that to the
10 Council at some point so they can see what information is in there
11 and see if there's some decisions. And again, looking into the
12 need for conservation of management of many of the species.

13
14 So, can you go to the next slide? Okay.

15
16 So, this last slide is talking about 2025 ACL monitoring. NMFS
17 every year conducts an ACL monitoring for all the species. NMFS
18 has been able to do it already for U.S. Virgin Islands because the
19 landings were available. It's still pending for Puerto Rico because
20 the landings are not ready yet, in terms of, remember, there are
21 landings that come from the catch report forms, and also landings
22 from eReporting, so staff is working on that. And then, once those
23 landings are ready to be used, then that monitoring will occur.

24
25 However, for 2025, there's no overages for Saint Croix. And then,
26 for Saint Thomas and Saint John, as I mentioned earlier, the usual
27 groupers and the hogfish, they went over the ACL. And again, it
28 was determined because it was because of enhanced reporting. So,
29 there was no need to implement any accountability measures, and
30 that ties to the topic I was just mentioning about revising those
31 ACLs for those species. So, this is a proof that that's something
32 that will continue to happen.

33
34 So, SEDAR 84 is the yellowtail snapper in Puerto Rico and Saint
35 Thomas/Saint John, and spotlight parrotfish in Saint Croix.
36 There's going to be a review workshop in July, and then Kevin, the
37 Science Center will provide more information about that during
38 their participation. And then, once they have outcomes from those,
39 which is kind of expected to be later into the year, then they
40 will convene the to go through that and then discuss.

41
42 And then SEDAR 91 is spiny lobster for Puerto Rico, Saint
43 Thomas/Saint John and Saint Croix. There is a review workshop in
44 August 2025, and then plans to perhaps present to the SSC, be ready
45 to present to the SSC for discussion later in the year, perhaps
46 before the December meeting. So, that's something that Kevin will
47 be discussing. And remember, you know, the SSC discusses and
48 provides recommendations to the Council on the ABC.

1
2 So, because those are not, as I mentioned earlier, those are not
3 going to be ready until the end of the year, that means that staff
4 is not going to be working with any amendments or anything that
5 may come from that, based on, you know, what the Council wants to
6 do with the recommendations. And so, we may be able to, you know,
7 based on what the Council wants to move forward with during the
8 rest of the year, right, based on the conversations that we had
9 earlier, then staff would be available to work on other things
10 that we mentioned before.

11
12 And the last thing I want to mention that was brought at the
13 December meeting is the U.S. Virgin Islands compatibility of
14 regulations with the EEZ. That's something that DPNR was wanting
15 the Council to bring back to the table. There's no action that has
16 been done from the Council's side at this point, but the idea is
17 to have a working group from DPNR, Council, and NOAA Fisheries
18 that can sit down and look to see if there's a need to do compatible
19 regulations and what are those. This is mostly a DPNR led action
20 that the Council will be updated on once there's more information.

21
22 So, that's all I have for this. I would say that if the Council,
23 like what we did in December meeting, if at the end of tomorrow
24 they want to revisit anything that was here, to provide more
25 guidance to staff at the end of the meeting, they're certainly
26 welcome to do so. Thank you.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, María. Before we go on a break, any
29 questions for María? Alright. Hearing none, we'll take quick break.
30 About fifteen minutes.

31
32 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alrighty. We're going to get back to the agenda
35 since we're-- Okay. We have a couple of introductions for some
36 people that just came on board.

37
38 I know Sennai has arrived and then we have a new member from the
39 DPNR. They have a legal counsel whom I would like him to introduce
40 himself.

41
42 **KYLE W. BEIGHLE:** Good morning, everybody. Kyle Beighle, legal
43 counsel with DPNR Fish and Wildlife Division. Excited to be here.
44 Look forward to working with you all.

45
46 **DINORAH CHACIN:** Good morning. I'm just mainly here to listen. I'm

1 Dinorah Chacin. I'm the U.S.V.I. Fisheries Liaison so happy to be
2 here.

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

5

6 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, Bureau Chief of Fisheries, Division
7 of Fish and Wildlife, designee for Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol,
8 DPNR.

9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks, Sennai. Alrighty. And then, I was also
11 told to make a comment. If there is anyone online that want to
12 make a comment in Spanish we will translate it here on our side.
13 So, feel free to make any comments online that are in Spanish, and
14 we will take care of it on our side.

15

16 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Pues vamos a decirlo en español, ¿
17 verdad? Que las personas que estén en línea que necesiten hacer
18 algún comentario en español, pueden hacerlo y acá lo traducimos.
19 Gracias.

20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Cristina.

22

23 Alright. Continuing with the agenda. Amendment 4 to Puerto Rico
24 FMP.

25

26 **AMENDMENT 4 TO PUERTO RICO FMP: RECLASSIFICATION OF THE RAINBOW**
27 **RUNNER AS A PELAGIC FISH-FINAL ACTION - MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA**
28 **FISHERIES/SERO**

29

30 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Cristina, if can put
31 the amendment for presentation.

32

33 Okay. Good morning, everybody. This is María López with Sustainable
34 Fisheries Division Caribbean branch of the Southeast Regional
35 Office of NMFS, and I'm going to be presenting on Amendment 4 to
36 the Puerto Rico FMP, reclassification of the rainbow runner as a
37 pelagic species. Next slide.

38

39 Okay. This is an action that we have been discussing for a while.
40 As I mentioned earlier, it was scheduled for final action during
41 the past Council meeting. However, staff needed to make some
42 adjustment to the document, and the document revised has been
43 provided in the briefing book for the Council as well as the
44 codified text if the Council would like to take final action.

45

46 This is an action that was requested by the Puerto Rico DAP and
47 the Council task staff to look into it, prepare an amendment to
48 reclassify the species under rainbow runner, which is a pelagic

1 species, the new species under the Puerto Rico FMP. It had been
2 included under the reef fish component along with other jack
3 species, and as such, being a part of the reef fish component, the
4 species is subject to management measures that apply to the reef
5 fish, such as seasonal closures, for example, the Bajo De Sico
6 seasonal closure, which, during the closure time, the harvest of
7 reef fish, harvest or possession of reef fish is not allowed, and
8 also recreational bag limits that apply to reef fish among others.
9 And we'll discuss that later.

10
11 So, the rainbow runner is primarily a pelagic fish of the jack's
12 family, and it's widespread to the tropical waters and inhabits
13 both coastal and offshore areas. It's an important species for
14 recreational fishing. Typical fishing techniques include using
15 poppers, trolling, light bait, and jigs. That's just some
16 information on the species.

17
18 So, this species is currently managed with a commercial and a
19 recreational ACL, a reef fish-specific accountability measure, and
20 an aggregate reef fish recreational bag limit. And as I mentioned
21 earlier, regulations applicable to reef fish, such as the Bajo De
22 Sico seasonal closure that goes from October 1 to March 31 each
23 year, that provision currently applies to the rainbow runner as
24 the status quo. Next slide.

25
26 Other important information is that the rainbow runner is not
27 listed, currently, on the Puerto Rico commercial catch report form.
28 So, that means that the information that is received on landings,
29 commercial landings of the species is limited. It can be added as
30 an ad in. So, they have to include them within the broader listed
31 category of the jacks or writing rainbow runner and its landings
32 on the form. There's a similar issue with eReporting for this
33 species. Fishermen who land rainbow runner have to search for
34 rainbow runner in the list of other species in the app or include
35 its landings under the broader category of jacks. However, during
36 the past Council meeting, we also discussed, the Council discussed,
37 requesting DNER, if they were able to include the species as a
38 direct entry in the commercial catch report form and in the
39 eReporting.

40
41 DNER, correct me if I'm wrong, but you guys were going to go look
42 into that. The idea with that is, you know, so that better landings
43 information can be collected because this is one of those species
44 that is currently managed under the Puerto Rico FMP. So, with that
45 said, it is expected that reported commercial landings of the

1 species do not necessarily represent all the catch, and that
2 reported commercial landings of jacks include catch of rainbow
3 runner as well as other species. And this is all noted in the
4 amendment that you have in your briefing book. So, this is
5 something that can change in the future if that species is directly
6 added to the catch report forms. Okay, so next slide.

7
8 So, the objective of this action is to ensure that rainbow runner
9 is managed in accordance with its life history characteristics and
10 fishing patterns, which are consistent with Council management of
11 pelagic species. So, this action, it's basically reclassifying the
12 rainbow runner, which is species named *elagatis bipinnulata*, from
13 the Puerto Rico Reef Fish Group to the Puerto Rico Pelagic Fish
14 Group through Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP.

15
16 So, what are the outcomes from taking this action? That means that
17 regulations that apply to reef fish, such as the recreational bag
18 limit, the Bajo Del Sico seasonal area closure applicable to reef
19 fish, and the reef fish-specific AMs would not apply to the species
20 any longer. That means that specific regulations that apply to
21 pelagic fish would be applicable to rainbow runner. And those,
22 regulations are the annual catch target that is set only for
23 pelagic species. Remember, pelagic species are new to management,
24 so we're still in the process of determining how to best manage
25 this species in terms of what actions to take if the annual targets
26 or the annual catch limits are exceeded.

27
28 So, that annual catch target was set at 90% of the current ACL for
29 the species. As reclassification for the species to the pelagic
30 group, then that means that the pelagic fish specific AM will be
31 applicable. Okay? So, in other words, anything that applies to a
32 reef fish category that I mentioned before will not be applicable
33 to the species any longer if this reclassification is done. Next
34 slide.

35
36 So, in this action the Council decided that they wanted to
37 establish an ACT for rainbow runner because of the classification
38 as a pelagic fish, because that is the management for pelagic
39 species that was decided in the island-based FMP. So, that's what
40 would happen.

41
42 So, the pelagic species, as I mentioned, are mentioned with an ACT
43 set at 90% of the ACL for each sector. Establishing an ACT in
44 addition to the ACL is a precautionary management measure to
45 address uncertainty in the management of pelagic species. And that
46 uncertainty comes because this is a new species for management and
47 we don't have, like, extensive history of landings for each
48 species.

1
2 So, the ACL continues to be the same, at this time, right? That
3 doesn't mean that we cannot revise it, and that was one of the
4 things that the Council was talking about. With better information,
5 with newer information, the Council would like to, eventually,
6 revise the ACLs for this species, and this was one of the
7 recommendations from the SSC last year when they reviewed this.
8 The ACL continues to be, this is not changing the ACL, I make that
9 clear. It's going to continue to be the 913 pounds, and
10 recreational 8,091. Then from that, the reduction, 10% or 90% of
11 the ACL will be that proposed ACT. For the commercials, it's 822
12 pounds, and for recreational 7,282.

13
14 So that will be the new ACT, and then that means that if that ACT
15 is exceeded, right? It's a precautionary measure, then that will
16 trigger that AM. And then, the AM says that if corrective action
17 is needed, NMFS could apply management measures, such as a trip
18 limit, and these are just examples, trip limit, a closure, or
19 anything else that would help protect the long-term sustainability
20 of the resource. Right? And that right now, as you all know, this
21 is something that the Council would like to make a decision as to
22 what that corrective action is, and that's why the Council will be
23 looking into this year.

24
25 But right now, this is the AM that applies to pelagics, and I'm
26 going to read it. It says, "The AM for pelagic fish compares the
27 sector-specific ACT to available sector-specific landings. If
28 landings for one sector are not available, then the ACT for the
29 sector with available landings is the applicable ACT for the stock.
30 If the AM is triggered, then NMFS in consultation with the Council
31 will determine appropriate corrective action."

32
33 "If the exceedance is the result of enhanced and improved data
34 collection and monitoring, NMFS and the Council may determine that
35 no corrective action is needed. If corrective action is needed,
36 NMFS could apply management measures, such as a closure or trip
37 limit" that's an example, "which would help protect the long-term
38 sustainability of the resource."

39
40 So, we know from a testimony of the Council meeting, and this all
41 included in your document, rainbow runner is an incidentally caught
42 species in federal waters around Puerto Rico. Commercially, it's
43 not really a high priority species. And while leaving the species
44 classified as a reef fish could provide protection to the species
45 through the reef fish AM, a reduction in the fishing season will
46 not apply to federal waters, unless, you know, obviously the Puerto
47 Rico state governments agree to similarly close their waters to
48 all harvest, which is not something that would happen if this is

1 moved to pelagics. Go to the next slide, please. Sorry for that.

2
3 So, another thing that would change, as I mentioned earlier, is
4 that the Bajo De Sico seasonal area closure restrictions for reef
5 fish harvest would not apply any longer to rainbow runner. This is
6 all included in the amendment. This is a summary.

7
8 Commercial and recreational fishermen could legally fish for
9 rainbow runner in the Bajo Sico management area during the seasonal
10 area closure, as is currently the case with other pelagic species
11 and non-managed species. So, that's what would happen once these
12 regulations are implemented. The proposed action is not expected
13 to change how rainbow runner is currently fished, and the landings
14 are expected to continue to be constrained by the applicable ACL
15 and corresponding ACT as part of the analysis that was done in the
16 document.

17
18 The last thing that would happen is that the rainbow runner would
19 be remove from the reef fish recreational bag limits. Removing the
20 species from any protection afforded by the aggregate bag limit
21 could result in an increased rate of catch of the species by the
22 recreational sector, though they will still be constrained to the
23 recreational ACL. Although, as you all know, in the absence of
24 recreational landings, the commercial ACT and ACL will be
25 applicable for the species. And this is because we currently don't
26 have recreational landings and monitoring of recreational sector,
27 but work is being done in that respect.

28
29 However, it is expected that if a rainbow runner is removed from
30 the recreational bag limit, that recreational fishermen would
31 continue to catch a similar amount of rainbow runner as they did
32 before the species was federally managed, which is less than one
33 fish per day. And this is all part of the analysis that is included
34 in the document, and that is the analysis that supports the
35 decision for the Council to move the species from the reef fish
36 category to the pelagic group category. Okay, next slide, please.

37
38 This is a summary. This presentation is shorter because if you
39 recall during the December 2024 meeting, we gave a longer and more
40 thorough presentation to the Council. So, I'm basically just
41 providing a summary at this point. But if there are any questions,
42 I would be happy to answer those.

43
44 So, in summary, removing reef fish specific management
45 restrictions for the species by reclassifying it as a pelagic fish
46 is not expected to result in an increased fishing effort based on
47 the analysis and discussion in Amendment 4. Rainbow Runner behaves
48 as a pelagic species and has been historically targeted as a

1 pelagic species with both commercial and recreational catches
2 being infrequent and variable. This is not expected to change based
3 on this reclassification.

4
5 Landings will continue to be constrained by the applicable ACL and
6 the corresponding ACT. If the AM is triggered, then NMFS in
7 consultation with the Council will determine appropriate
8 corrective action. A fishing season reduction could result, but it
9 is not the applied action like it is for the reef fish AM.

10
11 The Council could revisit the ACL and ACT for the rainbow runner
12 to address any future changes in effort, for example, changes in
13 market demand or changes in reporting, etcetera. And I wanted to
14 include in here that including the rainbow runner as a direct entry
15 in both the CCR form and eReporting app could enhance the
16 information available for revisiting the ACLs for the species.
17 Okay. So, last slide, please.

18
19 So, this is the action items and next steps. April 2025, this is
20 this meeting. The Council reviews the draft amendment and the
21 codified text and may take final action. Next, if the Council takes
22 final action, then the Council submits the amendment to NMFS for
23 approval, which means once the document is ready and/or cleaned,
24 ready to go. I mean, if there are any changes, they are usually
25 very minor and editorial, the staff will notify the Council Chair
26 what those changes are. And then, the Council formally submits the
27 amendment to NMFS for approval, and then NMFS starts developing
28 the proposed rule.

29
30 This is an amendment, so there's also going to be a notice of
31 availability of the amendment. So, there's two opportunities for
32 comment. The proposed rule is published. And then, after the
33 comment period closes, which is usually sixty days for the
34 amendment and thirty days for comments on the proposed rule, then
35 NMFS will develop the final rule. If there are any comments, those
36 comments are addressed during the final rule, and then that is
37 published. And thirty days after the final rule closes, the
38 amendment becomes effective.

39
40 So, that is the plan, right, for this action. And then, the next
41 thing we wanted to present is the codified text for-- Cristina's
42 going to put in the screen the codified text for this action.
43 Graciela is going to go through that. The codified text is
44 basically the changes that go in our regulations, and those changes
45 are-- will be changed. What is currently in the reef fish for this
46 particular species, what is in the reef fish section of the Puerto
47 Rico FMP. This is an amendment only for the Puerto Rico FMP because
48 the species is not a species managed under any of the U.S. Virgin

1 Islands management plans. So, these changes would make the
2 management of the species consistent with management for pelagic
3 species. Graciela, go ahead.

4

5 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you. So, you do have the codified
6 text in ISSUU?

7

8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, Graciela, just-- Can you tell us what the
9 codified text is? Just for the record. ¿Nos puedes decir que es el
10 codified text? Antes de que empieces.

11

12 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the codified-- sorry, I defer to
13 you, Kate.

14

15 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Do you want me to answer that, sir? Okay,
16 Kate Zamboni, for the record. The codified text is basically the
17 words that we would submit to the Federal Register and then
18 ultimately the changes that would be made in the code of federal
19 regulations. So, what we're trying to show to you is exactly how,
20 what María described, changing the way the species is managed from
21 a reef fish to a pelagic fish, what changes would be made to the
22 words that are currently in the code of federal regulations.

23

24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, you do have the version in the ISSUU
25 that you can read off of but this will be specifically for 50 CFR
26 Part 622, Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico and South
27 Atlantic.

28

29 The changes basically follow what María just presented. So,
30 specifically for Table 1, which are the pelagic species that you
31 have already in place. It includes now the rainbow runner to the
32 fish definition of pelagics. So, there is the jacks. You can follow
33 also the comments by Scott Sanford who prepared the codified text
34 for us. Then in Table 3, which is the one for reef fish, we'll be
35 eliminating rainbow runner from Table 3 in the code. So, you would
36 have-- can you go up a little bit more? The other jacks are left
37 behind. So, originally it said rainbow runner in that table so
38 it's not there anymore.

39

40 And can we keep going down to 622.440? Okay. This one will remove
41 rainbow runner from the reef fish commercial and recreational for
42 the ACLs, and it will establish the new ACT for the rainbow runner.
43 There is no change in the ACLs for rainbow runner. So, it's removed
44 in this table from reef fish.

45

46 Can you go up to the jacks so that they can see it? So, it's not
47 there anymore. Can we go down, please? To the next page. And the
48 next. And go down to page-- the page where it says-- keep going.

1 Should have given you the page number, but I forgot. Okay. Keep
2 going. One more page. One more. So, it's included in that
3 definition.

4
5 Okay. It's broken in a different place than mine. Okay. So, go up
6 a little bit where he says pelagic fish. ACLs. Right there.

7
8 So, if you read that paragraph that includes the ACLs and ACTs for
9 the now moved into the pelagics rainbow runner.

10
11 Now go back to the stock complex. Down. Next page. Okay. So, right
12 there.

13
14 Okay. So, because it's added to the pelagics, you look at number
15 three-- go up a little bit more. Two, three. There! Jack's rainbow
16 runner. So, that's the ACL for rainbow runner for the commercial
17 harvest. And below it, on a little (ii), it's the commercial ACT
18 that María mentioned and the (iii) is the recreational ACL, and
19 the next one is the recreational ACT. So, this is new. This has
20 changed from the original code.

21
22 Let's go to the next paragraph.

23
24 So, because of these changes, there is going to be a reordering or
25 designation in the forthcoming paragraphs. They will be reading
26 differently from what we had before. It doesn't add anything, it
27 just rearranges the way that it's implemented.

28
29 If you go down to number (8) a page down. Okay.

30
31 So, the pelagic fish AM application, the current pelagic AM will
32 now also apply to the rainbow runner, in addition to the other
33 defined pelagic species. And I think that covers every change that
34 you've reported on and this is what goes along with FMP amendment.

35
36 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Graciela. Thank you, Graciela, for
37 reading the codified text. That codified text was prepared by NOAA
38 Fisheries for a regulation branch. And this is, as we mentioned,
39 this is what would change in the 50 CFR part 622 under the Puerto
40 Rico FMP.

41
42 That concludes the presentation. So next is up to the Council to
43 discuss how they want to move forward. And if they want to move
44 forward, then they can prepare a motion based on what they want to
45 do. We'll be here to assist if needed.

46
47 **Questions/Comments**

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
2

3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** This is just to finish the process that was
4 started some time ago. Most of the discussion that we had here is
5 already in the minutes, etcetera. At this time, what the staff is
6 presenting to you is the product, the outcome of all those
7 discussions. At this time, what we need to hear from the Council
8 is if you agree with the codified text. Do agree that this is the
9 intention that we have? And then a motion to approve it, with
10 amendments, if you need to have amendment or just without
11 amendments.
12

13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?
14

15 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
16 record. We have been discussing this since December and now with
17 the presentation that María brought to us I think we should move
18 on with this and present a motion.
19

20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mr. Chair, based on what Vanessa just said
21 they wanted to move forward. We have some suggestions for the
22 Council that we can provide as a motion, and then you can adjust
23 how you see fit. So, can you-- okay. Thank you very much.
24

25 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes, just give me one minute please. Let me read
26 it first.
27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai, you have a comment?
29

30 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah, before we make the motion, I just wanted to
31 ask a question to DRNA regarding reporting just so we make sure we
32 have like a timeline or idea because that will then change how we
33 view it and what we have to do. So, I was going to ask Ricardo if
34 he had an idea if rainbow runner was included in either of the
35 reporting formats already, electronic or paper. And for which ones
36 it is not, what they thought is the feasibility of getting it
37 included in terms of a timeline.
38

39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?
40

41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, for the record. Yes. We have
42 the rainbow runner already included eReporting in the application
43 as a separate species. We will do the same in paper. Even though,
44 we have a blank in the paper that the fisherman can put the name
45 of the species that he is reporting a part of all the other that
46 have their names and the pictures. But we will include it on paper
47 too very soon. Probably, in the next printing in next printing
48 batch.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I got a quick question. This is really for
3 Puerto Rico FMP. Right? Not? Okay. Strictly that. Alright. Okay.
4 So, we need a second for the motion. Vanessa is moving the motion.
5 We need a second.

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

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the motion reads, *"The Council moves
10 to approve Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico Fishery Management Plan:
11 Reclassification of the rainbow runner as a pelagic fish and submit
12 the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for review. The Council
13 allows staff to make editorial, non-substantive changes to
14 Amendment 4 and give the Council Chair the authority to deem any
15 modifications made to the amendment and regulations as necessary
16 and appropriate for implementing Amendment 4."*

17
18 Any, discussion? Okay. We'll take it to a vote. Okay. It'll be a
19 roll call vote. I'm going to start on my right with Kreglo.

20
21 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Yes.

22
23 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes.

24
25 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes.

26
27 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Yes.

28
29 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yes.

30
31 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Yes.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Carlos Farchette, yes. *Motion*
34 *carries.*

35
36 So next on the agenda is the SSC report. Vance?

37
38 **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT - VANCE VICENTE,**
39 **CHAIR**

40
41 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Thank you and good morning, to all. Sennai,
42 I'm glad you made it because I don't have that much to say. Anyhow,
43 again, good morning. Thanks for the invitation.

44
45 In summary, the SSC during 2025 has performed some jobs,
46 indirectly, because we did not hold a meeting in 2025. So, for the
47 record, the SSC of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council did
48 not hold a formal meeting in 2025. That does not mean that we did

1 not exchange information and ask questions and answer questions
2 among the group.

3
4 Anyhow, going back to the last meeting, the 185th Caribbean Fishery
5 Management Council meeting, the SSC was charged with the following
6 task.

7
8 One, Miguel, stated very clearly that the Council cannot submit a
9 proposal and that all the money that the Council gets has to go
10 through the grants office, but the members of the Council and the
11 members of the SSC can make proposals. So, I would like to propose
12 that in our next meeting, whenever it is in 2025, we would like to
13 follow-up on this subject, like for example, select the proposal
14 topics, which species, which type of habitats and ecosystems are
15 going to be involved in the proposals. And, again, reiterating
16 this should be included in our next SSC meeting.

17
18 Then Andy made a motion, Andrew Strelcheck. He says, "Okay. I will
19 make a motion to request the SSC to review the pelagic and spiny
20 lobster ACL overages at their next meeting," and it was second by
21 Sennai. So, again, this topic should be included in the next SSC
22 2025 meeting agenda.

23
24 In addition, we were reminded, when I say "we," I mean the SSC,
25 that we are involved with the SEDAR process. Once the SEDAR process
26 is completed, it goes to the SSC and the SSC meets and brings
27 recommendations to the Council, and then the Council decides to
28 take action on the results of this stock assessment. So, that means
29 that there are amendments that are going to be prepared.

30
31 The next, after SEDAR, just for the record, during 2025 the SSC
32 participated in several activities. One, we participated in the
33 Caribbean Seminar Series, which was conducted, performed in March
34 18th, 2025 with very interesting presentations. It was a double
35 feature. One presentation was given by Aaron Pilnick of the
36 University of Florida presenting the topic Unraveling the
37 Ecological Consequences of the 2022 Diadema Mass Mortality Events.
38 This was a very significant presentation because he demonstrated
39 how the effect of this keystone species where, we may say, affects
40 essential fish habitats. Okay. So, just for the record.

41
42 The second presentation was given by Tom Wijers from Wageningen
43 University & Research, presenting Restoring Caribbean Reef's One
44 Spine at a Time, The Culture and Rearing of the Lung Spine Sea
45 Urchin diadema antillarum. Anyhow, this topic, again, brought up
46 the importance of several species which are listed under the island
47 FMP of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. There are no specific
48 management measures proposed for this ecosystem species. I mean,

1 these species modify the ecosystem, their primary production, the
2 biological diversity, and they need to be looked at more carefully.
3 Anyhow, that's it.

4
5 The other activity that we were involved was on the follow-up
6 discussion of the national SCSA outcomes. This was conducted in
7 March 20th, 2025, which, as I explained in the last meeting, the
8 topic was applying ABC control rules in a changing environment.
9 Here, Graciela took most of the weight like usual. So, she was
10 very effective in this discussion.

11
12 Third, we were asked, the SSC, Chelsea Harms-Tuohy from Isla Mar
13 a scientific organization on the West Coast of Puerto Rico. She
14 informed that she had been contracted by the Caribbean Fishery
15 Management Council to conduct the Caribbean Climate Vulnerability
16 Assessment, alias CBA, for priority Council managed species. So,
17 we discussed among several members of the SSC and of course with
18 Graciela, and we had the different opinions. The list was provided
19 to us, and some species were proposed to be added. Maybe Graciela
20 can expand on this a little bit more.

21
22 I was stressing the importance of including epibenthic
23 invertebrates, okay, corals, sponges, which keep a record of
24 climate change by the different proportion of oxygen-18, oxygen-
25 16 isotope ratios. You can tell what was the temperatures and with
26 other isotopes, you can go back several hundred years and determine
27 what were the climate conditions then. So, I suggested that at
28 least hard scleractinia corals, as well as sclerosponge, which are
29 sponges that grow very slowly, and also keep a record sometimes
30 for over a thousand years of what were the climatic conditions
31 then. Then Richard jumped on me and said, "Nah, I don't want to
32 know about corals. You know, we need species that have been listed
33 by the Council." And so, I said, "Okay. Well, maybe I can back up
34 on this." Whichever way, this needs to be discussed again as a
35 topic in the next SSC meeting.

36
37 And, okay, then also Michelle Schärer, who is a member of the SSC,
38 she wants us to discuss, in the next meeting, the permit
39 application to conduct the studies in Saint Croix regarding the
40 nassau groupers. So, anyhow, these are topics that I think we
41 should discuss in the next meeting, but I'm open for suggestion.

42
43 Don't look at me like that, Miguel. I didn't say anything wrong.
44 Maybe Graciela wants to expand a little bit on this proposed topic.

45
46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** For every SSC meeting-- thank you, Vance.
47 --we do an agenda that we submit to the SSC members to see if they
48 need to include anything. They were already preparing for the

1 national SSC meeting, which has been postponed. That's too bad
2 because when all of the SSC members or representatives of the SSC
3 members from all the Councils get together, we can feed from the
4 information that they provide and what they do and use in other
5 Councils.

6
7 We are very much interested in things like the flexibility on how
8 to do stock assessment for tropics. We're interested in the use of
9 socioeconomic information for stock assessment probably some
10 environmental issues that need to be addressed when we're looking
11 at the vulnerability of these species to changes in the
12 environment.

13
14 So, we do have a list. We're missing a couple of topics. SEDAR 84,
15 it's coming online in July. So, that should be the review. SSC
16 members participate on that as well as the observers from the
17 industry. And SEDAR 91, is apparently happening during the last
18 week of August in Charleston, South Carolina, we think. There are
19 uncertainties because of budget issues and the possibility of
20 finding hotels that would host the meetings for a reasonable price.
21 So, we are working on that.

22
23 So, most likely the SSC meeting will have a virtual meeting, and
24 we have to decide on the date depending on the list of actions
25 that the Council wants to proceed with, immediately. Miguel and I
26 have talked about that and most likely it would result in a virtual
27 meeting.

28
29 We also have the SSC online for when the EBFM TAP has information
30 to provide to the SSC that they would like the SSC to comment, or
31 make suggestions, or agree with, or disagree with what the TAP is
32 doing. So, that's also coming online. That's another topic that we
33 have.

34
35 So, the SSC has already been participating not only in the CVAs
36 for most species, but there is also another project that will be
37 looking at modeling red hind and lobster. So, they will also be
38 pulled into that discussion. They will probably come in as a
39 stakeholder interest group, or something like that, but that's
40 forthcoming. That's still not happening. I think that that's all
41 I have.

42
43 Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Vance.

44
45 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you, Graciela. I have comment which I already
46 mentioned before and it's regarding the virtual meetings. I mean,
47 when the SSC gets together, it's very important to be in direct
48 contact with the fishers. Sometimes I am a little bit not satisfied

1 with having a non-person meeting. I was looking at this, but then
2 Miguel put out a figure, I didn't know that we were so expensive.
3
4 Jesús. Between 60 and 80 thousand dollars every time we meet. God
5 this-- well, it makes me feel valuable, actually. But I was
6 thinking, Miguel, that maybe one thing that we can do, I think six
7 of our 11 SSC members are local. They are in Puerto Rico. So, maybe
8 those can get together in your office, in your conference room,
9 and then from there, we can contact the allochthonous individuals.
10 I don't know. That will save some money. I don't know whether it's
11 enough, but those that can't-- and actually I'm personally willing
12 to pay my own trip, I don't care about per diem or nothing, to be
13 there.

14 15 **Questions/Comments**

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, you live in San Juan, you can.

18
19 **VANCE VICENTE:** I know. Yeah, but you still pay me. You know?

20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Jesús. No. But ser--

22
23 **VANCE VICENTE:** Anyhow, that's something I wanted to put up and
24 see what's your opinion is.

25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. No. Vance, seriously, that's one of the
27 avenues that we are pursuing, because the budgetary constraint is
28 one thing, but our responsibility is another. And we have to meet
29 them as best we can. So, this is something that Graciela and I
30 were talking about, about those possibilities.

31
32 But I have to get my other part of the budget before we make any
33 decision. So, once we have that, then we can say, "okay," because
34 the importance of the SSC and the DAPs. That's why this Council
35 has the DAP's Chairs sitting in every Council meeting.

36
37 So, that's a good idea that we should pursue. I will let you know,
38 as Chair of the SSC, when we receive the money, we can do that and
39 we won't pay even for your ticket.

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

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy and then Julian.

44
45 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Vance, for the update on the
46 SSC. I agree with you. I think in-person interaction is of utmost
47 importance if we can afford to do so. I was also going suggest a
48 hybrid approach if that's something that's affordable to the

1 Council going forward.
2
3 A few things. Vance, you mentioned obviously the pelagic and spiny
4 lobster accountability measures. I agree. I think that's something
5 that's timely for the SSC discussion. We have the SEDARs that are
6 coming up. So, I was going to ask Graciela, I guess, from a timing
7 standpoint, it seems like the SSC maybe would meet sometime after
8 those SEDARs, just to kind of make it as efficient as possible. Is
9 that what you're thinking of in terms of timing?
10
11 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Well, the SEDAR '84 meets the week of
12 July 15th. And usually, the CIs and Vance who will Chair that, they
13 have to prepare the final review of the process. So, that would be
14 yellowtail snapper for Saint Thomas and Puerto Rico and parrotfish
15 for Saint Croix. That usually takes probably between a month and
16 three months.
17
18 I think Kevin is online, but that's the earliest that they would
19 have, you know, the report coming out. That's what the SSC reviews
20 in order to recommend to the Council if there needs to be a change
21 in the ABC for those species.
22
23 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Okay, thank you for that timing. So, maybe
24 what I was thinking won't work, I feel like it's going to be important
25 that we talk about the accountability measures, kind of bring back
26 a document to the Council first and then go to the SSC thereafter.
27 And then as María mentioned earlier this morning about the
28 sustainable yield levels for various species and possibly starting
29 to go down the road of kind of evaluating species in need of
30 conservation and management, that might be as well some information
31 we'd want to at least start preparing for the SSC to react to even
32 if it's early in the process and add that as well as an agenda
33 topic. But it would have to come after that August Council meeting.
34
35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you for that. The spiny lobster
36 SEDAR will take place August 24th. So, then that puts us into most
37 likely the October, November, December range. It's up to the
38 Council to provide us with the specific recommendations on what
39 topics you want because we can have separate meetings and that
40 could be done.
41
42 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** It sounded like we may need two separate SSC
43 meetings. One, to kind of handle some of the Council topics before
44 us after we meet in August, and another is a follow on for the
45 SEDAR assessments.
46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We budgeted for two meetings. Now that we're
2 talking about having the hybrid meeting, it's a doable thing that
3 we could do. We can put priority into it. And then Graciela and
4 Vance should meet and go over the agenda and the topics and the
5 schedule as you want to discuss it.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I have Julian and then Kevin.

8
9 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. I just was commenting on what Vance said.
10 That was a good idea. If we could, you know, meet at the Council
11 office. You know, we don't have to-- if you want to bring, like,
12 say, Gerson and myself as DAP people, we can stay at a very cheap
13 hotel. You don't have to stay at a fancy hotel. We don't have a
14 problem staying on a double tree or something or whatever is cheap,
15 whatever, a Hampton or whatever. But just, I agree with him. In
16 in-person meetings you accomplish a lot more because of when you
17 have a bathroom break, when you have a lunch break, you're able to
18 interact with the individuals and accomplish things that you don't
19 normally accomplish in the rooms. You know, you bring back a
20 different mindset sometimes. So, it's just something I'm saying.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

23
24 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yep. Thank you. So, couple of comments on Vance's
25 presentation. First of all, thanks for the update, Vance. And also,
26 thanks for the shout out to our seminar series. I really appreciate
27 it.

28
29 As far as SSC meetings go, I'll have more to say about this in my
30 presentation this afternoon. However, what I would remind the
31 Council, as well as the SSC Chair, that we're going to have six
32 stock assessments to review this year. I don't think that's doable
33 in a normal SSC meeting. That's a lot.

34
35 Also, as Graciela pointed out, I don't believe the CIE review
36 document will be completed before the August SSC meeting. So, we
37 could talk more about this later this afternoon when I present
38 some things, but I think it would be very difficult in a single,
39 say, November meeting to thoroughly review all of those
40 assessments. I could be wrong about that, but that's a big lift,
41 right? Because we're going to have three spiny lobster assessments,
42 two yellowtail snapper assessment, and one stoplight parrotfish
43 assessment. So, that's up heavy lift. So, something to think about
44 in planning SSC meetings.

45
46 We won't have all the information. We'll have completed our work
47 from the Science Center perspective, but the review body, the
48 Center for Independent Experts, the CIE review, will not be

1 completed, or at least the documentation won't be completed for
2 the SSC's benefit. They won't be able to see those. It's unlikely
3 they'll have time to review that before August if the
4 documentation's even available by then, as Graciela pointed out.

5
6 So, something to think about in terms of the fall SSC calendar. It
7 might be helpful to have another meeting in there, whether that's
8 virtual, in-person, obviously that's a Council budget decision.
9 But just a couple of things to think about in terms of the stock
10 assessments. Thanks very much.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Kevin. Vanessa.

13
14 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Thank you, Chair. Just a comment for the
15 record. I have seen all the situation that Vance is presenting
16 here, as Julian says, I think that we should put a special
17 attention on this, because our work in this table depends on the
18 best advice that we can have from the SSC and the DAPS. So, if
19 it's possible to have those meetings, as they suggest, in the
20 Council office, and we can work on that with the budget that is
21 assigned for the-- I know we are low on that, but if they are able,
22 and as Julian says, they have their best to put that budget low to
23 have that meeting, I think we should put a date or something for
24 that before our August meeting because if not, everything is going
25 to be just stopped because we don't have the best advice possible
26 to take decisions in this table. Thanks.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance, are you done? Okay.

29
30 **VANCE VICENTE:** For the record, I'm done.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So now we have Sennai with the Ecosystem-Based
33 Fishery Management Technical Advisory Report.

34
35 **ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL**
36 **REPORT - SENNAI HABTES, CHAIR**

37
38 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sennai Habtes, Bureau
39 Fisheries Chief, V.I. DPNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife.
40 Apologies everyone for my tardiness this morning. My flight got
41 bumped back a little late. But I'm here now, and I will try and,
42 move this along as best I can.

43
44 EBFM TAP has been dutifully working towards developing an FEP. I
45 have some updates to provide you based on the individual working
46 groups and where they've been going. A lot, however, from the work
47 that we'll be doing, we'll be presented to you in other
48 presentations today or tomorrow. So, I will just provide you with

1 an indication of the things that are being done, and I will leave
2 those details to the other presenters that will be coming up later.

3
4 If you have questions on the things that I briefly go over, I will
5 ask that you hold those until they come from the individual
6 presenters. However, that should not disparage you from asking me
7 things that would lead into a longer conversation, on things that
8 we need to make decisions on. Next slide.

9
10 As always, I'm giving you a brief background on the history of the
11 EBFM TAP. The purpose is to assist the Council in the development,
12 collection, evaluation, and peer review of the statistical,
13 biological, economic, social, and other scientific information
14 relevant to the Council's development of the FEP, which is the
15 Fisheries Ecosystem Plan and its amendments. This is made up
16 fishers, scientists, outreach and education persons engaged in
17 ecosystems research, or those that are knowledgeable or interested
18 in the conservation and management of ecosystems and manage
19 fisheries under the Council's purview.

20
21 We provide expert scientific and technical advice to the Council
22 through the SSC and aid the Council in identifying resources
23 available for the development of plans, primarily the FEP. And the
24 objectives are to provide ongoing scientific advice on ecosystems-
25 based fishery management for fishery management decisions,
26 including recommendations for habitat, status, social and economic
27 impacts, management measures in ecosystem-based impact stressors
28 and sustainability of fishing practices. I know you guys get tired
29 of hearing this every time I present, but I think it is important
30 to remind you of what we are doing in the EBFM TAP so you understand
31 why we're doing it and the things that we are trying to do.

32
33 So, I'm going to continue with a couple of the things that we've
34 already decided on. We have the mission, which you guys should
35 know. The main purpose at present is developing the FEP to promote
36 ecosystem-based approaches to ensure healthy, resilient, and
37 productive marine ecosystems and the resources dependent upon
38 those ecosystems within the context of the unique biological,
39 ecological, economic, social, and cultural characteristics of
40 those fishery resources and the communities dependent upon them.
41 It took a lot of time coming up with this comprehensive mission
42 that should incorporate all of the aspects that came to us from
43 the Council.

44
45 This framework promotes the following goals. I will not go through
46 those again, they're there listed. You can look at them. If you
47 have questions on them or you have recommendations on them, feel
48 free to email me either during the meeting or come talk to me at

1 the meeting. This should be on ISSUU eventually. You can-- it's
2 there now. Thank you, Cristina. So, if you have questions on those
3 recommendations for us to review the next time, we have a meeting,
4 please come talk to me. Next slide.

5
6 In our last EBFM TAP meeting, we updated the strategic and
7 operational objectives, adding the ones in blue, which are ensuring
8 ecosystem essential species are considered in management. This is
9 considered an operational objective. Reduce and monitor marine
10 diseases, which is another operational, which should be part of
11 the reduction of degradation aspects. Support tourism
12 opportunities to promote healthy fisheries and habitat. Develop
13 education and outreach opportunities to support sustainable
14 fisheries and habitat. And then, the last operational objective
15 that we added was ensuring data collection incorporates sources
16 from all sectors, commercial, recreational, for-hire to inform
17 management decisions in the U.S. Caribbean for operational
18 objectives.

19
20 This is the framework that we're working on for developing the
21 FEP. All right? We're doing that through a set of five different
22 working groups. What I will do now is provide you updates on what
23 those working groups are working on. Next slide.

24
25 The first working group was the conceptual models melding working
26 group. You guys should be aware that this is work that was done by
27 J.J. Cruz-Motta, Tarsila Seara, and Stacey Williams under a grant
28 provided to them by Lenfest. This was to develop stakeholder driven
29 conceptual models to support the EBFM in the U.S. Caribbean. That
30 grant has completed, as well as the work from that working group,
31 which resulted in a report that summarizes the major threats, the
32 important aspects for indicators from stakeholders, as well as how
33 those can work in the framework of an ecosystems-based fisheries
34 management approach through the FEP.

35
36 That information is now being digested through that working group
37 and added into sections of the FEP for development. So, the current
38 work for that working group is focused on reviewing the draft FEP
39 that we have and including this information. I've posted some of
40 the main discussion posts that were found in that report, which
41 are the analysis emphasize the importance of participating methods
42 and co-production of knowledge to better understand factors
43 affecting the region's fisheries. The identification of similar
44 elements and relationships among different conceptual models
45 provides a compelling method for prioritization to guide fisheries
46 policy and management actions. We currently see its uses in the
47 FEP process to include: providing conceptualization of the
48 fisheries ecosystem from the perspective of key stakeholders;

1 using ecosystem elements with high agreement to guide strategic
2 objectives; and then using those elements and threats to the
3 ecosystem in the development of a risk assessment framework, which
4 I will get to later.

5
6 Identify data gaps and guide the development of future research
7 priority documents and allocation of funds; and create a baseline
8 for future iterations and monitoring efforts while ensuring
9 continuous engagement and representation, right? This is finding
10 a process that works to meet all of these. It has to be iterative,
11 and it has to be developed and agreed upon by the Council. That is
12 what is taking a while to develop this. The FEP is the plan by
13 which we do this. So, finding a way that incorporates all of these
14 things that I'm talking about in a single document and a framework
15 that can be used for us to do so, is highly important.

16
17 Alright. Next slide. The next working group is the ecosystem
18 indicators working group. This is taking a lot of work that's been
19 done by Mandy Karnauskas and Carissa Gervasi that were developing
20 the ecosystem status report for the U.S. Caribbean through the
21 integrated eco-assessment team. They presented at our last
22 meeting. That ecosystem status report is in a draft phase that's
23 almost finalized.

24
25 We're taking indicators from that as well as the indicators
26 presented from the conceptual models working group and the
27 indicators identified as necessary for the risk assessment
28 framework. This current working group is identifying and looking
29 at all of those and putting them into the draft FEP plan as we
30 speak. We coordinate on that and their work developed to identify
31 the suite of ESR indicators, conceptual [inaudible] quantitative
32 indicators, and a process by which we can prioritize the
33 indicators. So, they're in the process of drafting that and working
34 to develop that. Next slide.

35
36 A lot of that is informed by the Risk Assessment Working Group. We
37 had a contractor, Leigh Fletcher, who will be presenting her work
38 on the Risk Assessment Framework that she developed. That was in
39 coordination with the Risk Assessment Working Group that was led
40 by Tauna Rankin. Tauna had found funding through her division
41 within NOAA and provided funding for the contractor to develop
42 what I think is very comprehensive and really feasible risk
43 assessment framework that is highly useful for ecosystems-based
44 fisheries management, but a lot of other management decisions that
45 we need to make here in the U.S. Caribbean. And we hope to, you
46 know, develop that into something that can be used for the FEP for
47 us going forward. Next slide.

48

1 The next working group is the Multi-Species Modeling Roadmap. You
2 may remember this as the data. I've already forgotten what it was
3 because we're only calling it the Multi-species Modeling Roadmap
4 now, but it used to be the data hub one. That the purpose for that
5 one was developing data management and coordination policies and
6 infrastructure necessary to create operational ecosystems-based
7 fisheries management in the U.S. Caribbean. What we've realized is
8 part of that data management is really identifying the right types
9 of modeling approaches that can be used, and developing the right
10 type of structure by which we can do that.

11
12 To fund that, we've been working with Martha Prada, and the Council
13 to get possible funding, which would help us develop a community
14 of practice working group hub that will provide a lasting way that
15 we can all interact and continue working on these things and
16 develop ecosystems based modeling and multispecies modeling
17 approaches from all the disparate groups that are working on this.
18 You know, there are a lot of different working groups right now
19 that are focused on it, and there are a couple of us like myself
20 or María or Kevin or Tauna that sit on all of them, and it's
21 getting a little difficult to move everything across a lot of
22 different platforms so that we can all continue to keep pushing
23 this process forward.

24
25 So, this working group right now is the one that is still meeting.
26 We've had two, meetings, one in December 12th and one in January.
27 We're likely to have another later in the spring or early summer.
28 The purpose is to develop a first draft of a multispecies framework
29 table which would identify the most appropriate, or the possible
30 multispecies modeling approaches that can be used given our species
31 and given our data. Use the updated ESR indicator list based on
32 the FEP list from both the ESR and the multispecies modeling work
33 to use that to develop a model that has the right data approaches
34 and find the best types of multispecies modeling that can be used
35 here. A corollary aspect of this is the Southeast Fisheries
36 Sciences Caribbean Branch Strategic Planning Toolbox Working
37 Group, which I sit on, as does Kevin, and Kevin will talk about
38 this later, I won't steal his thunder, but we're recommending that
39 there be a procedural workshop, to provide U.S. Caribbean
40 alternative management approaches.

41
42 My hope is that if the proposal that I put in is funded, it is to
43 develop a data management hub as well as set up three in-person
44 meetings that would fund people to come and develop the roadmap,
45 start working on the multispecies modeling, and develop the data
46 infrastructure system that we need to actually do this. Alright.
47 Almost there, guys. We're coming down the hill now. Next slide.

48

1 Alright. So, the last working group was the drafting FEP. All
2 members are constantly working on this through the online version
3 of the draft. We had a technical writer that was funded by Pew
4 Charitable Trust. She completed a draft with the first four
5 chapters, July of 2023. We've since revised that structure to
6 include a couple of other chapters and more information. The format
7 of it, I believe, that we've ended up with, are the ones that are
8 sitting on the screen right now. And we still have two more
9 chapters that we need to add in, including a revision of the
10 information from the indicators and the conceptual model because
11 both of those reports are finished. Next slide.

12
13 So, the red is stuff that we've done. We've finished the revised
14 draft to goals and objectives. We've done the conceptual models.
15 We've melded them. We've created the risk assessment framework,
16 thanks to Leigh's very diligent and hard work. And we've finished
17 the report from the conceptual models, thanks to J.J. and Tarsila's
18 hard work. Next slide.

19
20 We have the strategic objectives that we completed in our last
21 EBFM TAP meeting last year, and we've also added the operational
22 objectives that we then will present to the SSC once we've
23 completed a draft of the FEP. What we have left to do is the draft
24 management strategy and a development of performance measures and
25 create an iterative feedback mechanism that allows adaptive
26 management of the EBFM. Those are the things that we're trying to
27 draft right now in developing the FEP.

28
29 Our hope is to have a draft completed by November if we get funding
30 for another technical writer to help us do this, because all of us
31 have day jobs and drafting a document like this is likely
32 impossible for any one of us to do. And then finally, hopefully,
33 it to the SSC and then finally the FEP later this year. Right now,
34 it says December of 2025. My guess is we'll likely have to push
35 that into the spring of 2026.

36
37 But that's what I've got. Happy to answer any questions if you
38 guys have any.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Questions for Sennai? Andy?

41
42 **Questions/Comments**

43
44 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Maybe not a question. First thank you, Sennai.
45 This is a great reminder, as well as a monumental effort right now
46 that you're going through. So, I think, to me, as you're kind of
47 sitting through the presentation, the key is section four, which
48 is the tools for the Council, and how that ultimately is going to

1 get integrated into management decision making around this table
2 or that informs management decision making before it even makes it
3 to this table. So, you said, I think, August is kind of the timing
4 for when you think that will be available and a presentation or
5 something like that, following that, would be really beneficial,
6 I think, to really understand for these Council members, myself,
7 what we could ultimately use as tools for management. Just curious
8 your thoughts on that.

9
10 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah, thanks, Andy. I think that's a great
11 question. I think the risk assessment framework that Leigh has
12 developed, I think, has a lot of those tools that we were planning.
13 She, thankfully, went and, I think, outside of just the normal
14 single issue risk assessment framework, developed a larger
15 framework that would be really useful for us to use in the EBFM
16 context. And I think she'll present a little bit about that
17 tomorrow, and I think that'll give you an idea of the direction
18 we're heading with it.

19
20 For us, taking that information and providing it in the context of
21 FEP is what I think we're going to do in the working groups based on
22 the specific indicators that are going to be available to us from
23 ESR conceptual model. So, it's both using that framework from the
24 risk assessment to identify a structure for the Council through
25 the SSC to make these decisions, but then also understanding that
26 there is more information that is going to be needed, right? So,
27 there are going to be some of these indicators that we don't have
28 but we desperately need, and how do we get there?

29
30 And so that is what we're trying to develop now through the
31 multispecies modeling roadmap. So, I think we have half of the
32 work done through the risk assessment framework. The other half is
33 saying, here's the data available now. Here's the data we're going
34 to need, and here's the pathway that we get there. And trying to
35 do that within a realistic context given, you know, the situation,
36 I think, we find ourselves in with U.S. Caribbean fisheries
37 management right now. I think is really important. So, that's the
38 hard part, and that's what we're trying to develop.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more comments or questions for Sennai?
41 Alright. Hearing none, I think we'll break for lunch.

42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You want to start at 01:30?

44
45 So, yeah, we're go ahead and break for lunch, and the people online
46 will be back at 01:30. Okay.

47
48 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on April 22, 2025.)

1
2 - - -
3
4 APRIL 22, 2025
5

6 TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION
7 - - -
8
9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to get started again. You can all
11 grab your seats. Next on the agenda, have Daniel Matos Caraballo
12 with the progress of eReporting Applications After Four Years in
13 Puerto Rico Fishery Research Lab.

14
15 **PROGRESS OF THE EREPORTING APPLICATION AFTER 4 YEARS IMPLEMENTED**
16 **IN PUERTO RICO - DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO, FISHERIES RESEARCH**
17 **LABORATORY, PUERTO RICO DNER**
18

19 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Good afternoon, everyone. Let's do a
20 little review of how the electronic application is working to
21 report the trip tickets for the commercial landings in Puerto Rico.
22 Let's see this progress report of the reporting application for
23 years after the implementation. Next slide, please. Okay.

24
25 So, we started in the year 2017 to establish this program. We
26 received the help of the Nature Conservancy and NOAA Fisheries.
27 They worked in collaboration with the DNER Commercial Fisheries
28 Statistics Program. And then, we started to work on this electronic
29 trip ticket. We would like to have a smartphone application to
30 help the commercial fishers report the landings data. Next slide.

31
32 Finally, the first process was slow in part because of Hurricane
33 María, but finally, in the year 2020, the application was ready.
34 If you remember, in March 15th of the year 2020, Puerto Rico started
35 a lockdown because of the pandemic of COVID-19, so the Commercial
36 Fisheries Statistics Program personnel continued to work from
37 home, online. We received the data by mail. We distributed it very
38 carefully and we continued to do the data entry, but then Ricardo
39 López talked with the secretary of DNER at that time, Rafael
40 Machargo Maldonado. Mr. Machargo loved the application, so he wrote
41 Administrative Order 2020-3 establishing the use of eReporting.
42 So, on this day we started, officially, to receive some data via
43 eReporting. Next slide, please.

44
45 So, on the left, you see a picture of the paper trip ticket. So,
46 everything's there. It has 42 species and we ask information about
47 depth, fishing places, where they are landing, also, the fishing

1 side of where they catch. All this information was moved to
2 eReporting. On the right you'll see some pictures of how the
3 application looks. There are many, many screens but the fishers
4 love that. Next slide, please.

5
6 So, at the end of the year 2020, what do we have? The CCL is the
7 paper ticket. The eReporting is the electronic trip ticket, the
8 application. So, we received 800,000 pounds of landings in the
9 paper trip ticket, and we received 271,000 pounds in the
10 application. We received a report of 15,430 fishing trips in the
11 paper trip and 5,159 trips in the application.

12
13 How many fishers reported in both tickets? Well, in the paper trip
14 ticket, we had 755 commercial fishers and, for the first year, 406
15 commercial fishers used the application. What happened after that?
16 Next slide.

17
18 Well, during the year 2021, after the lockdown and all the danger
19 that came with the pandemic of COVID-19, what did we do? Well,
20 personnel from eReporting or ShellCatch Company came to Puerto
21 Rico. Also, personnel from the Nature Conservancy, personnel from
22 DNER Commercial Fisheries Statistics Program, all came to develop
23 and coordinate many, many meetings around Puerto Rico.

24
25 In the next slide, we see a picture of one of those meetings. So,
26 we received 20, 25 fishers. Some places received 30 fishers. They
27 all got information about the application. The personnel from TNC,
28 personnel from eReporting and personnel for the Commercial
29 Fisheries Statistics Program, they talked, one by one, with every
30 fisher that was in the meeting and they helped install the
31 application in their phones. They also explained how it works.
32 These meetings were very good, and the use of the application
33 increased. Next slide, please.

34
35 In this slide, you will see the commercial landings reported in
36 pounds via CCL, this is the blue columns. The eReporting is in the
37 pale orange color. You can see the year 2020 and then you see how
38 for the year 2021 people who use the application duplicated. And
39 in the year 2023, they were close to 600,000 pounds reported. And
40 in the year 2024, you see also popular it was. Probably 35 or 40%
41 of the commercial landings have been reported via the electronic
42 trip ticket.

43
44 Next slide, please. For the same period, from 2020 to 2023, you
45 see the number of trips reported. Again, the blue line is the paper
46 trip tickets, and the pale orange line is the electronic trip
47 tickets. You can see the same increase. So, right now, over 9,000
48 or 10,000 trips came from the eReporting trip ticket. Next slide,

1 please.

2
3 This is the most interesting because for the same period from 2020
4 to 2023, you can see the number of fishers that are using the paper
5 ticket or the electronic trip ticket. It's very interesting how
6 the number of users of the paper trip ticket decreased and the
7 number of the people reporting in the application increased.

8
9 I would like to share some information. María Del Mar helped me
10 with some very good questions. I would like to share the questions
11 she asked me and the answers I gave. María Del Mar asked me, "Why
12 are there so many fishers that do not use eReporting?" There are
13 many answers for that. Most of them do not know how to use a
14 smartphone. Others don't feel comfortable using it. A few numbers
15 of fishers continue to use trip tickets, the paper trip tickets,
16 although they are able to use the application because they have
17 some resistance to change.

18
19 Another good question, María Del Mar, asked me was "How many
20 deficiencies or issues have the commercial fishers with the
21 eReporting data entry?" The answer for that is many fish trappers
22 they have this complaint about the program and, because they catch
23 six, eight or 10 species per trip, they have, for every single
24 species, they have to write depth of the catch, the fishing area,
25 the fishing gear, the fishing location. They understand that they
26 have to repeat the same information many times. So, this is the
27 biggest complaint we have. Because of that, some of the fish
28 trappers, move from the electronic ticket to the paper ticket, so
29 we are working with the eReporting personnel to make some changes
30 in that.

31
32 Another very good question by María Del Mar was, "Which group of
33 commercial fishers use more eReporting?" We checked the data and
34 25% of the landings in the application from the scuba divers. They
35 fish mostly conch and lobster. 19% of the landings reported via
36 eReporting were the bottom-line fishers, the deepwater snapper
37 fishers. It's not a surprise to see that only 8% of the trap
38 fishers are using. So, we need to improve that. Next slide, please.

39
40 So, at this point, what are the challenges and the needs we have?
41 Well, I think everyone in this meeting has the same problem. We
42 need recurring funds to continue. The money-- we need more money,
43 but everyone here has the same problem. So, DNER and NOAA Fisheries
44 must work together to keep eReporting running.

45
46 Let me tell you something. ShellCatch, the company that worked
47 with eReporting, did not receive a cent for two years. So, we need
48 to improve that. They are working for free. Hopefully that will

1 change soon. Also, NOAA Fisheries is working to merge the
2 eReporting database to the CCL or paper trip ticket database. These
3 tasks have been worked for the last two years. I have to be honest
4 with you; I thought that was an easy task. I can't understand why
5 it takes so long. But then I started to have some meetings with
6 the people who are doing the merge, and I discover it's very, very
7 complicated. So, it's not easy. The people working with that, from
8 NOAA, they are very close, very close to finishing this merge, but
9 we need to complete that.

10
11 Three, eReporting must continue to improve yearly as new fishery
12 needs arise, new pieces of information arise. We have to continue
13 to work with that. Number four, DNER must continue to promote and
14 educate more commercial fishers in using eRporting. Of course, we
15 would love to stop the use of paper trip tickets and keep that
16 one, but first, we need to have the assurance that we have the
17 money to continue with this very important tool. One more slide.

18
19 Okay, we hope to continue improving the eReporting tool and hope
20 to continue to improve the data collection. If any of you have any
21 questions, I will be glad to hear, if I know the answer, I will
22 do.

23 24 **Questions/Comments**

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Daniel, for the presentation. What is
29 the status of the port samplers that you used to have around the
30 island? Is that still working? Do you plan to improve it?

31
32 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And then, the second one. What is the difference
35 in cost? I mean, with the eReporting versus the data collection
36 using paper tickets.

37
38 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Well, first question. The port samplers
39 continue to collect biostatistical data. Also, every single report
40 we receive, the port samplers have to edit, check, and confirm.
41 So, we avoid errors, and we avoid any false data coming to us. So,
42 they continue to work in that way with the landings. They continue
43 to work until now. We have Luis Anibal Rivera and Jesús León. They
44 are the full time or the regular person for DNER. They both have
45 been working for forty years. We are glad to have them with us.

46
47 Also, we have three additional port samplers. They are contractors.
48 We receive some money from NOAA Fisheries. We are very grateful

1 for that. And we have Wilson, who is here, working with us and
2 also working with the Council. And we have Marie Angeline León.
3 And we have Juan Lugo. They collect data and also help with the
4 data entry of paper trip tickets. They help us with that.

5
6 And the last question you made was "what's the different in cost?
7 I don't know, Miguel. I have to-- I'll take that as a homework. I
8 have to see the difference. But we will have more time to collect
9 data. That's for sure. And also, they collect data for the
10 correction factor. But I have to do this homework.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** If may, Mr. Chairman. The correction factor, do
13 you still use that?

14
15 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** We continue to collect the data. We
16 stopped the final analysis because we are working on merging the
17 trip ticket data and the electronic trip ticket data. We are
18 working on that to continue using the correction factor.

19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Daniel.

21
22 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Oh, you're very welcome.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

25
26 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, I like
27 the idea of the e-ticket system. I know it's a preliminary process
28 that you're doing right now. But my question or my concern is, has
29 any validation been completed on the e-tickets that you have
30 received? In other words, so I turn in my report today. Has anyone
31 now gone and actually do a, let's say, a port sample off of that
32 same catch to see if the two of them are validated it, if they are
33 matching somewhat close or not.

34
35 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Yeah.

36
37 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Because I think that would be the key to it being
38 accepted as a database that can be used in management, the
39 validation process.

40
41 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Yeah. Thank you very much, Julian, for
42 your question. And yes, we do the validation. I don't use the word
43 validation when I answer the question to Miguel, but yes. The
44 samplers, they edit every single piece of information that we
45 receive and it is validated. Nothing comes to the database before
46 the process of the validation. The port samplers try to know the
47 fishers and see if everything is fine. If we don't know the
48 fishers, we call them and then we try to see them during-- well,

1 we say to the person, "well, if you're going to fish, call us. We
2 want to be there when you come to shore and landing to see that."
3 So, we try to do that. We try to validate every single piece of
4 information.

5
6 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yes. So, so just a follow-up. So, what I'm saying
7 is I went out and got a hundred pounds of blue fish today. I
8 reported out in my e-ticket that I got a hundred pounds of blue
9 fish. What I'm saying is when I land that hundred pounds of blue
10 fish, has there been any port samples there to validate that what
11 I'm reporting, that hundred pounds, is actually correct for that
12 trip?

13
14 I understand the part where they go in and make sure that the
15 tickets are filled out properly. But my thing is, I'm reporting
16 what I say I caught, but has there been like a pop up where they
17 actually check to see if that's what was caught? So, it's like a
18 check and balance. I hope I'm not making this confusing, but--

19
20 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** No. We're not able to do that for every
21 single landing because-- but we, at least, we try to know who is
22 the fisherman and what is their catch and the port sampler with
23 their experience know. Sometimes they see, "oh, Mr. Juan del
24 Pueblo, he reported 2,000 pounds of lobster." We call him, "sir,
25 you caught 2,000 pounds, is that correct?" He says, "No, no. It's
26 200 pounds." Something like that we try to catch it in the process,
27 and we try to meet everyone to reduce bad data in the process.

28
29 Wilson would also like to say something. Come, come. Come here.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. Espérate antes de que él hable.

32
33 There are two things that we're talking about here, and we should
34 not mix them. One is a validation by the port sampler and the other
35 is the validation by the program. When we started the program,
36 actually, we did it with the University of Miami, that's where the
37 correction factor came to be. The correction factor was only used
38 for Puerto Rico, not for the information that we sent to the Miami
39 lab because it was too subjective.

40
41 The way they did it was, during the same period that the poor AMs
42 were reporting, we hired a guy that nobody knew who he was or who
43 she was. That person would sit at the same port for fifteen days,
44 collecting every information, "Hey, how much you got there," and
45 everything. Then we compare that with the report by the port
46 sampler. That's how we found the escapement. That's why we covered
47 the correction factor.

48

1 The problem with the correction factor is when we lost that ability
2 because of the money, it became almost political and in a bad way.
3
4 For example, when I was there, the Secretary of Agriculture said,
5 "Well, the fishery increased by 3%." And they called me, "You have
6 to show that 3% of the fishery increased because the secretary
7 said that." They did it twice. So, I went to someone. They told me
8 that they were going to be fired. But anyway, I said it and then
9 they finally understood that without the system of validation that
10 we implemented, it was very difficult to implement.

11
12 The other thing is that, for some time, we lost the port samplers.
13 It was very difficult for the fisherman to come back. The other
14 thing is every time we have a problem the fishermen stop sending
15 us information and that was an issue.

16
17 So, the question actually is for Wilson and for Daniel, do we still
18 have those challenges? And then, are there some plans in the future
19 or near future to correct those issues?

20
21 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Well, we continue to collect the
22 correction factor with the port samplers. So, they know they are
23 working for us, but the port samplers visit the landing area and
24 collect the data and we compare that.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?

27
28 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, thank you. Wilson
29 Santiago, for the record. Puerto Rico Fisheries Liaison for the
30 Council and DNER but also a contractor for the Statistical
31 Commercial Program for DNER.

32
33 So, I'm the person that worked directly with the eReporting app,
34 the trip ticket. So, for Julian question, yes. All the data is
35 validated. First of all, the data in the eReporting app that the
36 fishers report we sit down, each day, to check one by one. To add
37 to the other question and to add to what Daniel was saying, we
38 port samples recover the effort data and the trip interview
39 program. So, all this data goes directly to the Science Center.

40
41 Another thing. The correction factor, too, right now, is directly
42 in the CCL, Caribbean Commercial Landings Program. So, we, port
43 samplers, when we do correction factor, when we do trip interviews,
44 it goes directly to the Science Center already. So, all those data
45 are validated with the data that the fishers report in paper and
46 in the app.

47
48 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Thank you, Wilson.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Daniel. Is this in season
3 reporting? Are they reporting at sea, or when they come home, they
4 logon and report?
5
6 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Excuse me? What was question?
7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** When they report, do they report at sea when
9 they're out there or they come home and then they report?
10
11 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** If they have internet signal they can do
12 on the boat, but maybe or probably they do it when they land
13 because then they weight the fish and they know what they caught.
14 But they're able to do that. But mostly they do it when they are
15 on the fishing landing center, the fishing village, where they
16 have the balance to weight and everything like that.
17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?
19
20 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Daniel, and thank you for answering
21 my questions. It's María--
22
23 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a question.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're coming to you, Sabater.
26
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Do you want Roberto to go ahead.
28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Go ahead. Go ahead, Sabater.
30
31 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Okay. Sorry for the interruption. Is there any
32 possibility, probability, or whatever that this will be applied to
33 the recreational area of fishing?
34
35 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Ricardo, would you like to answer that?
36
37 We are working on that. We would love to do that. We tried to find
38 the money. We propose that to the secretary. We talked with other
39 people and, yes, we would love to do that, but again, we need
40 funds.
41
42 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have a group of people, fishermen around 20 to
43 25 that are willing to be the guinea pigs or something like that
44 to get the application started.
45
46 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Yeah. Even if we try to start pilot
47 project-- but we can't.
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?
2
3 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Yes. Thank you, Sabater, for that.
4 Yes.
5
6 And, yes, we have been working on that. But I can tell you that
7 for the recreational sector, it's going to be very difficult for
8 us as a government agency to get the data from the fishers to make
9 them report it in an app. Why? Commercial fishers have to report
10 by law. By law, if not, when they renew their license, they get a
11 fine. But we don't have a recreational license. We have never had
12 that. So, in my experience, yes, the commercial fishers report in
13 the app or in the paper, but they have to do it.
14
15 And I know some recreational fishers that are that are willing to
16 do it, you know, very responsible guys. All of them are
17 responsible, but because it's not by law for them to report it,
18 it's going to be very difficult, but we are working in depth.
19
20 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos? We've been discussing this in Puerto
21 Rico for twenty years. I was part of the group. We spent \$3,000,000
22 one-time, 3,000,000 another, and we're still in the same position.
23 The legislator--
24
25 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I couldn't hear what the person was saying.
26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Sorry. Thing is that this is a key problem now
28 because as know there's a push to get that information. I told you
29 that Graciela and I discussed that many times. The one solution or
30 not one solution, but one possibility was to establish a project
31 for a sampling of the data that is collected by the recreational
32 fishers. At the time, the cost of that was about half a million
33 dollar. If I ask Daniel for half a million dollar now, he would
34 kill me.
35
36 But that's really what happened at that time. We also have some
37 experts, some people that work, like Todd Gedamke, who developed
38 a sampling program that can be applied to recreational and
39 commercial. Is that something that you still have in the books
40 that you can use if the monies are available?
41
42 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Sure, sure. And it was very interesting
43 that Todd Gedamke did a very good job and was very similar to our
44 results. So, we are very glad for that. But yeah, what Todd did
45 was great.
46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?
48

1 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** María?
2
3 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Andy, had a comment as a Council member.
4 Honestly, I forgot.
5
6 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Sennai, you want to go and then I'll go after
7 you?
8
9 **SENNAI HABTES:** Okay. Sure. So, it's more of a comment than a
10 question. We've gone through this process in the U.S.V.I., but it
11 started with rules and regulations, right? So, we had to institute
12 a recreational fishing license through new updates to our Virgin
13 Islands rules and regs. That included costs for the recreational
14 licenses and a mandate for reporting for the for-hire sectors.
15
16 We then had to find funding to initially get a contractor to
17 develop the site, but there are enterprise existing companies that
18 do this for other states. Right? And going with one of them tends
19 to be a good option because you're linked into all of the other
20 data reporting in existing systems that is required to work with
21 like NOAA or the NSAR exemption. So, if you are going down the
22 roads for trying to get recreational licenses, you really do want
23 to have a planned-out process. You know, we're happy to help
24 anytime you guys have any questions.
25
26 The second comment is the recreational port sampling program is
27 ongoing both in Puerto Rico and in the U.S.V.I. But like that
28 funding is very dedicated collecting data from Creole samples or
29 socioeconomic surveys. We're limited in the amount of money because
30 the amount of money we get for those programs are never enough to
31 do the actual sampling. So, trying to identify other ways of using
32 that is just impossible. So, we have to be realistic, and we also
33 have to be very clear about what can be collected, and prioritize
34 the data sets that we think are the most important and put the
35 funding towards that, because we're not doing that currently.
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?
38
39 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Question and then maybe a suggestion.
40 With regard to the correction factors, so you said several times
41 you're collecting that data and I assume you're collecting
42 correction factors for both papers based reporting and electronic
43 reporting kind of separately. But because of the database is
44 merging and issues there, we haven't been able to apply those
45 correction factors at this point. Is that correct?
46
47 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** We collect the correction factor no matter
48 if they report via paper or via electronic. We stopped to do the

1 analysis because we have to separate databases, and we are trying
2 to put everything together and then compare what we observe with
3 what we have. That's why it has been stopped for now. It's just a
4 pause.

5
6 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Okay. And my understanding is now we're using
7 kind of an average correcting factor from historical data as a
8 stop gap until we can actually use those more detailed correction
9 factors.

10
11 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** That's right.

12
13 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** I guess my suggestion, I appreciate Sennai's
14 comments, I've dealt with electronic reporting throughout a lot of
15 my career. I've seen several different approaches, one of which is
16 just we're changing from paper to electronic reporting, and you
17 need to get on board, right? And I'm not suggesting that that's
18 the approach you take, but have you considered maybe phasing out
19 paper-based reporting over time? Or if not, maybe looking at the
20 data. Obviously not all fishers are created equal, looking at the
21 ones that are landing the most fish and seeing if you can't get
22 more of those fishers on board to electronically report because
23 what we often find is obviously, like what Miguel was getting at,
24 it is a cost savings to not only the fisher for reporting faster,
25 less of a burden, but also the government because you have less
26 errors, less issues with the data, and it comes into your database
27 more seamlessly. Just a suggestion in terms of improving the
28 eReporting.

29
30 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Thank you so much. Very good suggestion.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

33
34 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. I remember now. And it's related
35 to what Andy was mentioning. First, thank you taking the time to
36 do that and answer my questions.

37
38 My question to you was, you mentioned that the hesitation for the
39 trap fishermen to provide data to the eReporting is because of the
40 complications of actually entering the data, especially when you
41 are fishing for multiple species. Is it possible for that to be
42 fixed? Because I know that you said that you added the rainbow
43 runner, for example, that staff and the Council suggested to be
44 added, and I was wondering if that could be something that could
45 be fixed in the short term, understanding that there are
46 limitations in funding, etcetera.

47
48 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Yeah. Thank you, María. And yes, it's

1 possible to fix, and we are working on that. Hopefully, soon we'll
2 fix that and the trappers will go back to the electronic trip
3 ticket system.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?

6

7 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. I just wanted to add to what Daniel
8 said. Yes. Continuously, since 2020, the app has been updated,
9 maybe once a month. ShellCatch personnel is very responsive.

10

11 Whatever issue in the app or whatever we need to change,
12 recommendation from the fishers, recommendation from ourselves,
13 ShellCatch personnel responds within, like, ten minutes. They fix
14 the problem. So, if it's something that they have to do an update
15 on, you know, in the app where they have to send it to the Play
16 Store or the iStore, if it's something like that, it's a little
17 more complicated, but it can be done.

18

19 So, for fixing this problem with the trap fishers and the net
20 fishers, specifically, they will need a new version. Right now,
21 this morning, I was writing with Daniel and Ricardo and we were
22 making the recommendation to the ShellCatch personnel. So, it has
23 to be, I don't know, I'm not a programmer, you know, but it has to
24 be very simple just to merge the information that you put in one
25 species just merged to the other one. So, hopefully, that is going
26 to be soon.

27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ricardo?

29

30 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Hello. Ricardo López, for the record. At the
31 end of the last year, we were talking with Kevin McCarthy about
32 this problem of having recreational fishers and commercial fishers
33 in the same application if possible. We were talking about money,
34 we were talking about different strategies, but then things went
35 hold. Hopefully, we can start that conversation again.

36

37 Kevin, I think he's here listening to us. So, we have been working
38 on that. Especially, in the part of the strategy to build this, to
39 arrange this application in order to get the recreational fishers
40 at least into a pilot project. Maybe starting with the charters,
41 and that's why Roberto Sabater was talking about that. So, he was
42 included in that conversation. Also, Helena and Wilson will be,
43 soon, working again in picking up the thing about recreational
44 fishers. And we have a new director of recreational fishers in
45 DNR. Her name is María De Lourdes Olmeda.

46

47 One thing that I would like to do with her is to invite her to
48 these meetings, so she can provide us more information about what

1 they are doing with the recreational fishers and what they need in
2 order move on the application. Those are my words.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more comments or suggestions for
5 Daniel? Anyone? Thank you, Daniel.

6
7 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Thank you, everyone.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, moving on, there's Kevin McCarthy, Southeast
10 Fisheries Science Center.

11
12 **SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES - KEVIN MCCARTHY,**
13 **CARIBBEAN FISHERIES BRANCH, NOAA FISHERIES/SEFSC**

14
15 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Hi, everybody. Can I share my screen? I'll just
16 run the presentation from here.

17
18 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. You can share your screen. I made
19 you a co-host.

20
21 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Great. Thank you. I'm going to put this in
22 presentation mode. How's that? Can you see the presentation, or do
23 you see the other--

24
25 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We're seeing it.

26
27 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Terrific. Well, good afternoon, everyone.
28 I wish I could be there with you, but we'll see how it goes from
29 Miami. I've got a lot of stuff to cover. Hopefully, you won't
30 regret giving me a whole hour to present. So, I'll try and keep it
31 moving along.

32
33 A lot of the conversation that we've been having so far today, I'm
34 going to touch on some of those issues in this presentation. I
35 have a few things that I'd like the Council to make some decisions
36 on. But I think the way to maybe handle that is I'll get through
37 the presentation, and then we'll go back to those items. There's
38 a few of them, and I'll let you know as it goes. A lot of this is
39 update, but some of it does require some input from the Council if
40 you would be so kind.

41
42 So, to start, these folks that you see listed here, this is the
43 team at the Caribbean Fisheries Branch of the Southeast Fisheries
44 Science Center. I happen to be in Miami, but not all of these folks
45 are. We've got people spread out quite literally across the
46 country. What you'll see here is sort of an equal spread between
47 people who are at CIMAS. That is the Cooperative Institute for
48 Marine and Atmospheric Studies at the University of Miami. And

1 then the other half of the of the team are federal employees. So,
2 the SEFSC Caribbean Fisheries Branch.

3
4 Thus far, all of these folks are still with us. No one has taken
5 an early retirement. No one has-- everybody here-- Well, let me
6 back up. No one here was in probationary status, and all of those
7 folks were let go. Although Matt Damiano was close. So,
8 fortunately, he got in under the wire by about a week. So, we still
9 have Matt with us, which is terrific, and it's great to have
10 everybody else still on the team right now. We'll see how things
11 go moving forward.

12
13 I should say, and, hopefully, she's not-- I don't think she'll get
14 mad me for saying this. We have lost some other folks at the
15 Science Center, quite a few. I think to date, it's something along
16 the lines of 45. Now some of those were vacant positions, about 15
17 of them. And then there is the early retirement and sort of the
18 buyout positions or people who are who will be leaving by the end
19 of the month. So, it there will be an impact. In particular, some
20 of the support staff, the people who do budgeting, that kind of
21 stuff. A lot of those folks have moved on. That's going to make it
22 tough. Some people who do some of the surveys down in the
23 Caribbean, they have moved on, so we're going to be scrambling to
24 keep those things moving.

25
26 One that hits very close to home for me, is Shannon Cass-Calay.
27 She has elected to take early retirement. So, that's my immediate
28 boss. I have to say that she was a champion of establishing a
29 Caribbean Fisheries Branch. She has been a champion of the work
30 that is going on down there. So, her electing to move on is a big
31 hit for us. But we still have this team intact, at least for the
32 time being, and I'm very excited about that.

33
34 So, just to go over some of the stuff that you'll be seeing in
35 this presentation, I'm going to give you an update on the stock
36 assessments that are ongoing. I want to give you a check-in on how
37 the strategic planning work is going. They'll then go through a
38 bunch of the collaborative projects we're doing with partners in
39 the region, meaning you all. Data and analytical improvements
40 update will follow that, and I'll be talking about the correction
41 factors we just brought up, some information about outliers in
42 some of the datasets, and the CCL form history we're reviewing.
43 So, I'll talk about those things.

44
45 I'll talk a little bit about alternative assessment methods that
46 we're exploring at the Science Center. Everybody's interested in
47 looking at new ways to analyze the data and provide management
48 advice, and that's clear to us at the Science Center and has been

1 for a number of years. So, we have had a number of initiatives
2 underway for a while. And then, there's going to be some changes
3 to the SEDAR process that are on the horizon. So, I want to talk
4 about those.

5
6 Where you see asterisks, that is where I'd like to get input from
7 the Council. So, let's review very quickly. So, this is the team
8 of the Caribbean Fisheries Branch. I'll be talking to you about--
9 I don't know if you could see are you able to see my cursor if I
10 move it around? Yes? No? Maybe?

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

13
14 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Terrific. So, I've already mentioned we'll
15 talk about strategic planning, data collection, data analysis, and
16 stock assessments. So, let's start with the stock assessment
17 updates.

18
19 As you know, we're in the middle of SEDAR 84. That's yellowtail
20 snapper and stoplight parrotfish. The assessment workshop reports
21 are nearing completion. They will go out to the panel for review
22 in phases. So, the first one, April 28th, will be when we send the
23 Saint Croix stoplight parrotfish assessment report out to the
24 panel. Then on May 12th will be Saint Thomas/Saint John yellowtail
25 snapper and May 26th will be Puerto Rico Yellowtail snapper.

26
27 Those all get reviewed by the panel. They come back to the Science
28 Center. We make the final revisions and then it goes to SEDAR.
29 From SEDAR it will go out to the CIE and SSC review panel, who
30 will hold a review workshop July 15th through the 18th. Following
31 that, the CIE and SSC panel puts out their own report. So, the way
32 the timing is working out this round, as Graciela mentioned
33 earlier, I don't think there's time to go from that workshop, get
34 the report done, and have an August SSC meeting that can really
35 review these assessments. So, we'll come back to this issue at the
36 end, but I'm going to ask for an additional SSC meeting. It can be
37 virtual.

38
39 I know money's a problem. It is for everybody. Always has been and
40 might be a little more difficult this year even. So, that's why I
41 have down at the bottom here this additional session of the SSC.
42 We'll have to think about timing for that.

43
44 SEDAR 91, spiny lobster across all the islands. The final
45 assessment workshop webinar is scheduled for this Friday. So, if
46 you all can join, it's a public meeting. Please do. The assessment
47 workshop reports are scheduled to go out to the panel on May 26.
48 We've still got, after this final webinar, we've got some work to

1 do to get those reports together.

2
3 The review workshop, again, that's a CIE/SSC combination. And for
4 those of you who don't know, CIE is Center for Independent Experts.
5 So, these are outside scientists with expertise in stock assessment
6 and data analysis, and they sit in as independent observers and
7 provide reviews of the work that's been done. Anyway, that's
8 scheduled for August 26th through the 29th. Then the assessment,
9 presumably will have enough time by November to receive those
10 reports from that review workshop so that the SSC could review
11 them in time to be presented to the Council, to you all, in
12 December.

13
14 Moving right along. Strategic planning update. This is really, you
15 know, we've sort of gone from strategic planning to doing and
16 you'll see that right here. So, what we were set out to do with
17 the strategic planning was to collaboratively identify data
18 improvement strategies and that will enhance stock assessment and
19 fishery management advice in the region.

20
21 We ended up identifying 53, what we're calling short term-- and by
22 short term, that doesn't mean that it takes years; it may take a
23 year or two, sometimes less --but 53 projects. We held two planning
24 workshops. One was for the Science Center itself where we came up
25 with 39 projects. And then many of you participated in the regional
26 workshop that we held where there were 14 projects or working
27 groups that were identified. So, thus far, we've completed 37 of
28 those 53. Ten are currently in progress, and six remain to be
29 started. There are many more that we can come up with at this
30 point, but those 53 original ones are what we're what we're working
31 on.

32
33 This work has been published, in the sense that there are reports
34 from the groups who have completed their work, but we plan on
35 putting those together as tech memos. There's a manuscript for
36 publication in preparation. Future steps will continue to work on
37 these projects. And the deliverables, in addition to those tech
38 memos and manuscripts, is we want to have all of that information
39 accessible online that's in, preparation. That's in progress.

40
41 This work has really guided what the Caribbean Fishery Branch does.
42 It's allowed us to coordinate better to optimize our limited
43 resources. We've strengthened, I think, our working relationship
44 with all of you in the region. We've operationalized some data
45 processes. We really have, when we you see this last item here,
46 open science principles, what that means is that the work and the
47 results are accessible to all. And that's what we're getting at
48 when we're talking about publishing and when we're talking about

1 making things available online.

2
3 So, let's talk about some of the collaborative projects with you
4 all. We've touched on some of these already. So, we've got two
5 ongoing port sampling projects. One is in support of Grisel
6 Rodríguez and her work with the recreational sampling in Puerto
7 Rico. The port sampling is underway. It began last year, and it's
8 ongoing. We're focused on vessels and vessel interviews. The shore-
9 based kinds of recreational fishing are for us to tackle in the
10 future. We are talking with MREP to make sure that we are
11 collecting the data in ways that will meet their standards so that
12 we can get this kind of survey certified and perhaps finagle a
13 little money out of MREP, particularly for the shore-based work.

14
15 In the Virgin Islands, the port sampling is also happening. This
16 is a collaboration with Sennai and his team at the Division of
17 Fish and Wildlife. And one of the main things that they're doing
18 right now is field testing electronic measuring systems, and this
19 works really well. It uses AI to get a measurement of the fish
20 where they also get a weight at the same time, and it can identify
21 the fish. Right now-- or identify the species, rather.

22
23 Right now, we're up to, I think we can do around 30 different
24 species, and this was work that was done with some other
25 contractors. It began through fishery information system funding
26 a couple of years ago, and it's really coming along very well. We
27 can even get the carapace length of lobsters, and that can be done
28 at sea on a boat, if we rig up the cameras properly.

29
30 Some more projects. We've got a fishery independent lobster trap
31 survey. That's being done in cooperation with Puerto Rico
32 commercial fishers, and that is run through a local scientific
33 consulting firm. We're in the second year of sampling right now,
34 and the idea is to build an index of recruitment. So, in other
35 words, how many animals are going to, next year, grow into the
36 fishery? So, they'll be of legal size after the next molt, after
37 two molts. And can we use that to predict how we might change the
38 ACL based upon these recruit signals? So that's something we've
39 been working on for a couple years now. It's ongoing.

40
41 We've also been collecting life history samples in Puerto Rico for
42 a number of years now. Those samples, when they're collected, are
43 going to either the Panama City Lab, or the of the Center or to,
44 USC, Aiken, where we've been working with, Virginia Shervette and
45 her students. That collaboration is going quite well, I think.

46
47 There are also some fisheries independent reef fish surveys. So,
48 there's a deepwater snapper survey. This is a hook and line and

1 video survey. It's run, also, in collaboration with Puerto Rico
2 commercial fishers and with a scientific consulting firm to keep
3 everything organized down on the island. We've got, I believe they
4 did two years of surveys in Puerto Rico where the depth range for
5 the survey was between 50 and 450 meters. We're able to secure
6 some additional funding for the last two years, and the survey now
7 runs from 20 meters to 450 meters. The nice thing about that is
8 not so much that we're now outside the range of deepwater snapper,
9 but that survey now overlaps with the diver survey, the NCRMP or
10 sometimes called RVC diver survey. And I'll talk a little bit more
11 about that.

12
13 But basically, what we have in the U.S. Caribbean now is survey
14 coverage, at least for reef fish, from the shoreline to 450-meters
15 depth, and that is terrific progress. Speaking of that diver
16 survey, this is conducted every two years, across all the islands.
17 Their depth of operation is 0 to 30 meters, which is about a
18 hundred feet. Some years, they go to 50 meters, but that is really
19 funding dependent. But, pretty consistently, every two years, they
20 can do 0 to 30 meters in their survey.

21
22 The important thing about this survey is thus far, we're working
23 on these other surveys, but thus far, it is the only long-term
24 fishery independent survey that has supplied indices of abundance
25 for stock assessment. And that information is useful for a lot of
26 other things. Not just a stock assessment, but there's size
27 composition information in there, and that's the size composition
28 of the fish in the water, not the fish that are at the dock that
29 are caught by the fishery. So, it's a different look at the size
30 composition of the animals. And they're scheduled to sample again
31 this year.

32
33 So, I mentioned that we've got this hook and line survey and also
34 a video survey and this diver survey. But what we need is some
35 calibration across those surveys. What does it mean when you have
36 a certain abundance measure that a diver has observed versus a
37 hook and line? And what we want to do is get them on a common
38 currency, and if we can do that, now we have a true way to look at
39 abundance of animals down to 450 meters from the shoreline. And
40 that is scheduled to begin this year, but it's a tough year for
41 funding. So, we'll see if that funding actually comes through.

42
43 So, these are projects that have begun and can continue if we get
44 continued funding. So, one of the things that is not quite as
45 glamorous as going out on the water and collecting, you know,

1 observations, but one of the things that we need for those surveys
2 is classification of the benthic habitat. So, we've supplied
3 support for some scientists at CIMAS to take some of this multibeam
4 sonar data and look at depth and substrate complexity and substrate
5 hardness. What we can use that for is designing additional surveys
6 for, you know, where do go to sample certain kinds of fish? Well,
7 it depends on the habitat. We all know that. But what is the
8 habitat? And that's and that's what these maps are getting at.

9

10 And it turns out that the Caribbean has some of the best maps at
11 least in the Southeast and maybe throughout the country, but
12 certainly for the Southeast, the maps are better than the Gulf.
13 The maps were more complete. They're not better. They're more
14 complete, and more complete than in The Atlantic.

15

16 We also have given all of these different kinds of projects and
17 really need to a to integrate and coordinate those projects so
18 that we're not spending money inefficiently and, you know,
19 duplicating effort. So, we've got a research associate, I think,
20 that we can hire. The hiring announcement went out, and then things
21 became a little less certain with the funding. So, we'll see if
22 that funding comes through, but we're really anxious to have that
23 research associate. I've talked about this before. We need
24 somebody, one, who's bilingual and, two, who lives in the region.
25 I don't care if they're in Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands, but
26 I'd like them to be based out of there. And they'll be hired
27 through, CIMAS, through the Cooperative Institute.

28

29 One of the other things we have going that involves, again,
30 artificial intelligence is to improve fishery independent queen
31 conch surveys. One of the tricky things with conch, right, is they
32 occur in aggregation. So, it just presents you with what is sort
33 of a two-stage sampling design problem. First, you have to find
34 where the aggregations are, and then you need to survey the
35 aggregation. Well, it costs a lot of money to put a bunch of divers
36 in the water looking around for conch. So, if you have a boat, you
37 can drive around towing a camera array, you only need two people
38 out there and a computer.

39

40 The idea is that this AI will say that's a conch, that's a rock.
41 And when you start to see enough conch, now you know you're in an
42 aggregation. You can either send the divers out or you change your
43 search pattern, and your camera counts those conchs within the
44 aggregation. So, this is a contract that went into place across
45 the street at the University of Miami, and they are already field
46 testing a prototype camera system that was field tested last week,

1 I think, here in Biscayne Bay, but we need to make sure that it
2 can swim. So, that's where we're at with that one, but it's great
3 progress thus far. They only got the money in in January, I think,
4 and they've already got a prototype. So, I'm pretty excited about
5 that.

6
7 Two projects that you received an update on in December, which was
8 the pilot stakeholder survey, which is basically asking the
9 question, what are the priorities of fishery stakeholders
10 regarding fishery management? In other words, what do you all want
11 from management? And does a recreational fisher want the same thing
12 as a commercial fisher? Does a diver want the same thing as a trap
13 fisher? Does a dive shop owner even know that we manage fisheries?
14

15 So, we're trying to cut across lots of stakeholder groups. This
16 will inform a management strategy evaluation because the way we
17 manage can depend on what people prioritize for management. So,
18 for example, maybe you want to have a management strategy that
19 allows you to catch the same amount for years at a time. You don't
20 want there to be volatility in the amount of catch, say. That's
21 one way, you may not want that, but that's one way you might want
22 to do that, and we can get at that with management strategy
23 evaluations and understanding what the fishers and other
24 stakeholders want out of fishery management.

25
26 So, we've got a proposal submitted. We think it's funded, but,
27 again, this year is a tough year, so we're not sure if that money
28 is actually going to come through. If it does, we hope to begin
29 this work in the fall. And then, we had the pilot pelagic species
30 data collection where for-hire fishers were interviewed, and the
31 catch recorded in Saint Thomas. And right now, that is still
32 undergoing some data analysis. There was a summer sampling event
33 and then one in the winter in December. So, we're still working on
34 those data.

35
36 What we'd like to do is extend that Puerto Rico lobster recruits
37 survey, the one with the traps, into the U.S. Virgin Islands.
38 Again, this is contingent upon funding. We don't know if it's going
39 to come through. We want to extend the reef fish hook and line
40 survey from Puerto Rico into the Virgin Islands. This is the one
41 that goes from 20 meters to 450 meters. That will overlap with the
42 existing diver survey in the Virgin Islands as well. And then we
43 want to get funding for a University of the Virgin Islands student
44 to develop a methodology to use remote sensing, for example,
45 satellite photos, but it could be radar. It could be standing up
46 on a hill with a telescope to estimate total fishing effort. And
47 that will pair nicely with port sampling.

48

1 So, moving right along to some of the data and analytical
2 improvements. So, this is the data triage process. You've seen
3 this in the past. The way we did it was very stepwise. We went in
4 and said, "Alright. We want to we want to look at the indicator
5 species," for example, "of those indicator species, which ones
6 have size comp information." If it was a "no" for a particular
7 species, we stopped we didn't look at that species anymore. If it
8 was a "yes," were there landings? If it was "yes," where's the
9 life history data? If there was a "no" anywhere along that chain,
10 we stopped looking at this at that species.

11
12 So that got us down to a handful of species that had all the data
13 needed for sort of a classic traditional stock assessment, like
14 you're like we're doing through the SEDAR process. However, that's
15 limiting. So, the new approach is to look at, "Okay. Is there size
16 comp data?" "Great." "Are there commercial landings?" "Maybe,
17 maybe not." "But let's keep looking. Is there life history data?"
18 "Yes, or no?" "Are there recreational landings? Are there indices
19 of abundance or abundance data that we can create indices with?"
20 Either fishery dependent, that's the FD, what is down here at the
21 bottom, or fishery independent FI. Because there are things you
22 can do with different collections of these kinds of data.

23
24 If you have size comp data and you have life history data, there
25 are analyses you can do. You don't have to have all the landings.
26 You don't necessarily have to have an index of abundance. All those
27 are great if you can get them, but there are things you can do if
28 you don't have them. So, we're currently working on this. This
29 will come into play for some of the some of the things we'll talk
30 about in a few minutes.

31
32 And the only thing that would be excluded is if there is a species
33 group that has an indicator species, but the species in question
34 is not the indicator. We don't need to look at those. We only need
35 to look at the indicators in groups that have indicator species.
36 That may be a little confusing, but if you've got a question about
37 that, I'll I'm happy to address it and maybe explain it a little
38 more clearly.

39
40 So, we've also got the Trip Interview Program or TIP. This is where
41 we get the size composition data from the landings. We're trying
42 to modernize those data and the data processes, the way we analyze
43 those data. We want to improve the data accuracy, the quality
44 control, the kinds of analyses that we use. That is something we're
45 doing here at the Science Center and great progress has been made.

46
47 These kinds of things are less glamorous than going out on the
48 boat. It's not what many people think about when they say, you

1 know, "I really want to be a marine scientist," because everybody
2 wants to go on the boat and go diving and all of that. But this is
3 really the bread and butter of what we do. So, it's really
4 important work. The size composition data in particular are really
5 important for the kinds of assessment work that we do. Whether or
6 not it's a full-blown SEDAR kind of assessment or some other data
7 limited assessment, size composition data is really good stuff to
8 have for understanding what's going on with population dynamics.

9
10 We also do some exploratory data provisioning and understanding
11 how that might work for WECAFC. For those of you who are unfamiliar
12 with WECAFC is the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission.
13 So, this is an international commission that is trying to collect
14 data from not only across the Caribbean, but I think, basically,
15 from Brazil up to, well, up the East Coast of the Mainland United
16 States. So, we're working on that. That is struggle because there
17 are a lot of datasets that we could use to report to WECAFC and
18 we're trying to wrangle all of those.

19
20 Then, some other things that have implications. The next few things
21 have implications for the ACLs in the Caribbean and how they're
22 set. So, we discovered a lot of things, with the SEDAR 91 data
23 workshop. And so, we've come up with this sort of collaborative
24 work between Puerto Rico DRNA and the Science Center, that came
25 directly out of the SEDAR 91 data workshop. First thing, in
26 particular, is data outliers.

27
28 So, looking at individual trips and the amount of landings they
29 reported, and were there things that were just sort of out of
30 whack? And it turns out there were. There were a couple of trips
31 that had things reported like 18,000 pounds of lobster. That seems
32 unlikely. And so, when working with DRNA staff, we found some data
33 entry errors, you know, the data either was key punched in one way
34 or somehow in the transmittal of the data from the paper to the
35 database, it went from 180 pounds to 18,000. That has implications
36 for the ACL and monitoring of the ACL. Because remember, that's
37 just what's reported, and then a correction factor is applied so
38 it gets even bigger and that's erroneous. So, of 10 trips between
39 2023 and also 2022, we're looking at 27,000 pounds, almost 28,000
40 pounds of erroneous data, and that gets blown up by those
41 correction factors. So, we want to do some more work there.

42
43 We've talked about the correction factors. They have implications,
44 of course, for the ACLs. And, again, I think Andy got into this a
45 little bit. We're using, right now, because of a number of reasons
46 with merging datasets between the electronic reported data and the
47 paper forms. We're trying to work out those problems. But right
48 now, we have to use an average of the correction factors from 2014

1 to 2019, and that's what's used for estimating the landings
2 beginning in 2020 and up to the present day. This is Puerto Rico
3 only. But we found a number of issues through the SEDAR 91 data
4 workshop that we're trying to address. Again, it's in collaboration
5 with the RNA.

6
7 Another thing that has ACL implications is what species were on
8 the CCL forms or the CCRs, as they're sometimes called. What
9 species were on the forms over time. Because when we rely on
10 fishers to write-in, and they can. They can write-in, "Here's a
11 species I caught. It's not on the form. I'm going to write it in,
12 and these are the pounds." You're never sure how complete that is.
13 And so that could lead to some very low ACLs based upon the average
14 landings over some benchmark years. So, we're looking at that right
15 now.

16
17 And if you look, especially in in the Virgin Islands, there were
18 numerous form changes prior to about February. But then, again, in
19 2011, there was a big change in the forms, 2016 and 2019, and those
20 all have implications for ACLs and ACL monitoring.

21
22 So, what I'm going to recommend is that we have a systematic review
23 of trip level landings for outliers. Not just for spiny lobster,
24 not just for a handful of recent years, and not just one island or
25 the other, but across the board. We've been focusing on Puerto
26 Rico and Puerto Rico's spiny lobster, but I think this is a bigger
27 task than that, because of the ACL implications.

28
29 We need also a systematic review of the commercial landings'
30 correction factors. We identified a couple of issues that have
31 been resolved, but we haven't looked at all years and we haven't
32 looked at all the available data. So, we need to continue that
33 work. We need to resolve database incompatibilities. This is the
34 electronic reporting in the paper forms, so that we can then stop
35 with using the averages of the correction factors but calculate
36 them individually by year and coast for the most recent years.

37
38 And we need a systematic review of the catch reports of the logbook
39 forms. Determine what species are missing from the forms and when
40 and what effect did that have on setting ACLs. We've got a lot of
41 species that have ACLs in the hundreds or a few thousand pounds.
42 Is that because of the way the forms were written? Some of those
43 species weren't on there, or is it because they truly don't catch
44 a lot of those species? We don't know until we do this analysis.
45 And so, what I'm going to suggest, this is what I'd like some
46 Council input on, is, once we have assembled all this information,
47 that we take this to the SSC and the SSC consider the ACLs in light
48 of these analyses. So, we can come back to that because I still

1 have a bit to go through, but just sort keep this in your back
2 pocket, that I think that we'd need to think about timelines and
3 that sort of thing and who's going to do what, but keep this in
4 mind, and we'll come back to it at the end.

5
6 So, we're all concerned about the SEDAR process and the data
7 demands that it requires. Many people are looking at alternatives
8 to this sort of very complex single species stock assessment,
9 including the Science Center. So, here's a few things that we're
10 doing. We're working with a scientist at the University of Miami.
11 We are looking at length-based risk assessment. So, this is a data
12 limited approach. We're doing that in parallel with SEDAR 84. So,
13 the nice thing is we've got a full-blown stock assessment that is
14 the SEDAR product. Now what answers do we get when we do a data
15 limited approach? How do they compare?

16
17 Similarly, there's something that's called the stock assessment
18 continuum tool, which allows you to do exploratory analysis and
19 we're doing that in parallel with SEDAR 91 were you can implement
20 several kinds of standard data limited assessment methods, and
21 that's what we're doing. So, now we've got the full-blown SEDAR 91
22 assessment. What do you get when you compare that with some of
23 these data limited approaches?

24
25 And finally, we've got management strategy evaluation. That's this
26 last bit, the MSE. And we're doing that complimentary to the SEDAR
27 84 stock assessment. We want to test management options against
28 stakeholder objectives and also look at long term uncertainty.
29 These results are going to be presented in our May Caribbean
30 seminar. So, I look forward to seeing some of you there.

31
32 And that brings me to what we're going to do with SEDAR in 2025
33 and 2026. I think it's been generally agreed that we don't want to
34 do another single species stock assessment. So, in talking with
35 SEDAR, initially, we thought we could fit in a workshop in
36 November, but it turns out we need a bit more time than that due
37 to some limitations with SEDAR being able to contract things so
38 that we can, you know, have a place to hold this meeting. So, we're
39 looking at March or April of next year. And what we want to do is
40 review and recommend options for alternative approaches to
41 providing scientific advice to managers.

42
43 Those approaches are likely to differ among species or species
44 groups, so it's not going to be a one size fits all. So, the great
45 work that J.J. Cruz is doing has a place. The work of some of these
46 data limited approaches have a place. There are lots of folks
47 thinking about this problem and trying to come up with solutions,
48 and so we want to get them all at the table. We want them to bring

1 what they've got, the kinds of work they've been doing, and
2 consider in light of the available data, so this goes back to the
3 data triage, given the available data, what kind of solutions can
4 we come up with? And, again, it may differ depending upon the
5 species.

6
7 So, my recommendation would be-- we have as part of our strategic
8 planning working groups what we're calling the toolbox group. This
9 is a group that's looking for this very kind of solutions, and I
10 think that group could be the organizing committee for this
11 workshop. We need to have Council staff participating. So, I'm
12 going to ask you all if you are willing to give some of your
13 staff's time to help with this project. We need to prepare terms
14 of reference, and I've got those to show you, at least a draft and
15 a statement of work. We need to work on that.

16
17 I also think we should consider including some folks from the
18 Pacific Islands. They have the very similar kinds of challenges in
19 terms of data, in terms of lots of different species. And they've
20 taken some, you know, they're certainly doing stock assessments.
21 They've taken a different approach than us. However, they've gone
22 from looking at species groups, and they're now working their way
23 towards single species stock assessments. Whereas, we're sort of
24 going maybe in the other direction, so it'd really interesting to
25 learn from their experience.

26
27 So, these are the terms of reference. I apologize for this. These
28 are the ToRs that were written up as a draft by the toolbox work
29 group. What SEDAR needs from you all is, yes or no. You're okay
30 with these, or, no, you're not okay with these and they need to be
31 revised. There's two pages of these. So, I'll read through them.
32 We can come back to them.

33
34 So, the first term of reference is to review and discuss
35 alternative approaches to single species assessments as outlined
36 in the literature or as applied to other data limited regions and
37 explore novel ecosystem-based fishery management approaches that
38 have not yet been applied or published. Review where ecosystem-
39 based fishery management approaches have been successfully applied
40 in other regions. The second one, review data availability in the
41 U.S. Caribbean and determine what types of alternative methods may
42 be feasible for implementation. The third, provide research
43 recommendations to advance development and implementation of
44 methods; i.e., tools that are alternative or complementary to
45 conventional stock assessment.

46
47 There's more. The next one is providing guidance on processes for
48 developing management advice that will meet legal mandates when

1 using tools that are alternative to or complimentary to
2 conventional stock assessment. Next, provide recommendations on
3 methods that could be most easily applied in the U.S. Caribbean in
4 the present scenario or under future improved data collection
5 scenarios. And then finally, prepare a SEDAR procedures document
6 addressing recommendations that will be used to guide future SEDAR
7 assessments.

8
9 So, we can come back to these to get your, yes or no, or recommend
10 changes. And if you think that this is a document that needs to be
11 reviewed by your SSC, we can talk about how we could get that done.

12
13 Okay. So, let's review some proposed SEDAR changes. And these, I
14 think, came out of the last SEDAR steering committee or maybe the
15 one before that.

16
17 So, we all recognize that we'd want to make stock assessments or
18 at least management advice, whatever form it takes, to be more
19 timely, and we want to increase throughput of that fishery
20 management advice. We also recognize that resources are not
21 increasing and are likely to decrease, and more efficient
22 assessment processes are required. And we also know that the
23 duration of SEDAR projects has been increasing and increasing
24 substantially. So, the recommended change coming out of the
25 steering committee was that the Science Center will take
26 responsibility for the assessment modeling component of the SEDAR
27 process. And I'll talk a little bit more about what that means
28 exactly.

29
30 But, again, why do we want to do that? Well, it turns out that the
31 webinars, the assessment webinars are not terribly effective.
32 They're inefficient. They often do not produce the kind of useful
33 and consistent scientific advice that are needed by the assessment
34 leads to move forward with the stock assessments, at least in a
35 well-informed way. So, we don't gain a lot of technical insights
36 during those webinars. It's a logistical workload that could be
37 better spent on doing the actual modeling. It's not terribly
38 efficient or useful way to engage stakeholders. Right? And it's
39 difficult to find times when everyone who's on the panel can
40 actually attend.

41
42 So, the proposal is that when we're doing a stock assessment, we
43 need to think about does it need to be incorporated in the SEDAR
44 process. And those assessments that need to be in the SEDAR process
45 would be those that have sufficient new information to require
46 external participation or review. If that is not the case, then
47 the Science Center would take responsibility for the assessment.
48 If it is within the SEDAR process, the Science Center would take

1 responsibility for the assessment component of the SEDAR process,
2 the data and the review components. So, the data workshop, the
3 review workshop would still go on. They would remain unchanged.
4 That would not be a Science Center process. That would be a SEDAR
5 process.

6
7 So, the specific components of the assessment process would be
8 negotiated between the Science Center, Council staff, input from
9 the SSC, input from you all as the Council. You could elect to
10 prepare a statement of work, have the SSC draft one, have the
11 Science Center draft one. In the past, typically, I draft it. You
12 all approve it or have me change it. We could continue with that.
13 You could also communicate verbally. "Here's what we want to see.
14 We need to hit these various requirements for a stock assessment."

15
16 So, at the bottom, for any of these, no matter how we proceed with
17 the process, whether it's entirely within the Science Center or
18 it's a somewhat amended SEDAR process where the modeling component
19 is done within the Science Center, but the data workshop and the
20 review workshop remain, whatever that process we're going through,
21 you all would establish a technical team of people with diverse
22 scientific expertise and/or fishing expertise, and that's
23 appropriate for the analyses to be reviewed in the species being
24 assessed. So, in other words, we want to have lobster fishers when
25 we're talking about lobster. We want to have yellowtail fishers
26 when we're talking about yellowtail, and we want to have the
27 scientific expertise who can provide some guidance on the analyses
28 that need to be done.

29
30 Additional consideration should be given to the ability of whoever
31 is being named to the technical team. We want to make sure they'll
32 be able to attend whatever meetings we need to set up, and they
33 can participate in those meetings and discussions. So, these would
34 be meetings that would be called as necessary, and they would be
35 meetings that don't need to be noticed in the federal register.
36 So, we could have them more frequently. We could have them on as
37 a needed basis, you know, to get updates on the work that's going
38 on in the Science Center. But that would be a role for the Council
39 to put together those technical teams depending upon the species
40 or species groups being assessed.

41
42 So, we're changing things up. How do we keep the process
43 transparent? Well, for one thing, the data workshop is a public
44 meeting anybody can attend. And you, as the Council would still
45 name people to go to the data workshop. If there's not a data
46 workshop, if we've decided, "well, we don't need one. We've done
47 this species a couple of times. There's not a lot of new
48 information. We can get right into supplying the data and then not

1 have to use a data workshop." We can hold the data webinar, if you
2 all want to do that.

3
4 There are also options for people to be involved through the SSC
5 meetings and during the public comment opportunities there. The
6 review workshop is will still be a public meeting. We do want to
7 have technical input from the SSC. So, the SSC would be involved
8 in the process. We can supply, we, the Science Center can provide
9 progress reports, and, again, there's that technical team, and
10 we'd seek input from that technical team as needed, and the
11 technical team could ask for updates. So, we wouldn't be completely
12 behind closed doors. We just want to have an efficient system.

13
14 So, these are the topics we talked about, or I talked, and,
15 hopefully, some of you listened. So, we need to think about for
16 SEDAR 84 and 91. Do we do we need another, SSC meeting? Because
17 six stock assessments to go over, in a single meeting in November,
18 is going to be tough. Remember, there's a separate assessment for
19 each for each island. I'd like to get your thoughts on a notion of
20 looking more broadly at the correction factors, the data outliers,
21 and the CCL form histories. And then we need to look at those terms
22 of reference for the SEDAR workshop that will be looking at
23 alternative assessment methods.

24
25 So, I'm going to take a breath. And does anybody have any questions
26 before we go back to those items?

27

28 **Questions/Comments**

29

30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Have a Julian.

31
32 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yeah. I can't see anybody. So, yeah. Again,
33 whoever's leading the meeting--

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian.

36

37 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** This is Julian Magras for the record, Kevin.

38

39 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yep.

40

41 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Great presentation, but I'm watching how we are
42 fine tuning the whole process for SEDAR and seeing what'd the best
43 to work out. But you know what the fishers would like to see in
44 there is how some way you can incorporate some compensation for
45 the fishers because we spend the most time in the SEDAR process,
46 and we don't get paid \$1. Everyone else that attend these meetings
47 are being paid. The fishers do not get paid for their time.

48

1 We don't get a stipend. We get paid to travel, to come to the
2 meetings. But every time we attend one of these meetings, we have
3 to lose a day fishing. So, that's why you haven't seen me on many
4 of the last recent meetings because I can't afford to do it
5 anymore. I'm still going to be part of the process, but, you know,
6 somewhere along the line, just like the Council found way to give
7 us compensation for being at these meetings--
8

9 I know there's a budget shortfall right now, but if you don't
10 request it, you can't get it. I heard attending other meetings is
11 something that's being talked about even to pay the fishers who
12 attend MREP to try to get some kind of stipend so that program
13 could keep going. And, you know, I would really like, with the
14 powers that be, it might not be you, but someone might be listening
15 on how we can be compensated for us to continue being part of the
16 process.
17

18 Right now, it's Nelson, Gerson, myself. We can't even get the other
19 fishers to get involved because they're saying "We can't continue
20 to take time off and we're not getting compensated." So, you know,
21 we know how important and how valuable our information that's given
22 through the process is, but, you know, we continue losing time.
23

24 I'm here, at this meeting; my boat doesn't move. I'm the captain,
25 so my mates, they don't make nothing while I'm here, but I'm here.
26 So, we have got to try to do something. Thank you.
27

28 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Right. So, I hear what you're saying, Julian,
29 and I appreciate the difficulty. I mean, it's not unique here. We
30 hear some of this from, you know, from fishers in the gulf, from
31 fishers in the Atlantic.
32

33 So, the way that SEDAR works, is that they are the ones paying for
34 your travel. So, if this was to come to pass, it would have to be
35 made at a much higher level than me. That's for sure. However, I
36 will say-- I'm just going to go back up here. You know, this notion
37 of changes in the way SEDAR operates reduces the number of meetings
38 in the process.
39

40 You know? Unless someone is named to that technical team, and even
41 then, that would not be days of meetings. That would be updates or
42 asking specific questions. You know? So, we would want fishers on
43 there to be able to say, "Hey. How does, this particular thing
44 work?" You know? So, like, we could ask, "how often are you moving
45 your traps around? How often are you fishing your trap?" You know,
46 very specific fishing kinds of questions. Whereas we'd ask the
47 scientists or the statisticians on that panel for a specific
48 scientific or statistical questions.

1
2 So, that's going to reduce the number of meetings. Now the data
3 workshop, would not change. And in terms of getting compensation,
4 again, that is way above my pay grade. But, yeah, you're right.
5
6 If you don't ask for it, it's not just going to fall out of sky.
7 Any other questions?
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, Kevin. Thank you for the presentation.
12 It's kind of too much information to absorb at one point. And I
13 would like to go back to the things that you need for the Council
14 to decide today. For example, terms of reference.
15
16 Personally, I believe that the people who work on this are, really,
17 smarter than me. But it would be a matter of looking at your
18 presentation and those terms of reference and then ask the Council
19 whether you have any modifications or you would like to adopt them
20 as presented today. So, we can go by one, the things that you need
21 for the Council to make a decision on.
22
23 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. I'm going to start up at the top here, which
24 was the SEDAR. So, we probably don't need to do this today, but I
25 think that because of the timing of the process and the Council
26 SSC meeting dates, everything's going to come to them as scheduled
27 right now in December. And I think looking at six stock assessments
28 is too much for an SSC meeting. So, we could talk about this more
29 in August, but my recommendation would be to have an SSC meeting
30 in October. It can be virtual. And another one in December, that
31 too could be virtual. I mean, it's up to you all.
32
33 I don't know what else they have to discuss. And I know Vance is
34 a proponent of having in-person, but I don't want to bust the
35 budget either. But I think we need to have one in October to go
36 over SEDAR 84 and another one in November to go over SEDAR 91. And
37 those all could then be presented to the Council. Maybe. Maybe six
38 assessments are too much for the Council to handle on a single
39 meeting.
40
41 So, perhaps this needs to be, you know, considered and a decision
42 made in August. I don't think we need a decision now, but I do
43 think it's a lot to present to you all. And you're right, Miguel.
44 I appreciate that there was a ton of stuff here. Part of that is
45 for you all to know that the things are really starting to move
46 along. We're starting to get a lot of things done. It took us a
47 few years of being a branch to really get established, but now

1 we've got a lot of things going on.

2
3 By the same token, I don't want to overwhelm you all with a bunch
4 of stock assessments in a single meeting. So, I'm open to
5 suggestion for how we might approach that. Maybe that's something
6 that we talk about with Council staff and have a solution by the
7 next meeting in August. Or at least a recommendation.

8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I like that approach. And, also, we have
10 to be mindful of the budget. I just received a note that they are
11 going to cut 27% of the total NOAA budget with the [inaudible],
12 and that will affect everybody and his brother this year and next
13 year.

14
15 In the case of the SSC, we were approved only one meeting, and we
16 were hopeful with that. So, we're going to split that one meeting
17 into two, probably virtual. But Angie, Carlos, and I have to go
18 through the budget and make sure that we have enough. I need to
19 cut in some other areas because this is important for the Council
20 at this time. I believe that this is a priority that you mentioned
21 before.

22
23 So, let's then say that, if the Council approved this approach,
24 then the next step will be how do we implement that using the
25 budget that we have and the people of the SSC that we have.

26
27 I need to hear from the Council.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

30
31 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, Kevin, for the presentation. We
32 talked earlier today about multiple SSC meetings. And so, I think
33 this actually kind of aligns well if the budget allows it, right?
34 Because we would be able to maybe attach to that first SSC meeting
35 some of the Council business and the second one would probably be
36 solely dedicate to SEDAR 91.

37
38 With that said, Kevin, you mentioned October and then I think
39 November. Is there any way to have an earlier SSC meeting than
40 October? Or is that just when you think the reports and everything
41 will be ready and that's probably the most optimistic timeframe to
42 complete that October SSC.

43
44 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I think-- I mean, it's possible we could go
45 September. I'm just not clear on how long it will take the CIE to
46 get their report out. Right? So, their review for SEDAR 84 is in,
47 I think, the middle of-- well, there it is. July 15 through 18.
48 So, if they've got-- I'm just making up numbers, and I don't know

1 what the answer is. I don't know if anyone from SEDAR is on the
2 call, but let's say they have six weeks to get the report out, and
3 maybe it's shorter than that. Now you're looking at the end August.
4 So, for that to get to the SSC and give them time, you know, maybe
5 the September we could do it. If they only need a month to get the
6 CIE report out, then that would shift the possible date forward by
7 a few weeks.

8
9 **JULIE NEER:** So, Kevin, this is Julie from SEDAR. Just a quick
10 question to clarify, make sure I understand what you're saying.
11 Are you talking about when the summary report will be done from
12 the review panel or when the individual CIE reports will be due?
13 Because those are two different things.

14
15 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Explain to me the difference.

16
17 **JULIE NEER:** So, at the review workshop that is composed of CIE
18 reviewers as well as SSC people appointed to review, they will
19 produce a summary report of that panel's discussions,
20 documentations, and thoughts on the assessment. That piece is part
21 of the SEDAR final stock assessment report.

22
23 In addition, the individual CIE reviewers that are part of that
24 group, write individual CIE reports that they send to the CIE for
25 review, then to NMFS for review, and then they are released. That
26 is not part of SEDAR. We have no control over how long that process
27 takes. We only have control over the part that SEDAR does with the
28 review workshop proper. And so, what that means is that we should
29 have, looking at this workshop, we should have the CIE report done
30 in mid-August to late August, the summary report of the review
31 workshop. The individual CIE reports will come in at some point
32 later.

33
34 We usually make those available to the SSC for their consideration,
35 but they're not always available when the SSC reviews the
36 assessment.

37
38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. And do we have an idea, like, what is typical
39 for that turnaround time, or it's all over the map?

40
41 **JULIE NEER:** It is, unfortunately, all over the map. They are
42 supposed to turn in their reports-- These individual CIEs have to
43 turn in their reports usually three or four weeks after the review
44 workshop, which they usually do, but then there's a steering
45 committee at the CIE that has to review those reports, deem them
46 okay, then they send them to the agency who is the client, so to
47 speak, and then the agency reviews those reports and says they're
48 okay, and then they're released.

1
2 So, it has taken as little as six weeks and as long as four months,
3 which is why they're not part of the SEDAR report anymore because
4 it made our wrapping stuff up and scheduling impossible.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?

7
8 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. And so, I guess just to try to wrap this
9 up, I mean, think we all agree that we need to defer to the
10 Executive Director and evaluate the budget. My suggestion for
11 trying to have an SSC meeting possibly in September is to cover it
12 under this year's fiscal year budget, which may be better and more
13 optimistic than next year's budget. I don't know if that makes--
14 it probably doesn't make a difference for you, right, because you
15 can carry over those funds. But for us, it would make a difference
16 by splitting the years.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel? Well, Sennai?

19
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** Thanks. Sennai Habtes, for the record. As we linger
21 over these budgeting issues, the forecasting doesn't look good. I
22 think, really, what we need to do is identify ways that we can
23 streamline processes like Kevin is mentioning, but also find ways
24 to better engage through the existing processes that we have,
25 right? We have DAP meetings. Can we provide some moderate resources
26 towards them where one of the scientists that's engaged either
27 through the SSC or in the SEDAR process can present information to
28 them during their meetings and get feedback from the fishers,
29 right, that can then be presented back at the SSC meeting or during
30 the SEDAR process.

31
32 Because right now what we're doing is we have a lot of people
33 coming at a lot of different meetings and it all goes back into
34 the SEDAR and it's a lot of the same people at a lot of the
35 different working groups. I think what we as a Council probably
36 need to do is sit down and identify a better process for engaging
37 the groups of stakeholders that we need information from and really
38 find ways that we can, you know, double up on things as best as we
39 can. Because we're not, I mean, let's face it, we're not going to
40 have the funds to do the number of in-person meetings we need to
41 do. We're just not, you know? And that's a fact going forward.

42
43 So, how do we find ways to get the things that we need to get out
44 of existing structures that we have? Or do we need to come up with
45 new structures? Do we need to provide better online resources that
46 help people review things in a timely manner so that they can
47 provide the input that we need when we do have, you know, these
48 in-person meetings so that it doesn't take as long to get that

1 feedback and iterate into the process, you know?

2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, along the lines of what he just
4 mentioned, that's more or less what I was thinking. What we need
5 to do is to know the priority from the Council so we can address
6 those issues with the SSC, with the monies that we have. Today,
7 this morning we were talking about a lot of things that we can
8 throw at the SSC, but we need to really focus on what we really
9 need. That's why I liked Kevin's presentation because he's focused
10 on what we really need and what we can do.

11
12 So, in the case of the SSC my proposal is that Graciela, Vance,
13 Carlos, and I have to sit down and look at the priorities of the
14 Council regarding the SSC. And by the way, are planning to have
15 three DAP meetings-- I mean, the three DAPs will meet in one
16 meeting, and it would be virtual. I've been talking to the three
17 Chairs, Julian and Gerson and Nelson, about the best use of that
18 time. The idea being to talk about permits, but the more that we
19 talk about the issues, I believe that we need to put together an
20 agenda as efficient as possible, so that the time that they will
21 spend on that meeting will be well spent. Also, we will have
22 information from them to the Council about the issues that we
23 discuss here.

24
25 We don't pretend to have all the issues discussed during one
26 meeting nor that they will give all the information because that
27 would be impossible. But at least we will be able to have those
28 priorities, discuss it and come back to you with ideas, issues,
29 and things that they can tell us that will be able to help the
30 Council with what we need to do.

31
32 The discussion here about the timing, it would be impossible. Julie
33 said, you know, how to pinpoint the exact date that they are going
34 to have the CIE report. But let's say that we have the SSC and
35 they can wait. Let's say that we have a September meeting and
36 another one in November. So, Graciela and I, have to sit down,
37 look at the items that we want to discuss at that meeting that
38 will be in response to what we have here. Because I hate to meet
39 the SSC with the budget that we have and come out with more
40 questions than answers. Really.

41
42 Anyway, we need to hear from the Council. Do think the idea that
43 was presented by Kevin and talked about by Andy will be the way to
44 go? That we plan to have this meeting? Probably it will be a hybrid
45 meeting, but at least one meeting that will address the key issues
46 that you have been discussing. We need to get the input from the
47 SSC.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?
3
4 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
5 record. Thank you, Kevin, for all the information that you
6 presented today. I think I will suggest to the other Council
7 members to think about all the proposed slides that you put in
8 here for the recommendations that you do, and that we move with
9 that because we know that we are short on time, but we need this
10 information as soon as possible. And of course, if you already
11 made and put the information in the slides and we have that in our
12 briefing book, we're supposed to know how to move now. Thanks.
13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we all agree with that? I'm not hearing any
15 comments. Miguel.
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Then we agreed to have a September meeting. It
18 will be fine tuning. We will focus on the issues that are relevant
19 to the Council, so we present that to the SSC. If we need another
20 meeting, as Kevin suggested, we can have one before the December
21 meeting. And in that time, with the budget that we have.
22
23 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes, Miguel.
24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Thank you.
26
27 Then, Kevin, you also mentioned that the Council had to go over
28 the ToRs. Did you present that?
29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yes. So, so we've got that to look at. So, this
31 is hopefully less problematic. So, I mentioned all of those kinds
32 of data reviews that have an impact on the ACLs. What I'm asking
33 for here is some time at a future SSC meeting so that between the
34 Science Center and the SSC, we can develop a strategy for getting
35 this work done. And at that stage of the game, we may have some
36 insights on the ACLs as they now exist.
37
38 I'm talking mainly of those species that have very low ACLs or
39 they're chronically, you know, exceeding the ACLs, and we have to
40 ask whether or not that's better reporting. I want to resolve all
41 of that, systematically. So, we don't have that. So, we're not
42 constantly revisiting those questions.
43
44 So, that's really just a time at the next SSC meeting to talk
45 through these issues with them and develop a strategy for how we
46 can move forward to address those things because I need the SSC on
47 board with whatever approach we're going take. So, that's really
48 just time at the next SSC meeting to chat with them for a while.

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. This is one thing that is mostly direct in
3 relation to Puerto Rico data collection system. And probably we
4 don't need the whole SSC to go over it. Maybe you can pick some of
5 the people at the SSC that can help, members from the Regional
6 Office. I mean, not the Regional Office, but the Southeast
7 Fisheries Science Center and of course Puerto Rico.

8
9 Because this is not the first time that we discussed this.

10
11 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Sure.

12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We tried to do this in 1975 when I was there,
14 and we are still discussing it. But I believe that this is, to me,
15 personally, this is the right approach because we have all the
16 elements that we need to discuss.

17
18 And this is something related to what Julian mentioned before that
19 we had to revisit these issues. But at least from my point of view,
20 what you have here is a roadmap and also, we'll provide you some
21 information that once it's, let's say, blessed by the SSC, that
22 will be the scientific recommendation for the Council to consider.
23 And of course, there will be a lot of recommendations to the local
24 government, and they have to tell us whether they can do it or
25 not. Because many of these things, actually, the whole staff of
26 the data collection program is in this room, except for two.
27 Daniel, Ricardo and Wilson are the key elements here to discuss
28 this issue here.

29
30 So, what do you need from the Council at time, Kevin, regarding
31 this one?

32
33 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, on this one, I just need some time at the
34 next SSC meeting to show them what it is we're doing and sort of
35 the strategy and get their input and develop some timelines and
36 when we're going to get all this work done. I would say, though,
37 that this one here, the commercial catch logbooks or reports, that
38 is very much a Virgin Island's issue as well. Of course, the
39 correction factors are unique to Puerto Rico. The review of the
40 landing's outliers may, I mean, we should do that for all islands
41 as well. So, I think that there's a Virgin Islands component that's
42 equally important.

43
44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Kevin, you mentioned in one of the slides
45 the information on the benthic habitats around the islands that we
46 probably have larger cover than anyone else. In the logbooks or
47 catch reports, fishers make reference to specific areas, 2.5 by
48 2.5 areas, etcetera. We've been looking at a heat map trying to

1 figure out where most of the species are concentrated in because
2 there is that diversity of habitat and there is that those areas
3 that are very specific for certain species. Are we including in
4 the systematic review of trip level landings and the review of
5 commercial catch logbooks, the revision of all of the data that
6 they have provided since 2011, 2012 that includes that very
7 specific, well, that fairly specific fishing areas for many of
8 these species.

9
10 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I Mean, it wasn't part of this because I think we
11 were looking at things that specifically impacted ACLs and ACL
12 monitoring. I think that's a project that's worthwhile, but I think
13 it's separate from what I'm proposing here. I don't have a problem
14 doing it. I think it would be beneficial to everybody. But this
15 was looking at those components of the data that if we get them
16 cleaned up, we'll be able to better track ACLs.

17
18 We'll be more accurately track where we are relative to ACLs when
19 we take out erroneous data, we get the correction factors reviewed
20 thoroughly. Especially, looking at the logbook forms and what's
21 been on the logbook form. And that will really address those
22 species that exceed the ACL because of better reporting.

23
24 You know, if they weren't on the forms back when we set the ACLs,
25 then we're going to run into that problem all the time. Especially,
26 if the if those species names are now on the forms. Yeah. Go ahead.

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Don't start mixing things again because we
29 end up with a lot of things that we cannot deal with at this time.
30 Right now, for the SSC we have the first slide, one topic that we
31 are going to discuss, and this one.

32
33 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Mhmm.

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** That will be a one-day SSC meeting if we go over
36 it very quick. One morning, one afternoon. And still, we won't be
37 able to touch every issue that we have here. Do you think that for
38 this slide, we need to address something else along the lines that
39 you are discussing or we can leave it for another time?

40
41 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I think, all I need is, for the next SSC meeting,
42 two hours. Because with the SSC, of course, we'll get in a lot
43 more of the details and things, but two hours at their next meeting
44 so that we can come up with a plan for how to address the issues
45 on this slide.

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy and Sennai?

48

1 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes, I'm supportive of Kevin and team talking
2 about this with the SSC. I'm getting a little concerned with how
3 much may be come before the SSC. But keep in mind when Maria went
4 through her presentation this morning about priorities, this is
5 one of the things that's going to be before us to decide where we
6 want to put this on the prioritization list with regard to updating
7 these catch limits based on the improvements in scientific data.
8 And so, I think, ultimately, we need to take that into
9 consideration and decide when the most appropriate time is to have
10 that conversation with the SSC given our workload and
11 prioritization process. But agree, I think this would be a good
12 topic to have sooner rather than later if the SSC has the time to
13 discuss it.

14
15 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, Kevin, I don't want to ask you guys to do a
16 lot of like unnecessary work, but I do remember, like, in past
17 SEDAR meetings, we have identified specific recommendations that
18 we provide to your researchers on some of these issues. I was just
19 wondering if it might be useful to have a summary document that
20 gives those to the SSC prior to the meeting that can help kind of
21 structure and give us, you know, a defined way of talking about it
22 when that time comes in the meeting. It might save some time.

23
24 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Right. Yeah. I don't want to just spring this on
25 them. I'd want to provide some background for, you know, these
26 issues were specifically noted at the SEDAR 91 data workshop.
27 Working with Daniel and Wilson, we've addressed some of them, but
28 those were specific to lobster, and now we're suggesting that we
29 do a more systematic approach.

30
31 And so that's, you know, that's where we've landed. I would want
32 to give the background to the SSC and talk about these issues in
33 a document that we can provide to them ahead of the meeting so
34 they're not walking in cold.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Are you done, Kevin?

37
38 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** If I've got my time with the SSC at the next
39 meeting, the last thing, and I hate to do this last, but this is
40 something that's time sensitive. If we're going to do this
41 workshop, to look at alternative approaches to providing
42 management advice, we've got to have terms of reference, and we
43 need to have them soon. And so, these are the proposed terms of
44 reference, this one and that one.

45
46 If we wait until August, I think we're I think we're already behind
47 schedule.

48

1 **JULIE NEER:** No! Kevin?
2
3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yep.
4
5 **JULIE NEER:** This is Julie. Honestly, I actually think we should
6 wait till August to approve these because the full planning team
7 has not seen these yet.
8
9 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay.
10
11 **JULIE NEER:** I Like to think we need a little bit more detail and
12 flesh out a few of these things to make sure that we get what we
13 need out of this workshop. These are great starting points, but I
14 think we need some bullets underneath them.
15
16 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Alright. Well, if the SEDAR coordinator is telling
17 me we can wait until August, I'm happy to do that.
18
19 **JULIE NEER:** Yes. If they approve moving forward-- it would be
20 great to have the Council sign off on this approach for the next
21 SEDAR. That would be great. And then we will make it happen and
22 come back to you guys in August with further details.
23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I have Andy and then Graciela.
25
26 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** So, I'll just voice my support for the
27 approach. Since we're not approving these terms of reference and
28 that they're going to be looked at by the broader team.
29
30 A couple of things that I would suggest, with the first terms of
31 reference, it gives me pause when we say things like "novel" and
32 "have not yet been applied or published." I'd want to soften that
33 some. I think it's fine to explore novel things and things that
34 maybe haven't been applied or published, but I don't think we call
35 it out as something that we're jumping out to try to set a new bar
36 on.
37
38 Two, I think there has to be some more conversation with Graciela
39 and Miguel and the Caribbean Council team with regard to outcomes
40 of this integrating with management and making sure that there's
41 that clear nexus between the SEDAR outcomes in terms of reference
42 and, ultimately, how this plugs into management. And I recognize
43 that's not necessarily something that would be accomplished during
44 the workshop, but I want to be thinking about the outcome as we,
45 obviously, work through the workshop.
46
47 And then the third, which goes to your comments later in the
48 presentation, Kevin, in terms of staffing losses, impacts to the

1 Science Center with regard to the research and data enterprise, I
2 think a theme needs to be also looking at ways that we can simplify
3 the assessment approaches or procedures for Caribbean Fisheries,
4 actually all of our fisheries going forward. Just to offer those
5 as some suggestions as the team continues to work through these
6 terms of reference.

7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela, and then I have hand up.

9

10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, a couple of questions. One, one of
11 the things that we had talked about at the last SEDAR, specifically
12 data workshop, was the use of multispecies stock assessments. Is
13 that covered within that ecosystem-based approach? That's one.

14

15 And the second one had to do with the idea of including social and
16 economic factors data that has been collected recently, that it's
17 part of the conceptual models of the Lenfest work of the fishery
18 ecosystem plan to include that in these approaches. So, they will
19 not be novel. I mean, people have used them in other areas, but to
20 do multispecies, include the social and economic data that needs
21 to be looked at, and then, how to be thinking in terms of the
22 flexibility of applying this information instead of ACLs?

23

24 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, I think that certainly the multispecies,
25 that's one of the reasons why I recommended someone from the
26 Pacific Islands, because that has been the approach they have taken
27 in the past and now are moving towards single species. So, the
28 opposite direction we're sort of going. Other than that, yeah, I
29 think everything's on the table. Everything's fair game. I would
30 say that what we need for this steering committee, I'm going to
31 call it, for setting up this workshop is someone from the Council
32 staff. So, the Council does need to be okay with that.

33

34 And then socioeconomic, how do we manage instead of ACLs? You know,
35 I think all of those things are points for discussion. What I would
36 want is, when people come to this workshop, with the work they've
37 done, we need a very clear guidance on how this is going to inform
38 management. Not a bunch of hand waving, not a bunch of, you know,
39 "Somebody else has done this someplace else, but I don't know
40 exactly how." And a lot of fuzzy language. We need very specific
41 ways of how we can implement this stuff. Right? What can it do?
42 And I'm thinking specifically of the Tier 4 species, which is about
43 95% of all the species that are managed. Right? Only a handful
44 have had an assessment that's resulted in management advice.

45

46 So, what do we do with those Tier 4s, and how can some of these
47 other ways of analyzing those data or providing advice, how can
48 they tackle the Tier 4s? And now, one size is not going to fit

1 all. Right? It's not going to be that we have one method that can
2 work for every species. So, there's a lot of work to do, and we're
3 going to, probably, end up with multiple ways of going about
4 getting at those Tier 4 species. But if we could move that bar, if
5 we could get some of those better informed for an ACL or, however
6 we manage, then we've achieved a lot with this.

7
8 And that's how I envision the goal of this working group and this
9 workshop to be. To let's get better management advice for those
10 Tier 4s, which were just set by expert opinion and not informed by
11 a lot more than that. Because I used to be on the SSC when that
12 happened and we went through a hundred plus species in three days
13 and just came up with ACLs.

14
15 So, I don't know if that answered the question, Graciela, but I'm
16 wide open. And this steering committee needs will be the ones that
17 set the terms of reference, and they'll be the ones that come up
18 with the statement of work as to exactly what we're going to get
19 done or what we're going to attempt to get done. So, all that
20 stuff's still on the table.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Cristina, somebody still has a hand up? No.
23 You're good. Okay.

24
25 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** That's me.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. So, we're take a quick break. Are you
28 done, Kevin?

29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** If you'll give me somebody from the-- If you're
31 okay with someone from the Council staff serving on that committee,
32 and then we'll handle these terms of reference like Julie was
33 mentioning for August. We'll be all set.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

36
37 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I don't need a name. I just need to make sure
38 you're okay with somebody from the staff participating in that
39 committee that's to organize this workshop.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** You got it. It's done.

42
43 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. Thanks, everybody. Sorry I went so
44 long, but you should have never told me I had an hour. [laughter]

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We'll take a quick break. About ten
47 minutes.

1
2 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to start again. Okay. We're going
5 to get started again. Everybody, take your seats. You snooze; you
6 lose. We are back.

7
8 So next on the agenda is federal permits. So, who's Jessica?

9
10 **JESSICA STEPHEN:** Can you guys hear me okay?

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

13
14 **JESSICA STEPHEN:** Alright. Great. Thank you.
15
16 I'm going to talk to you today about permits.

17
18 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Jessica, excuse me. Do you want to
19 share your screen instead?

20
21 **JESSICA STEPHEN:** Whichever is easier.

22
23 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Thanks.

24
25 **FEDERAL PERMITS DISCUSSION - JESSICA STEPHEN, NOAA**
26 **FISHERIES/SERO**

27
28 **JESSICA STEPHEN:** Alright. Thank you. So, today, we're going to
29 pick up the topic of having permits in management. I think I spoke
30 to you all about a year ago at this point. So, just a little
31 reminder about who I am.

32
33 I work as a Branch Chief in our Data Collection Analysis Branch,
34 and I'm highly involved with our permit system and how we utilize
35 permits within management. So, this presentation is going to kind
36 of go through some of the aspects of what a permit could look like
37 in the Caribbean and how we would use it towards management. So,
38 you can move to the next slide.

39
40 So, what I want to emphasize here is that we are in the early
41 stages of considering what a permit could look like within the
42 Caribbean. When you think about how you visualize conception of a
43 project, you have the idea, you build a vision, then you end up
44 doing the research planning. And finally, you implement and then
45 evaluate what you're doing within your implementation and then
46 move forward to kind of continuously improve the cycle as you go.

47
48 So, at this point, I want to emphasize the value of the

1 collaboration and we're at the point where we're moving from the
2 idea to the vision stage. And if you want to go fast, typically,
3 you go alone. We want to make sure that we build anything that has
4 collaboration. So, if we want to go far with this, we want to work
5 together as we're moving forward. So go ahead to the next slide.

6
7 So, before I get into the example, I want to do a little bit of a
8 refresher since it's been a while since I talked to you about
9 federal permits. So, when we're thinking about federal permits,
10 they typically apply within federal waters. Anyone can obtain a
11 federal fishing permit, and that does include people as well as
12 businesses such as companies, corporations, or LLCs. When we are
13 looking at businesses, the businesses do need to be 75% owned by
14 U.S. residents.

15
16 When we're thinking about how permits work, most permits start in
17 what we call an open access permit. That means that anyone can get
18 the permit as long as they meet the requirements from the permit.
19 There are many times when a permit moves to what we call a
20 moratorium phase, and this is where we do not allow any new
21 entrants past what already had permits, and we're evaluating
22 whether the fishery can handle any additional effort within it.
23 So, again, the existing permit holders will need to be able to
24 meet the participation or catch thresholds. There are times when
25 a moratorium could move back to an open access permit if that
26 moratorium is not considered warranted. Or if it is, it typically
27 moves to what we call a limited access permit.

28
29 In that limited access permit, no new permits are created. So, in
30 order to obtain a permit, you must get one from another permit
31 holder. And there's a variety of different ways this can go. What
32 we've done in the Southeast has been traditionally buying it from
33 another permit holder, but we are also exploring other ways in
34 which it could go into a permit pool.

35
36 Oftentimes, with the limited access permit, they're trying to
37 decrease effort, and so we have terminations of permits that go
38 away for good, which slowly over time would decrease the number of
39 permits or effort allowed within that fishery. Typically, a limited
40 access permit will not move back to moratorium or an open access
41 permit. Next slide.

42
43 So here, I want to give you an idea of what the time frames can be
44 between moving between an open access to moratorium to a limited
45 access permit. So, I picked three of the different permits that we
46 have in the Gulf of Mexico. You can see between the open access
47 and the moratorium it's anywhere between two to five years has
48 been used in these examples. But moving from that moratorium to

1 limited access, typically has a longer time range. Here, we see
2 anywhere between ten to thirteen years. Some of the reasons for
3 this is you want to see what the effect is at limiting under the
4 moratorium and determine whether that full limited access is
5 actually warranted.

6
7 About limited access permits, they are specified within the
8 Magnuson-Stevens Act, and there are certain requirements for them.
9 The term limited access can mean that a system limits the
10 participation in a fishery to those who are satisfying, in
11 particular, eligibility criteria or requirements within the
12 fishery management plan. One of the key things to know is that
13 limited access systems may be established to achieve optimum yield.
14 That is generally the guiding principle that starts a permit for
15 moving from open access to limited access. Next slide.

16
17 When a Council or NOAA Fisheries are taking into consideration
18 whether to move to a limited access system, there are some key
19 questions that they need to be able to answer and capture the
20 history of. And those would include, what is the present
21 participation within the fishery? What has been the historical
22 fishing practice? And if it has a historic dependency on that
23 fishery. How do the economics of the fishery impact it? Is there
24 a capability of fishing vessels to move to another fishery to
25 engage in, particularly under the limited access system where they
26 may not have as much opportunity to get into it? What is the
27 cultural or social framework relevant to that fishery, and how
28 would it affect the fishing community to move to a limited access
29 system? And then there's a fair and equitable distribution. There
30 are also other considerations that could be considered moving
31 forward.

32
33 And you can see from these questions why limited access permits
34 are often start as an open access permit because that's what allows
35 you to get some of the information that would be driving the
36 questions of whether it should be moved to a limited access. Any
37 movement to a limited access permit would be required through a
38 fishery management plan and need to be approved by fisheries. Next
39 slide.

40
41 And then, just a few more background information before we get
42 into the heart of the presentation. Under the Magnuson-Stevens
43 Act, it does have definitions of commercial fishing and
44 recreational fishing. I want to point out that commercial fishing
45 is defined as when the fish that have been harvested are intended
46 to enter into commerce through sale, barter, or trade. Recreational
47 fishing, on other hand, is considered for sport or pleasure. And
48 there are oftentimes when people can interact under both the

1 commercial and the recreational fishing sectors. So, within the
2 purpose for data collection for us under Magnuson, you want to
3 make sure that you are standardizing the requirements for
4 information. Typically, that's information on the vessel
5 registration. We also require that fish processors, dealers, or
6 other first purchasers of fish are able to submit information to
7 meet the goals of the fishery management plan. And, of course,
8 when possible, we would like to integrate information and avoid
9 duplication of information collected. And then finally, we want to
10 make sure that all information collected remains confidential
11 according to Magnuson-Stevens's confidentiality rules. Alright.
12 Next slide.

13
14 So, now we're going to kind of get into the heart of what this
15 presentation is about. So, over the next couple slides, I'm going
16 to walk you through what an example would be of creating a
17 commercial federal permit, and I'm going to highlight where the
18 different decision points are. I want to stress that these
19 decisions are not the decisions the Council has to make in putting
20 through any federal permit. It's just showing you one pathway and
21 showing what the thoughts and considerations could be when walking
22 through them. Let's go on to the next slide.

23
24 If everyone remembers from, I think it a year ago when I did a
25 permit presentation, I talked about different types of permit
26 decisions and basically group them into six categories that you
27 see here. For this presentation, I'm going to walk you through
28 each of these different categories in the different aspects that
29 are contained within them.

30
31 So, the first one we're going to start with is permit access. Next
32 slide.

33
34 It's a little bit of a busy slide, so I'm going to take some time
35 to go through it. So, for this example, we're going to recommend
36 what I consider a commercial two permit system. That means that
37 there is a permit for the fishing or harvesting as well as a permit
38 for the buyer of the permit. And remember that commercial harvest
39 under Magnuson is that it is entering into commerce through trade,
40 or barter, or sale, and that's why we're setting up the two system.

41
42 The permit holder for the fishing permit is typically someone like
43 an operator or a captain or owner of a vessel, someone doing the
44 actual fishing. Whereas the buyer permit could include, a fish
45 dealer, a restaurant, a fishing association. We want to be a little
46 bit broad in our concept thinking here to make sure that we're
47 applying this correctly to the way fisheries and common business
48 models happen within the Caribbean. Both of the permits in and of

1 themselves do supply information to the agency for management. It
2 gives you a level of effort in general, but there's additional
3 information that can be gained that'd be very useful for management
4 based on reporting requirements for each of those permits.

5
6 So, for reporting requirements, we would also look at logbooks for
7 fishing permits. These are things that people are mostly
8 experienced with, the trip, the effort, and the catch information.
9 The buyer report would contain information on what vessel or
10 fishermen they bought from, the species, the amount of pounds, and
11 then the price per species. What's really good about this two-
12 permit system is it provides a validation already about the catch.
13 You have the independent logbook submission and then the validation
14 of the dealer report that is combined together to help ensure
15 validation of the information. So, that can be used in conjunction
16 with port samplers or other type of on the shore on the dock
17 validation as well.

18
19 And what's really good is that having this validation system helps
20 to make the data stronger for use within management or stock
21 assessments. In addition, by having both of these types of
22 information, if disaster hits, this provides valuable economic and
23 social data that can be used for disaster recoveries. So, for
24 example, during a hurricane after a disaster has been declared, we
25 have typically been able to use some of the logbook information in
26 other regions to help provide information during those disaster
27 declarations that helps the industry. Alright. Next slide.

28
29 So, one of the things I want to be careful about when considering
30 this presentation was looking at the way fishermen operate within
31 the Caribbean and trying to make sure that we're adjusting for
32 that with the concept of the permits. So, what I did here is I
33 reached out to a couple of folks, and I tried to capture what is
34 considered the common business models that occur within the
35 Caribbean. And I did a couple little icons so it can make it an
36 infographic a little bit easier to understand.

37
38 So, typically, we have the fisher. This would be for the fishing
39 permit, but that fisher might be selling the fish to a restaurant.
40 It might be selling it to a fishing association or a fish house.
41 So, there's multiple types of buyers that could be out there. The
42 fisherman himself could also be a buyer.

43
44 So, what we described in this little infographic on the left-hand
45 side, you would see the different scenarios where it's a single
46 fisherman selling to a single type of buyer, whether it's the fish
47 house, the restaurant, or a fishing association. But we also know
48 that a fisherman may sell to many fish houses or to a variety

1 different types of buyers. And those are the two grass on the upper
2 right-hand side. And then finally, there are some more complicated
3 scenarios that could occur where a fisherman might also be the
4 buyer. So, he might be submitting both the logbook and the buyer
5 report, and then he's able to sell directly to the public.

6
7 And then the final scenario that we wanted to consider was when a
8 fish house hired a fisher in order to go catch the fish and then
9 return that specifically to that fish house. So, all the catch
10 would go back to the person who, in essence, sponsored the fishing
11 trip. Next slide.

12
13 So, taking that information that I had, I wanted to kind of break
14 it up into ways that we could refer back to when we're thinking
15 about concepts. So, the first table on the left-hand side is just
16 what permits do you need to do for what activity and what would
17 you have to report? So, if you wanted to fish, you needed a fishing
18 permit, and you would have to turn in a fishing report or a logbook.
19 If you wanted to buy fish, you would need a type of buyer permit
20 and then submit a buyer report. So, how does that work with some
21 of the different scenarios I described before? And that's what the
22 next set of tables are with the infographics in it.

23
24 So, in the first one, we have a fisherman who's simply selling to
25 a fish house. The fisherman requires the fishing permit and the
26 report. And because of the restriction under Magnuson, he can only
27 sell to a buyer with a permit. So, it's going into commerce, and
28 we have someone who's eligible to receive that with the buyer
29 permit. That fisherman does not have to submit any buyer report.
30 That would be the onus would be on the buyer. The same scenario
31 works for if he's selling to a fishing association or a restaurant.
32 Apologies. I have one thing wrong in this slide. That third, sell
33 down that should also say could only go to a buyer with a permit.

34
35 But let's also take the example from a restaurant's point of view.
36 If a restaurant is buying directly from a fisherman, they would
37 potentially need to have a buyer permit and submit a buyer report.
38 If that restaurant did not wish to do so, they could then buy from
39 a fishing house or fishing association that first purchased the
40 fish. Or if the fisherman was willing, the fisherman could be both
41 the buyer as well as the harvester and then sell the fish to the
42 restaurant. And so, the point here is that we want to kind of
43 consider the different ways in which the businesses operate and
44 make sure we had enough leniency that we were working with in those
45 ways. Alright. Next slide.

46
47 So, that's covered the permit access, and what we'll go on to next
48 is the purpose and need. Next slide.

1
2 So, what we did here is worked up an intent for a purpose and need
3 that would follow similar to what you would see in an amendment.
4 And we did take a look at some of the other fisheries that out
5 there, in particularly the Caribbean small boat fishery and looked
6 at their purpose and need.

7
8 So, in this example, the need would be to improve the U.S.
9 Caribbean catch and fishing effort data, make sure that we are
10 tailoring management strategies to that region, and to get a
11 further understanding of the fishery to improve our capability to
12 monitor the commercial fishery. The purpose would be to enact
13 management measures that correspond with the traditional
14 operations of a small boat fishing fleet in the U.S. Caribbean to
15 provide NOAA Fisheries with improved capability to monitor and
16 sustainably manage those fisheries.

17
18 When you're thinking about going out for a purpose and need,
19 there's probably a couple of scoping questions that you might want
20 to ask as you're leaning towards what would be the specific in
21 purpose and need for any permit. And some of those questions could
22 be, how many fishermen are already harvesting that species are
23 complex? Where do they tend to sell their catch? How often do they
24 fish within that species are complex and what quantity is landed?
25 Do they fish in other complexes or for other species? What's the
26 value of the fishery that you intend to put a permit on? And do
27 you anticipate participation changing or has it changed in the
28 past? Alright. Next slide.

29
30 So, the next one we're going to go to is the idea of permit scope.
31 Next slide.

32
33 So, permit scope's a little bit of a difficult concept to try and
34 put together. And so, what I wanted to explain is that when we're
35 thinking of the scope, that means what does the permit encompass?
36 What are the things that are being limited or being applied to
37 within it? So, when I think of the permit scope, I think about is
38 a permit for a particular sector, for a particular gear, for a
39 particular species or complex, or a fishing area. Those are all
40 different things that would be embedded within the concept of the
41 permit scope. And so, for here, what it is, I mocked out a couple
42 of different scopes that would be for this two-permit system.

43
44 So, for the federal fishing permit, it would be applying only to
45 the commercial sector. That means that all of the catch must be
46 sold, traded, or bartered. It would be only valid for fishing in
47 sales within the Caribbean. One of the things that we picked up
48 from the HMS is, potentially, we would want to have a permit that

1 could not be held in combination with certain other federal
2 commercial permits. And so, for this example, I just picked the
3 deepwater snapper complex because we've spoken about it at meetings
4 before. And, therefore, because that's the species, the permit
5 could not be held in combination with any other commercial snapper
6 permits. So, that would include snapper permits for the South
7 Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico.

8
9 And then the fishing area would be within the EEZ with the fishing
10 gear of the buoy gear type. Because of the traditional scope of
11 the fisheries, we would want to limit the vessel length
12 restriction, particularly to probably traditional side vessels
13 that are used within the Caribbean. And at this point in time, we
14 weren't considering any retention or size limits for the fishing
15 permit.

16
17 For the buyer permit, it's a little bit less of a scope in general.
18 That's the person who would buy the commercial fish that would
19 come off the boat. And in this, again, we just happen to use the
20 deepwater snapper complex as an example. It would be the person
21 who would first receive that catch. And if you were looking at an
22 area, we could do something such as limited to the Puerto Rico
23 FMP. And, again, I want to stress this is not an example
24 specifically for that. I just wanted to use a fishery that would
25 kind of have some idea of how it's used and a little bit more
26 complex and just a kind of a shadow fishery or a thought of a
27 fishery. Next slide.

28
29 The next concept we're going to talk about is the permit unit.
30 Next slide.

31
32 So, the permit unit is what does that permit apply to? And this is
33 of a particular interest within the fishing permit. So, the fishing
34 permit, we have seen applied to vessels, to a person, or to a
35 combination of a vessel and entity together, or vessel and person
36 or vessel and business. So, when you're considering what you want
37 to apply the permit unit to, the FMP should consider, again, that
38 purpose and needs. Think about the questions you're asking. Think
39 about the way traditional fisheries have worked. These should
40 definitely be a topic that's scoped out when you're interacting
41 with the fishing industry to determine what would be the best
42 objective for the permit unit.

43
44 So, for the buyer permit, this is more simplistic. Typically, we
45 would say it'd be any person or business. Again, they would have
46 to still hit Magnuson of being a business with 75% ownership. By
47 having a kind of broader scope to the buyer unit, it allows the
48 fishing associations, the restaurants, or an individual person or

1 a buyer in order to be able to obtain that permit and then receive
2 the commercially harvested fish. In this example, what we decided
3 to choose were the unit for the fishing permit was just the
4 operator, the person operating the vessel. So, what that means is
5 when you start collecting permits and logbooks, you have history
6 of what the landings were. That history would go with the operator.
7 The operator would be the responsible party regardless of what
8 vessel they use. And typically, because we do need to know
9 information about the vessel in their application for their fishing
10 permit, we might require them to list the different vessels they
11 anticipate using. Next slide.

12
13 Alright. So, the next two categories I'm cover together, and that's
14 the permit eligibility and the permit limitations, and I'll cover
15 those over the next few slides. Next slide.

16
17 So, when we're thinking about permit eligibility, we want to think
18 about who could get a fishing permit. Typically, we will use a
19 type of permit application that someone will fill out information
20 in order to apply. Again, under National Standard 4, anyone would
21 be eligible. As an example, I use the fee that regional office
22 currently has for a fishing application, and that's \$25. Keep in
23 mind that if more permits are put into the Caribbean, that one
24 application could be used for more than one type of permit.

25
26 What type of information do we collect on that permit application?
27 So, we do collect information that identifies the individual, such
28 as name, birth date, social security number, and demographics. And
29 that's in order so that we can fulfill information for our social
30 science section of the amendments. We also gather information about
31 where we can contact them, address and phone number and email, and
32 then information about the vessel that they wish to use. So, that
33 would be the state registration or U.S. Coast Guard if they're
34 registered that way. Who is the owner of the vessel? What are some
35 of the characteristics about the vessel? Particularly vessel
36 length since that would be one of the defining criteria in who
37 could obtain a permit.

38
39 Permits are typically good for within one year and I wouldn't see
40 any need to change that at this point. But the permit renewal could
41 be dependent on ensuring that the reporting compliance occurs. So,
42 that means that they're submitting their logbooks, and the logbooks
43 are accurate. And those are the types of information we're looking
44 to make sure that we're gathering the correct information to use
45 in management.

46
47 And then, there could be limitations that we might instill for the
48 permit. So, for an example, it might be that the permit holder

1 must be on the vessel in order to use that permit. For example,
2 we'd said the vessel size, so this permit would be only valid on
3 vessels less than 45 feet. And, of course, the permit limitations
4 would be that you have completed the application and the fee in
5 order to receive your permit. A lot of times, we also have a
6 requirement to have the permit onboard the vessel. Alright. And
7 next slide.

8
9 So, let's go through the same kind of thought process thinking
10 about a buyer permit. Once again, the buyer permit would have a
11 person or a or a fishing association that would apply for the
12 permit. Again, I put in the fee that we use right now at SERO. It
13 doesn't mean that these are the fees that we have to keep, but,
14 currently, a buyer permit goes for \$50 and it's very specific to
15 a fishery management plan in which one you're using to go with the
16 fishing permits. Similarly, the permit application information has
17 similar identifying information and contact information. One of
18 the things we might want to consider is where do you expect to
19 receive the fish at? So, for a restaurant, they would list the
20 restaurant. A fishing association might list a certain dock or
21 area where they would receive things, say, likewise for a buyer or
22 dealer.

23
24 Once again, the permit renewal would be contingent upon reporting
25 compliance that the reports are submitted and accurate and that
26 they are abiding by only buying commercial fishing for that permit,
27 for the species in that permit, from someone who holds a commercial
28 fishing permit. And the limitations here are a little bit less
29 stringent. It would be completion of the permit application and
30 fee. And there might be other permit limitations you might
31 determine through scoping and gathering information from the
32 industry. Next slide.

33
34 So, I want to give an example of the types of information that
35 would be required on the report for both the fishing permit and
36 the buyer permit. Under the fishing permit, we would have
37 information relating to that permit, vessel information, who was
38 the operator. And then for the actual logbook, what we tend to do
39 is group information in a way that you don't have to repeat
40 information when you're doing it. So, the first level of
41 information would be trip information. Where were you fishing?
42 When were you fishing? What area were you fishing?

43
44 Next comes the effort information. What types of number of fishers,
45 of gear or hooks, relating to effort. And then finally, underneath
46 that would be the catch information. This would be all the species
47 that you caught. So, we would have both landed and discarded. And
48 there's always a potential to add discard condition if that's of

1 concern within that fishery.

2
3 On the buyer permit, the information we would require on that buyer
4 report would be, who the buyer is, the location where they bought
5 the fish, information of who they bought the fish from. So, either
6 that fishing permit number, the operator, vessel, potentially a
7 logbook number so we can match the two reports together. The number
8 of species landed both in pounds and number and then what we
9 consider the commercial ex-vessel price per species. That's
10 typically a price per pound for that species. Alright. Next slide.

11
12 And one thing I wanted to touch on, towards the end of this
13 presentation here is what is considered MSA confidentiality. And
14 so, I want to put it in a little bit plain language rather than
15 reading the language within the act. Typically, data submitted by
16 a fisherman to the secretary of state fishery management agency or
17 commission cannot be disclosed without the request or falling under
18 certain exemptions. And those exemptions are what you've expect to
19 see. So, it'd federal employees that are working with the data.
20 Sometimes we work with state or commission employees that are
21 subject to a confidentiality agreement and therefore can see that
22 confidential information.

23
24 A court order is also another way for someone to gain access. It
25 would need a very specific reason. If a fisherman gives us written
26 authorization to share it, we can. And then finally, information
27 that might be needed in support of homeland and national security
28 activities is an exemption to the confidentiality.

29
30 Otherwise, when we're sharing the data, we follow what we call the
31 rule of three. That means there really used to be used needs to be
32 at least three submissions or entities necessary for us to share
33 that data. We aggregate up so that you can't tell individual
34 business information.

35
36 Information that we share cannot directly or indirectly disclose
37 the identity or business of any one individual person. And we do
38 aggregate it so that we can share that information. We don't do
39 this simply by stripping off identifiers. We actually aggregate
40 and show the averages or summation values over a time period or a
41 spatial area. Alright. Next slide.

42
43 So, the next steps that I want the Council to consider is thinking
44 about directed scoping. What type of scoping would be required
45 before we can begin working on amendment? What questions do you
46 have about this presentation that can help lead towards that
47 scoping? I would consider using small in-person focus groups. I
48 know that's a little bit difficult now with the way the budget has

1 come out, and potentially there are other ways you can do those
2 smaller focus groups to gather information. Is there particularly
3 qualitative information about the fishery that we would need to
4 gather? How many fish would be in the complex that you're thinking
5 about or is it an individual species? How many fishermen are
6 dependent upon that species or complex? Where are those different
7 fishermen located?

8
9 And then the last is to think about unintended consequences of a
10 permit requirement. If you have a permit requirement and someone
11 doesn't want to obtain the permit or doesn't meet those eligibility
12 requirements, would they shift effort to another fishery or another
13 species or complex? How would new participants join into the
14 fishery once a permit is in place? And what could be the potential
15 economic impact of a permit requirement?

16
17 And I believe that is all I have. You can do the next slide, which
18 I think is just my question slide. And I'm willing to take any
19 questions anyone has.

20 21 **Questions/Comments**

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nelson?

24
25 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your
26 presentation. So, I'm curious because in Puerto Rico, we have,
27 right, now a deepwater snapper permit for state waters. How are
28 the federal agencies going to monitor the permits for the fishers
29 who are going to develop this fishing in federal waters?

30
31 **JESSICA STEPHEN:** Yeah. So, that's a great question. When we're
32 thinking about kind of enforcement, obviously, the breadth of law
33 enforcement ability to do on what our enforcement is probably not
34 as great as we would like within it. Some of the ways you could
35 solve that is by having at dock enforcement, where you're looking
36 for that permit and try and identify where someone said they were
37 fishing. Granted with species that cross state to federal
38 boundaries, that does become a little bit more difficult. And the
39 other would be for NOAA Fisheries in the state to interact together
40 and work together to come up to a solution so that we are ensuring
41 that we're enforcing what permit is applicable in what waters.

42
43 In other regions, I think sometimes the state has said in order to
44 fish state waters, you also need a federal permit. That may not
45 always be the case or an avenue we want to go down. That would be
46 a question I would want to scope out as we go through the permits
47 to make sure that we're not creating loopholes for people to get
48 through.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Jessica? Andy?
3

4 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yes, so not a question. First, thank you,
5 Jessica, for an excellent presentation. I know there's been a lot
6 of kind of stop and start conversations with permits in the
7 Caribbean for quite some time. So, Jessica's obviously given you
8 a very high-level overview of all of the ways that a permit may or
9 may not be used, right, or considered. Permits are frequently used
10 in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico for a variety of purposes,
11 including improvements in data collection, limiting fishing
12 effort, all the things that Jessica talked about.
13

14 So, I guess really what we're looking for as a next step is, is
15 there an appetite to pursue permitting in the Caribbean? And if
16 so, for kind of what purpose or even if we don't know what purpose
17 at this point, you know, taking the next step of going out to
18 scoping and getting some feedback and input from fishermen.
19

20 As Nelson, you know, rightly noted, right, there's a lot of
21 challenges with permitting in terms of enforceability. I know
22 that's one of the reasons why Puerto Rico DNR made some changes to
23 their snapper permit already. And so, we want to be very thoughtful
24 and careful if we are going work towards standing up a permit
25 system that we give kind of consideration upfront to what that
26 true purpose and need would be for that permit going forward.
27

28 The last thing I'll note and then certainly turn it back for
29 Council input is with the new Executive Order with regard to
30 deregulatory work, right, one of the questions I've asked is, you
31 know, are these things that we as an agency should be talking to
32 the Council about not pursuing, right? Kind of stopping from this
33 get go because this is a regulation, these are regulatory
34 requirements. And at the end of day, no, this is Council decision,
35 right? Council business. You ultimately can decide, you know, how
36 you want to proceed, but it might be a decision later in the
37 process where this would be deemed obviously a regulation and
38 something that we would have to consider based on what talked about
39 earlier this morning with regard to cost of implementation, the
40 burden on the industry. But it's certainly under your purview to
41 proceed now if you'd like to.
42

43 So, I'll open it up for other thoughts in terms of whether there's
44 even appetite interest to pursue a permit at this time.
45

46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?
47

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

1 record. I will put these comments on the table first.

2
3 Of course, as we know, we have the small Caribbean fishing boat,
4 but how many of our fishermen really get that permit? First, we
5 know that the language is something that is always on that. The
6 applications are in English. Most of our fishermen do not have the
7 ability to read or complete that application. Also, now that they
8 change for it to be applied on the Internet, some of them also
9 can't do it.

10
11 So, if we make the exercise of how many fishermen are right now
12 fishing out in the state waters and have that permit and we compare
13 that with trying to put another permit, maybe, as Nelson says, we
14 won't have enough enforcement either. What's the reason of why we
15 want more permits or more regulations if we will not be able to
16 have that enforcement, not only in waters, also in land for the
17 buyers and for the dealers.

18
19 That's something that we have been working on for a long time, and
20 we know that not even the state nor the federal government have
21 enough enforcement for that. I don't think that this is the time
22 to continue with the permits, at least for now. I will suggest
23 making more scoping on this.

24
25 As a representative of the Commercial Fisherman Association, one
26 of the biggest areas of fishing in the West Side of Puerto Rico,
27 we have the biggest platform out there. But from my knowledge,
28 only have five commercial fishermen that get a federal permit. So,
29 I don't think that we should put this as a priority right now.
30 Thanks.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anym-- Graciela?

33
34 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Jessica, I have a question regarding the
35 Small Caribbean Fishing Vessel Permit. So, for the people that
36 have that, how easily can they also get any other kind of permit?
37 If we were going to start backwards, instead of, you know, putting
38 a permit out for deepwater snappers or whatever, let's start with
39 the ones that already have the permit and work it backwards. Does
40 that make any sense?

41
42 Because they've already gone through the application process.
43 They're already in the system. They probably fish for many other
44 species. So, maybe we should investigate that permit and what other
45 species they are harvesting, because they are also probably part
46 of the deepwater snapper fishery, probably part of the reef fish
47 fishery and the lobster fishery.

48

1 **JESSICA STEPHEN:** So yeah. So, because that permit's already within
2 the SERO permit system, the way, if you want to kind of work from
3 that and to expand it, I would suggest then that you do the permit
4 in the same manner as applying to the entity and vessel, not just
5 an operator.

6
7 If they already have a permit application within our permit system,
8 it only costs \$10 more, currently, to add another permit to that.
9 So, that same application could be applied to multiple different
10 permits if you want to expand past the Caribbean small boat permit.
11 And I believe we currently have around, over the years, between 50
12 to a hundred people applying for the Caribbean Small Boat Permit.
13 It has seemed to increase in recent years, but I'd need to double
14 check those numbers, before I consider that official.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

17
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We want to know what is the pleasure of the
19 Council regarding permits, following Vanessa's suggestion. The
20 other thing is you have to first determine why you need a permit.
21 We've been talking about this question for a long time.

22
23 Also, with a new Executive Order, as we said before, we need to
24 wait until the guidance comes in. As Andy said, at this time, it
25 is the Councils prerogative to have a permit or not. Doesn't mean
26 that it would be approved at the end of the process because the
27 Secretary may have another directive, no more payments, period.
28 That's it. But the Council needs to decide to do we have a need
29 for a permit?

30
31 Usually, a permit is to count numbers and the number of fishers.
32 So, you can have a sampling that is representative of the fishery.
33 To preclude people to go into a fishery that you don't want them
34 to go, to establish limited entries, etcetera. So, you need to
35 first decide why you need a permit and then start to put together
36 something that will give you some information as to why you need
37 a permit.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, Andy. Yeah. I just want to-- I think I saw
40 in the slide that the permits can go not for fishing only, but for
41 gear also. So, you can have a permit just for gear? Yeah. Alright.
42 Okay.

43
44 I just want to clarify that because we do have a limited entry in
45 trap fishery in state water. That's not been approved in EEZ yet.
46 And I'm just wondering if maybe we should be thinking about that
47 in the future, a permit system for that. I'm not really sure yet.

48

1 Andy?

2
3 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. So, I mean, we've talked about a number
4 of reasons. Maybe why not a permit, right? So, agree with Vanessa,
5 right? There are certainly some challenges that we'd have to think
6 through in terms of requiring a permit and some of the hurdles
7 we'd have to overcome, translation being one of those, obviously
8 enforceability being another.

9
10 I feel like right now we don't really have a good purpose of why
11 we're wanting to pursue a permit. With that said, spend a lot of
12 time around this table as well talking about ways to improve data
13 collection. So, everyone wants better data, and the permitting can
14 oftentimes lead to better data because you're tying the permitting
15 to better data collection, so it's kind a double-edged sword. But
16 I feel like until the Council has kind of a stronger purpose and
17 need and really has kind of thought through some of the challenges
18 like Vanessa and others have mentioned, that we probably shouldn't
19 consider this a priority for now.

20
21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, another question. So, the government
22 of Puerto Rico, the DNER has a permitting system in place for
23 lobster, conch, some other species, etcetera. Maybe, after what
24 Kevin was saying about looking at all the data that we have already
25 available to see how that fits into, you know, people who are
26 fishing with a permit and providing information, people who are
27 fishing without a permit and not providing information. This kind
28 of input into analysis of the data, it's extremely important
29 because if you're already regulating your fishers with a permit,
30 we need to know how they are complying with that permit. And that's
31 not an increase in enforcement, but it's an increase in in analysis
32 power. So, you know, you would have to sit down and dig through it
33 and see how that works out.

34
35 So, we already have that in place. We've been also talking about
36 compatibility of regulations. That's another thing to bring up.

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not to extend the discussion, but we also need
39 to make a decision between commercial fishing license and a permit.
40 They are not the same thing. The statisticians and the people that
41 have been discussing this-- Puerto Rico has both. They have a
42 commercial fishing license and we also have a permit. The reason
43 why we did not adopt the license system of Puerto Rico is because
44 they discriminate about resident or non-residents and the federal
45 government told us, you cannot do that.

46
47 In order for us to adopt the local license of Puerto Rico as the
48 federal license, you have to overcome that hurdle. At that time,

1 the government of Puerto Rico told us, "No, we want to keep it the
2 way it is now." That was when Roy Crabtree was the Regional
3 Administrator. Since that time, we have been talking about this
4 issue. So, Mr. Chairman, are we going to follow then what Vanessa
5 and Andy are saying and table this for a while or pursue it a
6 little bit further?

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Well, I just wanted a little clarity here
9 because when it comes to the buyer permit, I think I got a little
10 confused there. Is this like the tuna permit that if you have a
11 tuna permit, you have got to have a dealer's permit to sell the
12 catch? Or is that hand in hand? Or is it like mandate? Or can you
13 just have a permit to fish, and you can just sell to anybody
14 without a dealer's permit?

15
16 **DELISSE M. ORTIZ:** This is Delisse from HMS. I can answer that
17 question. Yes, it's similar. So, for example, for the Atlantic
18 Tunas General Category or Atlantic Tuna Swordfish, you have to
19 sell your product to a federally permitted dealer, and there's
20 different types of dealers' permit. We have a tuna dealer permit
21 or a swordfish dealer permit or a shark dealer permit. So,
22 depending on what product you're buying, you have to have each of
23 those dealer permits.

24
25 In the case of the commercial Caribbean small boat permit, that is
26 the only commercial HMS permit that doesn't have that requirement.
27 Folks who have that permit are both the fisherman and the dealer.
28 And they submit the reports to the territories, like, you know,
29 state fishermen would do.

30
31 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, like Miguel, I don't want to prolong the
32 discussion too long. I think, you know, we got an answer in that,
33 like, a lot of this data is already being collected at the
34 territorial level. There's also a lot of stuff going in place to
35 address a lot of the data limitations; that was the original
36 reasoning for looking at this possible permit. Both an increase in
37 port sampling that's designed at the territorial level and then a
38 recreational licensing system, at least, currently, that we're
39 developing for the U.S.V.I. with Puerto Rico with plans to try and
40 implement as well. They will allow for increased data collection
41 from the for-hire recreational sectors that are targeting the fish
42 that are mostly in the EEZ, which are mostly HMS species. I think
43 what we really have to do is identify what would be the benefit in
44 developing this.

45
46 One of the benefits may be, and I don't know this, but if there
47 are additional resources that can come from the federal government
48 in developing these current systems by creating a licensing system,

1 then that would be useful, right? If we can-- I think the problem
2 becomes is if we create too many systems that the fishermen need
3 to use, right? It has taken a long time to get them at the level
4 for developing, you know, consistent catch reporting through our
5 CCR system, as well as being available to do the port sampling
6 system.

7
8 There is a reason why there isn't a logbook requirement for the
9 Caribbean small boat permit. There is a reason why there isn't a
10 dealer requirement for the small boat permit. And so, if we're
11 developing another federal system, rather than trying to expand
12 the territorial systems that we've already developed to do this,
13 I believe that it will create more of a headache and take away
14 from the resources that we desperately need.

15
16 However, if there is counterpoint to that, that I am unaware of,
17 please, somebody, I think they should talk about that now.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo?

20
21 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I remember at the beginning
22 when we started talking about the federal permits, it was because
23 we had a lot of people developing the deepwater snapper fisheries
24 in federal water. But the reality, the small boat permit for tuna,
25 right now, some guys have it, some guys don't. They sell the tuna
26 to everyone due to lack of enforcement. They don't care.

27
28 And I start, you know, driving in my mind if it's worse to establish
29 another federal permit. I would love to have a federal permit for
30 the deepwater snapper fishery, but, to be honest with you, if this
31 cannot be monitored, because we don't have the enforcement, it's
32 going to turn academic. That is the reality, and that is the truth.

33
34 And now with this Executive Order and everybody knows that NOAA is
35 cutting funds from everywhere, I don't see that we are going to
36 have a good group of informant agency in a short time.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other input? So, so far, I'm hearing that
39 nobody's interested in following through with the permits for now.
40 Is that what I'm gathering?

41
42 Okay. So, I would need a motion to table the federal permit system.
43 Do I need it?

44
45 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Have we made a motion to move forward with the
46 permit? No. We don't need a table it. No.

47
48 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Right. Yeah. If there's no motion, you just

1 move on for lack of a motion.

2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We'll do that. Next on the agenda is a
4 response to the Saint Thomas Fisher Association Questions
5 Regarding Grammanik Bank Management. That'd be Sarah Stephenson.

6
7 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hello. Can you hear me okay?

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.

10
11 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. Cristina, can I drive it, please?

12
13 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Yes. You can. Let me make you a
14 co-host.

15
16 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** I'm sorry just for the record. Thank you,
17 Jessica, for all your effort and the presentation.

18
19 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Can you see my screen with the cover page?

20
21 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.

22
23 **RESPONSE TO ST. THOMAS FISHERS ASSOCIATION QUESTIONS REGARDING**
24 **GRAMMANIK BANK MANAGEMENT - SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA**
25 **FISHERIES/SERO**
26

27 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. Thank you, everybody. I know it is the
28 end of the day. This isn't a very long document, so I'm just going
29 to get right to it.

30
31 At the December meeting, Mr. Magras reminded us that there was
32 this list of questions that the Saint Thomas Fisherman's
33 Association had put together in response to the Nemeth et al. paper
34 and presentation that was received at a previous Council meeting.
35 So, this is just us going through and trying to answer as best we
36 could those questions that they had put together. So, I'm just
37 going to go right through them.

38
39 Number one, what was the total landings recorded from the area
40 referred to as the alleyway? And so just to set the stage, we
41 define the alleyway in this document as the area that's between
42 our Grammanik Bank management area and the Hind Bank Marine
43 Conservation District. So, it's kind of, if you can see my cursor
44 spinning around, it's this oval here. So, that's figure one. So,
45 first of all, that's where we're setting this stage.

46
47 And then just a quick background information. So, before July of
48 2021, the Saint Thomas and Saint John commercial catch report forms

1 included boxes or zones for commercial fishermen to report the
2 areas where they fished. And you can see that in figure two on the
3 left-hand side, the TNW, TNE, TSE, and TSW. So, there was four
4 zones to report all fishing. The Hind Bank, it's a little hard to
5 see. Sorry about that. The Hind Bank, MCD, and the Grammanik Bank
6 are outlined in green there, and the Hind Bank is completely in
7 zone TSW. Grammanik Bank straddles TSW and TSE, and the alleyway
8 area would have been, also, probably in TSW.

9
10 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Excuse me, Sarah.

11
12 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yes.

13
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Can you make it bigger? Can you do a
15 close-up of the text?

16
17 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yes. Sorry. Is that better?

18
19 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Way better. Thank you.

20
21 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Okay. Sorry about that.

22
23 So, after July of 2011, the commercial catch report forms started
24 using a 2.5-square mile grid, and, that, you can see in the image
25 figure number three on the right-hand side. And so, each little
26 two-by-two square mile has a letter numerical code. And so, now,
27 after that day, the fishers started reporting by multiple zones.
28 So, you went from four zones to lots.

29
30 For this analysis to answer these questions where we're really
31 just concerned about that alleyway area, we looked at cells O19
32 and O20. We only looked at years 2014 to 2022 because the other
33 data that we had included confidential landings for that alleyway
34 area, so we're just using those years. And then, we are working
35 with regional partners to try to develop a GIS shapefile that has
36 the management areas as well as these two-by-two zones perfectly.
37 We don't have that yet or at least SERO didn't have it at the time
38 this document was prepared.

39
40 And so, to show you the analysis zones, Grammanik Bank is probably
41 on this slant here at the bottom of O19 and O20, and then the MCD
42 is going to be closer to cells O16 through O18. So, we really just
43 kind of pulled out all the landings that had that were in O19 and
44 O20, and we looked at that. So, that's what I'm going to-- pretty
45 much all of the data that we discuss in this document is going to
46 be for those two cells.

47
48 For the 2014 to the 2022 period, there was a little over 3,000,000

1 total pounds reported by commercial fishermen for everywhere, all
2 areas, all zones, and approximately 92,000 of that or 2.9% were
3 reported from the alleyway area from those two cells. I'll show
4 you a table in a minute that has that breakdown. During that same
5 period, almost all of that poundage caught in the alleyway area
6 was reported using trap gear. So, about 90.7%, 84,000 pounds in
7 the alleyway, using trap gear. Just to give you an idea, the
8 average number of cells that was reported during that time, was
9 about 144. So, we are looking at two cells out of 144 for this,
10 what is that, eight-year period.

11
12 For that same period, a substantial portion were recorded in
13 January, February, and March. So, here's the percentage of that
14 breakdown of the total landings reported in the alleyway area.
15 About 18, almost 20% were reported in January, and then another
16 almost 20% in February and March. The top species that were
17 reported in that area during this time included queen triggerfish
18 at 20.7% of the 92,000 pounds, red hind, spiny lobster, yellowtail
19 snapper, white grunt, and gray angelfish. So, you can see the
20 percentages start decreasing. There were a lot more, but we didn't
21 really include anything that was really below, about 4%.

22
23 So, of the 84,000 pounds that were reported with trap gear,
24 approximately 2% of those were the seasonal groupers. So, just to
25 remind you, these five groupers have a seasonal closure that starts
26 February 1st and goes through April 30th, and so you're not allowed
27 to catch those species in federal waters during that time. So, it
28 does show that, you know, not a lot were reported during that time.
29 So, there's high compliance, it looks like, from the landings.

30
31 And then this is just the table that shows breakdown by year. The
32 total sum during-- this is all-- oh, sorry. The column, the second
33 column is the universe of fishers during that time period and all
34 the landings that were reported. So, you can see down here that
35 the total number matches that just 3,000,000 pounds. That's for
36 all zones. And then if you look at just the alleyway, just those
37 two cells, the number reduces to nine fishers, tops, and you can
38 see those 92,000 pounds of landings.

39
40 And then if you even reduce it or filter it more to trap gear, you
41 know, an average of four fishers fishing trap gear in that area at
42 the 84,000 pounds. So, this is just kind of your summary table.
43 And this is reported from the Science Center commercial landings,
44 and it was accessed back in January this year.

45
46 The next question the fisherman had was how many fishers recorded
47 landings from the alleyway area? So, you can see here in this table

1 for that 2014 to 2022 period, it ranged from five to nine with an
2 average of 7.1 or seven fishermen. And then during that same
3 period, the number of fishermen using trap gear range from three
4 to five with an average of four fishermen.

5
6 The next question was how many traps were recorded in the alleyway
7 area and what month of the year? And then just again, a little bit
8 of background. There was a fish trap reduction program for U.S.V.I.
9 commercial fishermen, which became effective in August of 2017.
10 So, under that program, the maximum number of fish traps that each
11 commercial fisherman, in the Saint Thomas/Saint John District, can
12 possess is 250. So, shortly after the program was implemented, we
13 also had the two hurricanes, the bad year of which Hurricane Irma
14 passed directly over Saint Thomas and Saint John, and so a lot of
15 those commercial trap gear were lost.

16
17 So, for this document then to answer this question, we refined the
18 years, and we're really only looking at now 2019 to 2022. So,
19 trying to get after that trap reduction was implemented and the
20 hurricanes. So, to answer the question, from the landings data,
21 the total number of fish traps deployed in the alleyway area for
22 the four-month period, meaning, January through-- I'm sorry. Four
23 years. I said months. Four-year period. So, '19 to '22 is four
24 years. It ranged between 0 and 685.

25
26 There were a larger number of traps deployed in January through
27 March, an average of 417 traps. Commercial fishermen place traps
28 in the alleyway where the groupers are spawning when they're
29 spawning, sorry, December through March, because other fish that
30 they target, for example, queen triggerfish, move into the area to
31 eat the grouper eggs, and that's personal communication with Mr.
32 Magras. So, that kind of explains why we have a larger number of
33 traps, deployed during that year. And then if you remember back to
34 the landings, a larger number of landings during those three
35 months.

36
37 During the four-year period, fish traps were present in the
38 alleyway area every month from January through June. In the second
39 half of the year, or July through December, the number of fish
40 traps present in the alleyway area was less consistent, and there
41 were no traps reported in 11 of the 24 months during, so six months
42 times four years is 24 months. So, out of those, 11 of those months
43 had no traps reported in that area. And, again, based on personal
44 communication, the number of traps deployed in the area kind of
45 varies depending on the availability of the species that they're
46 fishing for.

47
48 The next question was what data is there to substantiate that

1 nassau grouper solely traveled to and from the closed areas during
2 the spawning season via the alleyway. Just a quick, over this 2014
3 to 2022 period, a small amount of nassau grouper was reported on
4 the catch forms as caught and discarded. However, none of those
5 incidental catches were recorded in the alleyway. So, none occurred
6 in Cells 19 or 20.

7
8 Landings of grouper species that are subject to the seasonal
9 closure. So, red, black, tiger, yellowfin, and a yellowedge
10 reported in the alleyway area between 2014 and 2022 with fish trap
11 gear were approximately a thousand pounds, nearly all of which
12 were reported during the open season. So, again, that shows high
13 compliance with seasonal closure. As shown back in table one, the
14 total amount of commercial landings reported during the time period
15 was about 84,000 pounds. So, the seasonal groupers comprise a small
16 percentage of the species caught in this area with this type of
17 gear.

18
19 At the 169th Council meeting in June of 2020, staff from the
20 University of Virgin Islands presented research results on the
21 abundance of nassau grouper observed at Grammanik Bank over a 70-
22 year period. And I've put here the link to the presentation if
23 you'd like to go back and look at it. During those dive surveys,
24 the number of nassau grouper per dive increased from less than 40
25 in 2004 to over 500 per dive in 2020. A steady increase over the
26 seventeen-year period that highlights the effectiveness of
27 management measures and fisher compliance with those measures. I
28 did kind of grab notes from the transcript, so a lot of this is
29 directly from that presentation.

30
31 The presentation included a map with acoustic receiver locations
32 and movements of tagged nassau grouper. The grouper spent most of
33 the time inside Grammanik Bank, but in between spawning events and
34 during the day, they would occasionally migrate towards the Hind
35 Bank MCD, which was four kilometers away, using a corridor along
36 the southern edge to go back and forth between the two management
37 areas. And then additionally, at the December 2023 Council meeting,
38 Dr. Nemeth with the University of Virgin Islands presented again
39 on the status of nassau grouper in the U.S.V.I. highlighting
40 results from the Territorial Coral Reef Monitoring Program and the
41 2023 telemetry study that was just published.

42
43 So, from those, acoustic tagging studies have shown connectivity
44 between the two management areas. Nemeth et al. also reported that
45 nassau and yellowfin grouper used two of the three fifty-meter
46 parallel reefs that run East/West between Grammanik Bank and the
47 Hind Bank MCD. The yellowfin grouper mostly used the reef farthest
48 from the shelf edge, while the nassau used the reef that was

1 approximately 300 to 500 meters north of the shelf edge.
2
3 The reef running along the shelf edge was not used by any tagged
4 fish that they observed. And then the two species, nassau and
5 yellowfin, spent an average of 75% and 44% of their time,
6 respectively, within the Grammanik Bank closure. So, nassau, 75%
7 in the closure, and then yellowfin, 44% of their time in the
8 closure.
9
10 Another study by Rowell et al. found that from 2007 to 2012, 64%
11 of nassau and 76% of yellowfin migrated from Grammanik to the Hind
12 Bank MCD. And I have a figure taken directly from that manuscript.
13 I'll show you in a moment. The Nemeth et al. study further
14 highlighted the pathways that nassau grouper used between
15 Grammanik and the historic nassau spawning site in the MCD during
16 the spawning season. And, again, I pulled a figure directly from
17 that manuscript that I'll show you.
18
19 The pathways indicate a wide use of areas outside the spawning
20 aggregation site, which is in Grammanik Bank. And then several of
21 these pathways can be observed in the alleyway area between
22 Grammanik Bank and Hind Bank. They were probably looking at a
23 broader region than our cells O19 and O20, but it's the same area
24 that we're discussing. Nemeth et al. calculated that nassau grouper
25 was located in Grammanik Bank about 65% of the time during the
26 spawning season. The remaining time the fish were actively
27 migrating to and from the spawning sites, staging areas, and
28 temporary resident sites.
29
30 So, the next is the figure that Rowell et al. included, and it
31 shows the migration pathways of yellowfin grouper, which is this
32 white arrowed line between the two management areas, and then
33 nassau grouper, which is the black arrowed line. So, again, the
34 shelf edge, the yellowfin used the pathway, the corridor farthest
35 from the shelf edge, and you can see here nassau grouper is
36 slightly closer to the shelf edge. And I guess they didn't observe
37 any fish using the one closest to the shelf edge.
38
39 The black circles represent the location of receivers, and then
40 the white triangles represent the passive acoustic recorders. And
41 then they do have the percentage of time that they observe the
42 fish. So, yellowfin was near this one 76% of the time, and nassau
43 grouper, 64%. So, that all came directly from that paper
44 highlighting the migration of these two species between these two
45 management areas.
46
47 And then, here's the figure from the Nemeth et al. 2023, which
48 illustrates similarly the pathways used by tagged nassau grouper

1 between the Grammanik Bank, which is the smaller gray box and the
2 Hind Bank MCD. And then the red cells kind of indicate the receiver
3 locations and the size of the circle is how much they actually
4 recorded. So, those two papers highlight very well the research
5 that's shown that these species do migrate to and from these two
6 management areas using the alleyway.

7
8 The next question was a little bit of a recommendation as well.
9 Recommendation to increase funding for outreach and supplies
10 focusing on increasing survival rates of incidental capture. So,
11 basically how to deflate a swim bladder. From Dr. Nemeth's
12 presentation that he gave at the 2023 Council meeting, he did have
13 a slide toward the end, which kind of highlighted outreach
14 campaigns that were done previously to try to get at some of this.
15 And so, what they actually distributed in their science kits, you
16 know, included a hypodermic needle for venting air in the bladder.

17
18 The presentation also included a summary of those outreach
19 campaigns. So, if you were kind of curious, you could go look at
20 it as I put the link here to go view the presentation. In the
21 Virgin Islands, Commercial Trap Fishermen have little bycatch,
22 meaning almost everything that is caught is kept. Some exceptions
23 would include the prohibited species, undersized individuals
24 managed with a minimum size limit, any oversized individuals not
25 marketable, and then out of season fish. So most commercial trap
26 fishermen in Saint Thomas and Saint John use venting tools when
27 necessary, and this is from personal communication with Mr. Magras
28 again, when those fish are showing signs of barotrauma.

29
30 And then currently, just as an aside, the bycatch information
31 that's included on the U.S.V.I. commercial report forms don't
32 include the disposition of the fish, it just asks, how many fish
33 were discarded.

34
35 NMFS and the Council have proposed requiring a descending device
36 be on board commercial or recreational fishing vessels when fishing
37 for reef fish in all three of our FMPs, and this is in Amendment
38 2. Rulemaking to implement this requirement began in 2024 with the
39 proposed rule and is expected to become effective sometime either
40 late 2025 or early 2026. And the January 2025 issue of the
41 Council's newsletter, and I've put the link there for you to read
42 it in English or Spanish, includes a description of the new
43 descending device requirement and helpful information for fishers,
44 including photos and links to help them acquire it or build it
45 themselves.

46
47 And then, this is the last question. Have there been any new
48 spawning aggregations discovered inside or outside of the existing

1 closed areas? If yes, have they been studied? And, again, Dr.
2 Nemeth provided in his December presentation, no new spawning sites
3 for nassau grouper have been found. They also have not seen more
4 than a dozen nassau grouper during the spawning season in the
5 historic spawning site, which is inside the Hind Bank MCD, but
6 there is anecdotal information on nassau spawning aggregation that
7 might be at the drop north of Saint Thomas, which would need to be
8 evaluated. It currently has not been.

9
10 And then, researchers with the University of Virgin Islands have
11 discovered additional spawning aggregation sites for other species
12 in both the Hind Bank MCD and Grammanik Bank. This is personal
13 communication with Dr. Nemeth, some of which are included in
14 published studies, which I've listed. So, mutton snapper, dog
15 snapper, cubera were in the Biggs and Nemeth paper. Tiger grouper,
16 red hind were in-- I'm going to butcher that name, so I'm not even
17 going to try it. Hogfish and bermuda chub were in a Nemeth and
18 Kadison paper. Those were all in Grammanik Bank. Then, they also
19 found sites for tiger grouper and schoolmaster in the Hind Bank
20 MCD.

21
22 So, all of those papers, are included in the references section
23 with hyperlinks if you wanted to go read them.

24
25 And I believe that is the end. Just in case no one had seen it, I
26 did include as an appendix the letter that the Saint Thomas
27 Fisherman's Association sent into the Council. And with that, I
28 will take any questions.

29 30 **Questions/Comments**

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions for Sarah? Julian?

33
34 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Thank you, Sarah. Good presentation. I know we
35 collaborated on this back in January up in the office. I have a
36 couple more questions, you know, which at some point could be
37 answered, especially as it pertains to the acoustic devices that
38 are being used. It seems like the acoustic devices are only placed
39 in a certain area, and that's the alleyway, the Grammanik Bank,
40 and actually where the hind is spawning.

41
42 I would like to know, and I don't know Graciela or someone, you
43 know, east of the bank, north of the bank, you know, it's
44 impossible that fish only come from one direction when we have so
45 much shelf to the east of these spawning sites. So, the fish are
46 traveling, you know, looking from the results that came out of
47 this, it clearly shows that the numbers are increasing. So, if the
48 fishers were actually making an impact in disturbing these species

1 from doing what they were supposed to do, the numbers wouldn't be
2 increasing. The numbers would be decreasing or staying on a stable
3 number, but the number is going up and going up and going up.

4
5 And, you know, another question is, has someone else besides Rick
6 Nemeth and his team from the University of the Virgin Islands
7 studied the Hind Bank. It's a 14 square mile closure. And I know
8 from my experience from little boy growing up, there's several
9 spawning sites within, but we only look at the original sites that
10 were given to them. I was one of them that gave Rick the coordinates
11 to the Nassau Bank inside of the MCD. And, you know, none of the
12 other sites are being looked at inside of the MCD. It's 14 square
13 miles.

14
15 And, you know, I think a real assessment needs to be done of what's
16 going on inside of it, but not by the same group of people. We
17 have already given them millions and millions and millions of
18 dollars. We need to get a different evaluation from someone else.
19 It's just like we were talking earlier about the eReporting. What's
20 the check and balance of it being the fishers are actually
21 reporting correctly? Well, this is a check and balance. Is Rick
22 and his team actually giving us all the information that we need
23 to know?

24
25 So, we throw millions of dollars at one group of people to continue
26 doing the studies, but we don't have a check and balance to say,
27 "Oh, well, wait. The original Nassau spawning aggregation is
28 overflowing, and that's why the Nassau groupers has decided to go
29 to" my Grammanik Bank that I used to fish in back the 1990s and
30 spawned there. So, you know, we need to, at some point, challenge
31 some of these reports that come out by doing another assessment
32 some way, somehow.

33
34 Thank you. But good it was good collaborating. It made the process
35 a lot easier, and thank you, Sarah.

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** I don't have an answer for you right
38 now. But we have been looking into the old reports from the MCD.
39 And I was just telling María that there was work that was done
40 here using an AUV and actually identifying fish, etcetera. But the
41 MCD was originally closed under the Coral FMP as, you know, the
42 need for that coral to be protected. I don't remember if you were
43 in those meetings at the time, but it was, "don't go South of Saint
44 John, go South of Saint Thomas."

45
46 So, we are bringing out all the information from the old reports.
47 Some of them we still have in papers, so I have to give them to
48 Sara so that she can include them in the references. It has been

1 an incredible exercise to answer your questions. And one thing
2 that we didn't look at, but answering your question about if you
3 interfere with the fish at the time, yes, they are increasing and
4 you are actively fishing the area from what you just saw. It is
5 that, you know, you're targeting other species other than nassau
6 grouper. The compliance there, at least from the information that
7 is in the reports, it's very high.

8
9 Now, we just asked Sennai about your price per pound for queen
10 trigger, red hind, all of them. So, just using \$10 a pound, just
11 round it off for that because it's easier for me to calculate. You
12 know, from what you are looking in the reports that amounts to
13 anywhere between \$500,000 to over a million dollars. For that
14 period of time, the amounts of landing that were reported.

15
16 If you use the lower figures, then we're still over \$500,000 that
17 the fishers that are fishing that area will not be part of their
18 income if that area is closed. So, we haven't gotten to that stage
19 yet because this was just the beginning in order to answer the
20 questions that you had.

21
22 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just piggyback on what she just said and then she
23 can continue if she got more information. Another thing that we
24 didn't also include, because we're waiting to see what the next
25 steps are going to be, is if you take these fishers that are
26 fishing in this area and displace them, guess what's going to
27 happen? They're going where the other fishers are fishing.

28
29 Now we only have, I think it's like six, seven of us, actually, I
30 think it's down to four of us alone that are fishing in that area.
31 And we fish there for those four months, then we move out. And if
32 we had to go fishing where other fishers are, now we're putting
33 hardships on them also. So, not only that, but we're also putting
34 more fishing pressure in another area which eventually can cause
35 problems. So, I think how we as a small group of fishers in the
36 Saint Thomas/Saint John District, how we fish is we try not to
37 overcrowd each other in areas.

38
39 We know, "Well, we got this group of guys that are fishing in this
40 area." And we try to stagger it out where we figure it's given the
41 fishery a balance. You think we're crazy, but that's what we do.
42 You know, it's only 42 trap fishers, and right now, really trap
43 fishers, I think, it's about 20, if 20. That are really trap
44 fishing. So, the numbers are decreasing quickly. The number of
45 trap fishers, fishers period, in the Virgin Islands in Saint
46 Thomas/Saint John is decreasing quickly.

47
48 A lot of the guys are getting older. They're getting out. They

1 can't get no helpers. Fishers are fishing with fishers. So, I think
2 the unique system that we have in place right now is what is
3 helping us to keep our fishery healthy along with the MCD, you
4 know, which is a 14 square mile closure which produces every
5 species inside of it. So, that spills out and actually stocks back
6 our fishery.

7
8 You know, I received a call on Saturday when I was in Saint John
9 selling fish, and I was asked from Washington, Julian, do you want
10 us to open up the MCD? I told Miguel about this earlier. I said,
11 "No. No. No. I don't want no MCD open up. I would never want that
12 MCD open up," because I know what it's doing to the rest of the
13 fishery. It's protecting the rest of the fishery. It overfills.
14 It's continuing to stock.

15
16 And that was one-- at first, when it happened, the first five years
17 were very difficult for the fishers. But now the fishers have seen
18 the fruits, we would call it, of that closure. So, you know, when
19 we're doing management, that's why I say sometimes, you know,
20 answering these questions and then adding in to, like, how he just
21 talked about the cost. Me and Sarah did discuss about the cost,
22 and I was supposed to get back to her with that, but I didn't. But
23 I'm glad you mentioned it. And doing stuff like this, get to see
24 the broader picture and discussing what's actually going on. Thank
25 you.

26
27 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, we will work on gathering the
28 information that we have on paper and bringing it to today's
29 digital world. The other thing is that this is what I was asking
30 Kevin about, this geographical information that we have, where the
31 fishing occurs, what kind of fishing occurs, that can give us an
32 indication of what habitat you have in there because if you're
33 trapping you're not putting them on corals because you'll lose
34 them up, mess it up, etcetera.

35
36 Again, we're working on all that data that has been collected since
37 2011, 2012 for those smaller grids, which I think is extremely
38 valuable, and we'll continue to provide you with that information.

39
40 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Just one quick follow-up. So, when she talked
41 about, when Sarah talked about getting the Grammanik Bank and the
42 MCD on the grids, that's going to be so much more useful to get
43 that on those maps. Because right now, it's like a guesstimation.
44 So, we have the coordinates. Every fisher has every coordinate of
45 where every trap has been set. I have mine with about ten years of
46 data. So, I can go back, and I make notes. Oh, well, this is a
47 nice area to go this time of the year. But once we could, like,
48 line some of that up with adding the Banks, then we can better

1 identify the squares that we are using.

2
3 Right now, it's a guess. Unless you go on Google maps and plug it
4 in to see exactly which square its falling in. So, that's going in
5 the right direction, to include some more of that stuff. Thank
6 you.

7
8 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, we have been working on that, you
9 know, separating that area, that polygon where you can actually
10 fish and done your fishing separate from the MCD and the Grammanik,
11 we are working on some kind of, you know, figures so that we can
12 provide you with that information.

13
14 But we can request, you know, if you want to work with us on
15 specifically looking at the coordinates that you have, I'm sure
16 that Sarah would be more than happy, and Liajay, to work with you.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you everybody. We have a public
19 comment period. Seems like we have nobody.

20
21 So, we're on recess until tomorrow morning at 09:00.

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chairman. We
24 had in the agenda a closed session, but after discussing it with
25 the three Chairs and members of the Council, the only item that we
26 had at that time was the membership of the three DAPs. All the
27 other committees that we have, advisory committees, are full until
28 2026, '27. So, tomorrow when we get into the agenda item that
29 discusses the advisory body membership, we will be able then to
30 provide the names, the people that are going to be suggested by
31 each one of the Chairs.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. We're on recess until tomorrow
34 9:00.

35
36 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for the day on April 22, 2025.)

37
38 - - -

39
40 APRIL 23, 2025

41
42 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

43
44 - - -

45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Good morning. We're going to start about
46 a minute. Okay.

47
48 Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the second day of the Caribbean

1 Fishery Management Council. We're start with a roll call. I'll
2 start with, Martha Prada.
3
4 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Good morning. Martha Prada, IRA coordinator.
5
6 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Cristina Olán, Council
7 Staff.
8
9 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Liajay Rivera García, Council
10 Staff.
11
12 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela García-Moliner, Council Staff.
13
14 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** María López, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast
15 Regional Office.
16
17 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, designee for Commissioner Jean-
18 Pierre Oriol, Virgin Islands' Department of Planning and Natural
19 Resources, also EBFM TAP Chair.
20
21 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Ricardo López, Puerto Rico DNR.
22
23 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Good morning. Vanessa Ramírez, Vice Chair.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.
26
27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Council Staff.
28
29 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** Diana Martino, Council staff.
30
31 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.
32
33 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Kate Zamboni, NOAA's Office of General
34 Counsel.
35
36 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** James Kreglo, Council Member.
37
38 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Lieutenant Kayla Ishida, United States Coast Guard.
39
40 **VANCE VICENTE:** Vance Vicente, SSC Chair. Good morning.
41
42 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good Jannette Ramos-García, Outreach and
43 Education Advisory Panel Chair.
44
45 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair,
46 Puerto Rico.
47
48 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Morning, everyone. Julian Magras, DAP Chair, Saint

1 Thomas/Saint John.
2
3 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, Saint Croix
4 DAP Chair, sexiest fisherman on the island. [laughter]
5
6 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good morning. Nicole Greaux, Fisheries Liaison,
7 Saint Thomas/Saint John.
8
9 **KYLE W. BEIGHLE:** Good morning. Kyle Beighle, Legal Counsel of
10 Fish and Wildlife.
11
12 **DANIEL MATOS CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos Caraballo, Puerto Rico
13 Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
14
15 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Good morning. María Irizarry, Council
16 Staff.
17
18 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto
19 Rico Fisheries liaison.
20
21 **DINORAH CHACIN:** Good morning. Dinorah Chacin with NOAA Fisheries
22 Habitat Conservation Division.
23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. And online?
25
26 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, Council Member.
27
28 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Alida Ortiz Sotomayor, Brent Stoffel,
29 Ricardo Lugo, Miguel Borges, Eva M. Collazo, Anne Kersting, Sarah
30 Stephenson, Daniel Olive, Jesús Rivera Hernández. Could you please
31 confirm online, Brent or Roberto, that you are here? Well, that
32 you hear us?
33
34 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Yes. I am here. I can see you.
35
36 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Thanks.
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. So, first up on the agenda, we
39 have the IRA coordinator, Martha Prada, with an IRA update.
40
41 **IRA UPDATE – MARTHA PRADA, CFMC IRA COORDINATOR**
42
43 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Good morning and thank you for the opportunity
44 to present an update about the progress of the IRA initiative that
45 the Caribbean Management Council is developing. This is a process
46 that actually started back in November 2023. And we have been able
47 to secure a lot of collaboration within the islands and outside
48 with NOAA Fisheries. We are grateful for that. Next.

1
2
3
4 Right now, the Council is developing six projects. Those projects
5 are highlighted here; each one with their principal investigator
6 but behind that principal investigator there is actually a very
7 broad specialist team working with them.

8
9 So, the objectives, the subjects, the topics, the goals are
10 comprehensive and, in a way, integrated. It goes from educational
11 point of view towards collecting information and conducting
12 analysis on vulnerability assessments and it integrates aspects
13 species on the recovery plan and ecosystem-based management
14 approaches to fisheries and so on. So, these are the people and
15 these are the projects. If you see those orange squares, it's for
16 a reason. Next.

17
18 Okay. On a general basis, back when we started this initiative, it
19 was under the panorama that perhaps each Council throughout the
20 Nation was going to be awarded, approximately, \$3,000,000 to
21 conduct these initiatives. Basically, we are very close to that
22 amount.

23
24 These projects are distributed, as you see in this table. The four
25 squares that are highlighted in my first slide indicates those
26 initiatives that were able to get an additional fundings that NOAA
27 made available to the Councils. We submitted a proposal, that
28 proposal focuses on what these initiatives were most needed of
29 those additional funding. So, the proposals that have double
30 numbers are the ones that were awarded.

31
32 The green color amount indicates the final amount. The Council has
33 already secured direct contracts with all of them, with the
34 exception of the locals here, DPNR, which is actually in the
35 process of being finalized. That was the last initiative that was
36 submitted and approved by NOAA. Next.

37
38 So far, the contracts actually started back in September 2024,
39 with the exception of my role as the coordinator which started
40 back in January of that year. So, really, it's been like five
41 months, four months of implementation and we have been able to
42 advance in all of the processes. Right now, on the technical
43 aspects, we can estimate that close to a 20% compare with
44 objectives or goals stated in the proposal as well as the
45 financial, the payment. So, everything on those proposals is
46 working as expected.

47
48 Not everything is so easy but the troubles we have had along the

1 way, we've been to come up with a strategy to overcome those
2 limitations. Next.

3
4 I'm going to provide a very short description of what those
5 achievements have been so far initiating with the educational
6 proposal. So, the educational proposal goal is to get inputs from
7 the fishing and school teaching communities about how extreme
8 events impact their life and what adaptation activities can be
9 developed in response to the challenges.

10
11 As of right now, a majority of the fishing villages have been
12 visited, preliminary, to make observations on how their fishing
13 infrastructure, on the coastal area, and also to get preliminary
14 perceptions of how fishers consider those events on their daily
15 lives. Interestingly, many fishers don't directly relate their
16 struggles with environmental changes. It appears to them that
17 pollution parameters and some economic factors are driving their
18 challenges more than other environmental challenges. However,
19 maybe there is a lack of integration of everything on analysis,
20 and we are in the process of getting that information.

21
22 So, far the proposal has established a strong team that is working
23 with that. The storybook, which is one of the main goals of this
24 proposal, is underway. So, I can say that within different
25 objectives this project is moving quite good. Next.

26
27 This is another interesting project. This project is dealing the
28 dolphinfish. It is trying to get field information with satellite
29 tags on different individuals. The proposal stated that there will
30 be ten satellite tags around Puerto Rico, ten satellite tags around
31 the U.S. Virgin Islands and 10 satellite tags dropped in the Mid
32 Atlantic Bay region trying to track the movements of these
33 individuals.

34
35 So far from those are you see that in all of the regions the
36 satellite tags have been dropped and there has not been quite a
37 large set of individuals but the representation is quite nice. In
38 addition to the satellite tags, regular plastic tags are also being
39 put on a lot of individuals to complement that information.

40
41 But the proposal is not just looking at species movement but also
42 other kind of information that is fishery related and fishery
43 independent and how to combine patterns exhibited from the movement
44 of the fish with the information that we have, environmental and
45 fishing from commercial landings and from recreational landings.
46 Next.

47
48 As an example of this, the preliminary reports, for instance,

1 illustrates here the FAD information on Puerto Rico, and you see
2 more than 50% is comprised by dolphinfish. So, this is a very
3 important species and like this kind of analysis, there is also
4 analysis in relation with sargassum in different areas of the
5 Caribbean in relation with other drifters that is being managed by
6 NOAA, different programs of NOAA, landings throughout the region
7 on the species. So, at the end, there will be a really interesting
8 kind of result trying to understand how these processes actually
9 impact their species distribution and the abundance part of the
10 species. Next.

11
12 We have a project that was mentioned by Vance at the beginning of
13 this meeting. It is about the collection of information that is
14 published or unpublished in the scientific literature or [gray?]
15 literature and is related to how we can assess the vulnerability
16 of the different species from these extreme events, mostly from
17 the environmental parameters. And so, right now, the project is
18 advancing in compiling information and in trying to choose from
19 around 200 managed species by different Councils, particularly the
20 Caribbean one, focus on the most important one that preliminarily
21 20 of them have been preselected. We are in the process of
22 finalizing the selection where those analysis will be conducted
23 in-depth.

24
25 The majority of the time that is being spent, right now, on this
26 initiative, is on planning and trying to get as much information
27 to integrate the different initiatives going on throughout the
28 region and outside the region. Trying to combine and get support,
29 scientific support from other experts throughout the U. S. Next.

30
31 We have this initiative that is dealing with collecting information
32 with fishers, in particular from the Southwest portion in Puerto
33 Rico on nassau grouper and queen conch. So, the idea is to provide
34 information for the recovery plans that are already developed and
35 will be important for this Council.

36
37 That information relates how the distribution patterns of
38 juveniles of these two species can be impacted on different purpose
39 through different factors like the recruitment rates, the habitat
40 quality, and the abundance. And so far, the team has been able
41 acquire the scientific equipment that will be put in the field.

42
43 It's also meeting with the fishers to agree on a protocol on how
44 these surveys will be conducted. This protocol is also happening
45 in coordination with the NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center
46 through Dr. Jennifer, who is also leading other field activities
47 in this area. So, everything is kind of integrated and combined.

48

1 Right now, the project was able analyze one of the factors, the
2 abundance of Sargassum area in coastal areas where satellite
3 imagery, maybe, has a lot of mistakes because it's a complex issue
4 to just be resolved through satellite. So, right now, they have a
5 preliminary map trying to choose what priority areas may be
6 surveyed. So, it's advancing with the people, the experts, the
7 imagery and with acquiring equipment.

8
9 This other project is advancing quite fast. It's about planning
10 scenarios, in particular for two species, the spiny lobster and
11 the red hind. So, one invertebrate and one fish. Both of them very
12 important commercial and ecological species. And so, the team has
13 not only held the first workshop with experts trying collect
14 information on what kind of dimensions and what kind parameters
15 they should be considering while dealing with their modeling. Right
16 now, there have been three dimensions that have been identified
17 and six factors that for each dimension will be analyzed.

18
19 Now, they are in the phase of compiling scientific information and
20 doing the modeling with different climate change models and
21 different kind of environmental information as well as collecting
22 literature. So, if you have any additional information on, let's
23 say, spiny lobster or red hind, please let me know so I can pass
24 it along.

25
26 In this slide, for instance, this is the kind of data. They are
27 not just using fishing information but they are also analyzing
28 changes in the rain, changes in the infrastructure, the ports and
29 everything. So, everything from terrestrial, coastal and marine
30 issues are being combined in this kind of modeling, trying to
31 generate the better planning scenarios. The project contemplates
32 eight different steps. We are now in the third one. Next.

33
34 Finally, our new proposal that is now our project, this is the one
35 that will be conducted locally, in the Virgin Islands under their
36 leadership.

37
38 The project has these components. They are preliminary trying to
39 finalize some activities that the EBFM TAP initiated, like, several
40 years ago. So, through this project we will be able to finalize
41 the fishery ecosystem plan, which is trying to get the final draft,
42 pass it and get it going through formal adoption once it's
43 concluded. But most importantly, it is the development of an
44 interactive digital platform. It's expected to get information,
45 centralized information on one site on different aspects. It is
46 meant for data management and regulations that actually exist at
47 different levels, state level, U.S. Caribbean level, the National
48 level, and maybe further than that.

1
2 So, it is very exciting to find out that this platform will soon
3 be ready and available for all of us to facilitate our work and
4 our analysis.

5
6 The project will also establish the creation, or not just creation
7 but strengthening, perhaps, of the EBFM TAP working group that
8 will be conducting and securing the future work of this initiative
9 and is looking at finding ways to extend the three-year project
10 into longer term initiative. So, like, analyzing different
11 alternatives, funding, collaborations and so on that will make
12 that situation possible.

13
14 And of course, all of the projects that are being conducted through
15 the NOAA IRA initiative have a component on education and provision
16 of information. So, in the near future, the Council web page will
17 start producing not just bulletins, but perhaps additional
18 information on how these projects and initiatives are moving on.

19
20 Thank you. If you have any questions.

21
22 **Questions/Comments**

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Martha. Question from Martha?
25 Vanessa?

26
27 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez, for the
28 record. I just want to thank you, Martha, for your excellent
29 presentation. And of course, you have our support for anything
30 that has to do with education for our fisheries.

31
32 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Thank you, Vanessa. I won't forget that.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy and then Vance.

35
36 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah, Martha, thank you for the presentation.
37 Great to see the progress already being made. I know you've worked
38 hard to update some proposals and work with the fishery service.
39 On the fourth proposal, which focused on queen conch and nassau
40 grouper, where you mentioned, I think, working with Jennifer Doerr
41 from the Southeast Fishery Science Center. Are you working with
42 anyone on nassau grouper from either the Southeast Regional Office
43 or Science Center at this point on that project?

44
45 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** That I am aware, no. But I maybe need to consult
46 with them because I do not have all the details of this project.
47 But if you can recommend someone specifically for that, it will be
48 highly appreciated.

1
2 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** I would recommend them reaching out to Dr.
3 Nick Farmer. He works in my office.
4
5 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Okay. Thank you.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?
8
9 **VANCE VICENTE:** No question. I want to congratulate you for your
10 work, your effort, and your presentation. I hope that you can
11 follow-up on this extremely important facet of fisheries. So, thank
12 you. Bye.
13
14 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Thank you, Vance. I just wanted to finalize
15 saying that we have been receiving a lot of support from the
16 community, from the experts, from the university guys, from
17 everyone. So, thank you to all of them.
18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Martha. Martha is going to provide a
22 report update at each Council meeting regarding the IRA proposals
23 and now our IRA projects. The last one, I want to recognize Dr.
24 Sennai Habtes because this came out of his brain. He put all this
25 together.
26
27 And now the Department of Planning and Natural Resources of the
28 Virgin Islands and the Division are working together so that they
29 can develop a contract. Because given that the government is
30 involved, they have to have a special procedure. This have been
31 approved, in principle, by the people in Washington. Martha is
32 following this with them. So, in the near future, we will present
33 that to them, the tool that we are going to use for engaging in
34 this project, specifically, for the U.S. Virgin Islands. As you
35 have seen the project is not only for the Virgin Islands, but also
36 spread out to the U.S. Caribbean.
37
38 The importance of this project is that it will give us some of the
39 needed tools that we have to follow-up with ecosystem fishery
40 management plans that we hope will be approved in the near future.
41 Martha, what will be the next steps with the project? Just a
42 follow-up. Do we have, aside from the contract that we discussed
43 before, what is expected for the projects? Do they have any
44 challenges that they have to overcome, or is everything is going
45 smoothly so far with the many people working on the projects.
46
47 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** We have been having some challenges, but they
48 are not too difficult to overcome. I can say, for instance, that

1 many activities are going on and so, for example, having the in-
2 person workshops requires a lot of planning because we are trying
3 to go where the users are. Are they convenient places? Is there a
4 convenient time? Maybe we don't have a lot of funding to go to
5 the, almost, 200 fishing villages between here and there, in Puerto
6 Rico. But we are slowly creating agreements.

7
8 Also, on that project, the good contact and communication with the
9 educational secretary and the departments at the state level. This
10 education and outreach can be integrated more formally in the
11 future, and so we are doing the first steps. So, that challenge is
12 becoming like a good and new initiative that perhaps can be a
13 follow-up in the future.

14
15 Other topics can be like through the hurricane season, we don't
16 know yet how those can impact and delay a little bit of the
17 projects, but that has to be analyzed in time.

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Also, from previous conversation, for the
20 education, the first part with Alida's project, you have a person
21 in U.S. Virgin Islands that will assist. Can you just mention that
22 for the record?

23
24 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** Yes. What is very nice from this project is that
25 they're able to slowly secure participation from different
26 stakeholders at the local level, at the community level. So, a
27 coordination within those different stakeholders per island is a
28 critical issue. So, since this proposal was initially, mostly,
29 focused on to be developed in Puerto Rico and now with the
30 additional funds we are expanding the goals in the U.S. Virgin
31 Islands, new liaison people for this project and a new community
32 participation is being expected.

33
34 So, local knowledge and understandings and situations can be
35 specifically addressed in those workshops. And so, it remains to
36 be seen how challenges from those can emerge in the future. But
37 right now, the challenges that have emerged, there has always been
38 a strategy to follow-up.

39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you. That's an excellent job that you're
41 doing. I want to take Mr. Chairman a point here to recognize Kelly
42 Denit and the group in Washington. They have been instrumental in
43 putting all this together.

44
45 You know, the IRA funds have been challenged to the point that we
46 have a very small window to put all this together. Otherwise, we
47 would lose the money. So, Kelly Denit, Morgan, and Derek, and other
48 people that are in Washington, they have coordinated everything

1 with every one of the eight Councils and Dr. Prada is now
2 communication with them all the time to make sure that we follow
3 the steps needed for the completion of the projects.

4
5 These projects will go all way until 2028. That's for three years.
6 They came out of the \$20,000,000 assigned to the Councils. Excuse
7 me? 2027. Yeah. But 2028 is the last year that we are going to
8 submit the reports.

9
10 You have to include that for the record also. In the case of the
11 basic funding, we have a goals year. The fifth year is without
12 money, but it's for us to provide the reports so that we don't
13 have to have to request an extension, no cost extensions.

14
15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Dr. Martha Prada. We will
16 continue working on this. There will be some presentations at the
17 main meeting with the CCCs, and they would touch on the IRA funds.
18 We were allocated \$3,000,000 We were able to secure 2.6, round
19 number 2.7, and those \$300,000 will go back to the big pot. But
20 apparently, those monies that were not allocated will be lost at
21 this time.

22
23 So, thank you again, Martha. I think that we will see you in the
24 next meeting with another update.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

27
28 **VANCE VICENTE:** Just one more comment. Something that might be
29 useful to develop is a timetable where you list the principal
30 components of this very complex project, you know, where are you
31 now and then by when you will have completed each of the proposed
32 tasks, something I don't want to put more pressure on you, but
33 that's something that I think is going be useful. And again, thank
34 you.

35
36 **MARTHA C. PRADA:** I didn't present, but we actually have that.
37 It's a little bit complex because it will require a large amount
38 of details for each proposal on each project. But for me to be
39 able coordinate and plan and to see if the projects are moving or
40 not and know where I should put some pressure based on that.

41
42 **VANCE VICENTE:** Okay. Thank you.

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And just for the record, thank you, Vance. Martha
45 didn't include this because as she says, it's kind of complex. But
46 there's one thing, if you don't meet the requirement, you are in
47 danger of losing the money. That's what we have been told all
48 along.

1
2 So, the all the PIs know this, so they are right on the dot. If
3 they don't meet a special time, they will have to have a hell of
4 an excuse of why not, so that we can support it towards it. But so
5 far, everybody is in the same boat, same page, and everything is
6 going smoothly.

7
8 Some of these projects may encounter activities that are beyond
9 their control, like a hurricane. But we don't know yet whether
10 that will be enough for us to have an extension of project
11 performance period. One thing, though, that all these projects are
12 here, and we mentioned that before, none of these projects will
13 have continued funding. It has to be three years, two and half
14 years or whatever. That's it. This is the product. This is what
15 happened.

16
17 However, they will have recommendations for future actions in case
18 of the government, federal government, local governments would
19 like to pursue it. And of course, the Council. Especially, in
20 outreach and education we want to enhance the activities that we
21 have for our outreach and education. Remember, we engage the
22 fishers all the time. So, all these projects have a component that
23 will engage the fisher. So, from ground up, we will be able then
24 to continue these projects. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. I'm kind of glad to hear about nassau
27 grouper because I get a lot of information on the street from the
28 divers on Saint Croix that seems like the nassau grouper has
29 exploded around Saint Croix. Especially, on the South Shore. And
30 I think, I might be mistaken, but Vance mentioned yesterday about
31 maybe considering assessment of the nassau grouper. I think the
32 rebuilding or recovery has proven to be working. Thanks.

33
34 Anything else from Martha? Thank you, Martha.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Jennifer Lee, Protected Resource Division.

37
38 **JENNIFER LEE:** Good morning. Can you hear me okay?

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

41
42 **PROTECTED RESOURCES DIVISION UPDATE - JENNIFER LEE, NOAA**
43 **FISHERIES/SERO**

44
45 **JENNIFER LEE:** Great. Alright. Yes. I hope you have been having a
46 good meeting.

47
48 I had the pleasure of listening in a while yesterday. And today,

1 I am here virtually just to present a brief update on some of the
2 protected resources actions that I've been keeping you in the loop
3 on. So, next slide.

4
5 In particular, I'm just going to provide some quick status updates
6 on some U.S. Caribbean related ESA rulemaking Section 7
7 consultation actions and species recovery actions. Next slide.

8
9 So, the big update, we did reclassify pillar coral from threatened
10 to endanger under the Endangered Species Act. This is the first
11 coral in The U.S. jurisdiction to be listed as endangered. The
12 presentation does have links in there, and they are also really
13 easily available on our website. And that rule did go into effect
14 on March 21. So, what this means when you switch from threaten to
15 endanger, it just means our take prohibitions now do apply.

16
17 I did put them on the slide there so you can read what it means to
18 take, to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap,
19 capture, collect, or attempt to engage in any such contact. So,
20 conduct. So, those take prohibitions now apply and then any
21 research or restoration activities that may cause take of pillar
22 corals will now need an Endangered Species Act Section 10(a)(1)(A)
23 permit, which is issued by NOAA Fisheries. And again, there's link
24 there, and I have that easy on our website.

25
26 I'm not sure if in the PDF you have access to links, if not, I'll
27 just make sure to follow-up. Alright. Next slide.

28
29 And this is just a reminder. We do have a couple of other rule
30 making actions that are not completed yet. We have rules pending
31 for an oceanic whitetip shark 4(d) rule, which was published back
32 on May 14th, 2024. And we also, back in 2023, had a green sea turtle
33 critical habitat proposed rule. So, I'll just keep updating you as
34 you meet and let you know if anything changes. But for now, those
35 are just, pending actions. Next slide.

36
37 Here I just wanted update you on our biological opinion. We are
38 amending the opinion to add nassau grouper critical habitat, five
39 coral critical habitats, and then the queen conch listing analyses.
40 We'll also be updating the opinion to change the status over from
41 threatened to endanger and address our incidental take statement.
42 And so, there, in the current opinion, because take was not
43 prohibited, it's not authorized, so we'll amend the biop to now
44 authorize what we expected.

45
46 We do have our lead biologist that was working on that amendment
47 retiring April 3, so that activity is still, of course, moving
48 forward, just going to be a little slower. I think at the last

1 Council meeting I did share that we expected to have a first draft
2 this spring. That's going to be delayed. We do have available
3 related information. If you just want to better understand in the
4 meantime some of the potential impacts and learn a little bit more
5 about various critical habitats and queen conch, there's a link
6 there to the species frameworks that we have available online.
7 Next slide.

8
9 So then, in terms of queen conch recovery updates, we have progress
10 moving forward with respect to working on engaging our partners
11 nationally and internationally. NMFS staff travel to the V.I. to
12 learn about the queen conch fishery, population status, and
13 connectivity, and local trade dynamics. Information gathered from
14 that trip will be used to help inform our understanding of
15 population dynamics of queen conch in the Virgin Islands and
16 ultimately inform some of our strategies for recovery.

17
18 We, at the last meeting, mentioned we are going to hold some
19 additional virtual workshops. Right now, those are on hold. We are
20 working to finalize, the workshop report for the workshops that we
21 did hold, and we actually sent that off to the Library Congress
22 for review. And as far as development on the recovery plan, we
23 don't really have any new progress to report there. So just a
24 future step. Next slide.

25
26 And so just to give you an idea of some of the things that we are
27 working on related to queen conch recovery updates. A lot of our
28 priorities right now are focusing on large scale consultation
29 guidance for Army Corps of Engineers. We have some really big
30 Section 7 consultations going on. We have the Port Everglades
31 deepening project. Our South Atlantic Regional Biological Opinion
32 has been reinitiated, as well as our Jacksonville Biological
33 Opinion has also been reinitiated. Those are big army corps
34 dredging regional biological opinions.

35
36 We do have a lot going on. Right now, there is a focus outside of
37 your area for the major consultations we have working on, but I
38 know that still interests you. So, just wanted to share that. Next
39 slide. Okay.

40
41 And then as far as recovery updates for other species, nothing
42 really to share for nassau grouper, although we're looking forward
43 to working with you as you think about Grammanik Bank and the IRA
44 project. I know that my colleague, Ori, has been involved in the
45 advisory capacity a little bit and sounds like we'll have more
46 coordination moving forward.

47
48 Oceanic Whitetip Shark, we did just recently publish a five-year

1 review that was done on March 27th. No big news there. Just
2 concluded there was no change to the listing status. That is a
3 good source of information. If you're didn't Oceanic Whitetip
4 Sharks and want to see what we know about them, it's a good place
5 to go.

6
7 And then, giant manta ray, we do have a final recovery plan that's
8 being developed, and we did have a draft plan out, back at the end
9 of last year. So, that's still moving forward, and then, we're
10 also working on a five-year review. And, again, that was
11 announcement that we were working on that was published last fall.
12 And the timing of the final giant manta ray plan and review, we
13 don't really have a good sense of how long it'll be before those
14 documents are out. But again, I'll make sure to keep updating you.

15
16 And I think that's really it. The only other thing that I would
17 mention, circling back to the island's biological opinion that we
18 have, Sustainable Fisheries and Protected Resources along with the
19 Science Center is working to implement terms and conditions and
20 reporting that is in that biological opinion. We are working to
21 assemble data to report on through 2024. And then, we're developing
22 a new website that will focus on minimizing turtle and fish take
23 and mortality through outreach and education. Just collaborating
24 on resources for best management practices and handling and release
25 guidelines. I'm just sharing that with you in case you get a reach
26 out from me or one of my colleagues. We're just working to keep
27 that biological opinion up to date.

28
29 And that's really it. Just a quick update.

30 31 **Questions/Comments**

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Jennifer. Any questions, comments
34 for Jennifer? Yes. Commissioner.

35
36 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Morning, everyone. Jean-Pierre Oriol, for
37 the record. So, Jen, I was just curious, can you just back to the
38 queen conch issue, can you provide a little bit more as to what
39 NERS is looking at for under the 4(d) rule right now, or are you
40 guys actually reviewing that right now?

41
42 **JENNIFER LEE:** Right now, we are not actively working on a queen
43 conch 4(d) rule. So, we are focusing on collecting information
44 that down the road could be used for a 4(d) rule. But at this
45 point, our real focus is, one, the Section 7 consultations. Anytime
46 a species is listed, we have to review those federal actions,
47 making sure that they're not making things worse off for the
48 species. So, a big focus right now is helping our action agencies

1 work through that process, because it's new for them with this
2 particular species. And so, our species recovery coordinator, Ori,
3 is working on providing guidance and guidelines, and that's why I
4 referenced some of those big consultations that were going on that
5 were not in your area but still relevant to queen conch.

6
7 So, that that's really the primary focus right now. And, you know,
8 we'll continue to collect information, and move towards other
9 goals.

10
11 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Thanks. Because the reason why I asked that
12 question is because the last time, at least the last time I had a
13 conversation with Ori on this, again, we were really focusing on
14 the data that led to the listing, which was the amount of landings
15 that are taking place in the United States being purchased but not
16 coming from the U.S. Caribbean. And so, the U.S. Caribbean is
17 wanting to see whether or not there would be some type of action
18 that either limits or puts restrictions, because most of the take
19 is not happening under Puerto Rico or the U.S.V.I. waters. So, we
20 wanted to stress that is being taken into consideration.

21
22 I guess my follow-up, or I don't know who might have the answer if
23 anybody does, is whether or not the recent tariffs that have been
24 imposed all over these countries, if there's been any kind of
25 tariff that would be placed on any of the countries that are
26 exporting all of these queen conch products into the States as
27 well.

28
29 **JENNIFER LEE:** I don't have an answer for that at this time. As
30 far as your comments on the importance of working on this issue,
31 I can just say that, yeah, nothing has changed in terms of our
32 collection of information and all the conversations that you've
33 had around this issue. I just don't have a next step for you at
34 this time.

35
36 **JEAN-PIERRE L. ORIOL:** Okay. Thank you.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more questions for-- Vance?

39
40 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Thank you, Commissioner. Regarding the import
41 of queen conch from other areas, I was quite impressed by going to
42 a very public supermercado Econo and finding hundreds of boxes of
43 frozen conch from Nicaragua. Okay? And I said, "I thought there
44 were some restrictions regarding importing conch, whether within
45 the veda, within the prohibition season or not." So, that's a good
46 point that we need to address.

47
48 Second, if I may, Mr. Chairman, regarding the pillar coral. The

1 dendrogyra cylindrus, you know, being listed now as a danger, and
2 not as threatened anymore, one way to find out what's the status
3 of this coral is using the fishermen or the fisher ladies, fishers
4 in general, which are all over the place examining different
5 habitats, and they can provide information of what the status is.

6
7 I and other specialists look at very specific areas. In my case,
8 well, these are submarine cables. But the fishers are all over the
9 place looking at habitats, and they may even find associations of
10 different species of fish with dendrogyra because dendrogyra is a
11 very peculiar species. It has these very long pillars, and the
12 fishers can very easily identify it from the diplorias and the
13 other 60 species of corals that we have. So, that's one way to
14 generate information as to what the status is of pillar corals in
15 Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

16
17 And in addition, we know that conch is associated, all species,
18 well, not all species. The strombus pugilis is different, but the
19 milk conch and the queen conch are strongly associated with a
20 specific type of habitat, and that is different species of seagrass
21 habitat, halophila, thalassia, halodule and others. But at the
22 same time, you know, we are developing-- there's a new type of
23 seagrass bed being formed in the Caribbean, that's from an invasive
24 species, halophila stipulacea and recently, there are studies
25 being conducted in the Virgin Islands, specifically in Saint
26 Thomas, studying the association of a reef fish settlement on these
27 new types of habitats. And that's all. Sorry for taking so much
28 time. Thank you.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Vance. Any more comments or questions
31 for Jennifer? Hearing none. Thank you, Jennifer.

32
33 **JENNIFER LEE:** Thank you.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next on the agenda is Brent Stoffle. Recap on
36 Social Sciences in the U.S. Caribbean.

37
38 **RECAP OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE U.S. CARIBBEAN: A 23-YEAR**
39 **PERSPECTIVE - BRENT STOFFLE, NOAA FISHERIES/SEFSC**

40
41 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Good morning, everyone. Let me make sure my co-
42 presenter, Suzana, is there and has a voice. She was having an
43 audio issue. Suzana, do you want to try and chime in?

44
45 **SUZANA BLAKE:** Yes. Can you guys hear me?

46
47 **BRENT STOFFLE:** I got you.

1 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.
2
3 **SUZANA BLAKE:** Perfect. Thank you.
4
5 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Great. Fantastic.
6
7 **SUZANA BLAKE:** And I assume you can see the presentation too.
8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes.
10
11 **BRENT STOFFLE:** So, anyway, we'd like to thank you, for inviting
12 us to present. This is a little bit of a different presentation
13 than what was on the books. This is going to be an update of our
14 oral histories project. Perhaps next meeting, we can provide the
15 twenty-two-year update on social science that was a little bit
16 more involved, with a little bit more scrutiny needing to be done
17 before we presented it. And so, what we thought we would do is
18 provide you with an update on the oral histories project and talk
19 a little bit about some of our movement for the future.
20
21 Again, we'd like to thank everybody. Especially, we would like to
22 thank, Jannette and, Wilson in Puerto Rico for their assistance in
23 bringing people together to conduct these oral histories. And
24 Nicole and, Saint Thomas, who was invaluable in getting folks
25 together and helping to put people on board with understanding why
26 we were doing this. Of course, many of these things can't be done
27 without the assistance of people like Julian, who is a 22 yearlong
28 partner in this effort of collaboration. And, of course, without
29 his assistance, we certainly wouldn't move forward. So, we'd like
30 to thank all of those folks.
31
32 Today, we're going to look at these oral histories a little bit
33 and talk about them in terms of a couple of different topics. We're
34 going to look at the importance, the methodology, its context in
35 fisheries. We'll provide the project update, look at its
36 significance, and then discuss moving forward.
37
38 So, oral histories, just to give you a little bit of background,
39 can go back thousands of years, some as far back as 10 to 40,000
40 years. Many indigenous cultures worldwide have preserved
41 knowledge, genealogies, and historical events through
42 storytelling, songs, and rituals passed down through generations.
43 Some of the oldest oral traditions include, globally, we have the
44 Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime stories that have been linked to
45 geological events that go back over 10,000 years. We have
46 indigenous North American or traditions that have many tribes that
47 have oral histories that describe ancient migration and

1 environmental changes. We have Hawaiian and Polynesian chants that
2 preserve genealogies and navigational knowledge from thousands of
3 years of seafaring.

4
5 We have African griot traditions. These are West African griot
6 storytellers that have preserved histories of entire kingdoms for
7 centuries, often stretching back over a thousand years. And we
8 have the Hindu Vedic oral tradition. The vedas are some of the
9 oldest known scriptures dating back to about 1,500 BC, and they
10 were preserved orally for generations before they were ever written
11 down. So, there's a long history of these globally, and they are
12 remarkably resilient and in some cases are corroborated by
13 archaeological and scientific evidence. Next slide.

14
15 Oral histories are a sound social science methodology because they
16 provide rich firsthand accounts of lived experiences, specifically
17 with groups and individuals that are impacted or related to the
18 research topic. Here's a list that highlights why they are valuable
19 in social science. Because oral histories rely on a memory and
20 personal perspective, they require careful methodological
21 considerations, such as corroborating information, acknowledging
22 subjectivity, and ethical considerations in preserving and sharing
23 narratives. However, when conducted rigorously, histories are a
24 powerful and valid tool for understanding human experiences.

25
26 Here are eight important rationales for oral history. I would
27 suggest that the preservation of knowledge, collaboration with
28 other kinds of data, and flexibility in the manner in which it is
29 conducted, and the empowerment of participants are the key
30 components of how and why we selected this method in our research
31 with U.S. Caribbean residents. The flexibility of the methodology
32 allowed us to conduct some of these interviews virtually, which is
33 advantageous for reports audio and video in addition to making,
34 transcription easy. It also makes it easier to create a digital
35 archive, especially useful for the NOAA voices database.

36
37 It is also advantageous from an economic perspective and that we
38 are often faced, as we are right now, with financial and travel
39 limitations and being able to conduct oral histories in this manner
40 can be a way to overcome these limitations. However, one needs to
41 have a strong relationship with the interviewees or a credible
42 presence. For information that they share is often guarded and
43 special and sometimes very personal. This is not information that
44 is easily accessible. For this reason, in-person, face-to-face is
45 always the best strategy. However, if the conditions are right,
46 the use of virtual interviews can help overcome some of our
47 limitations due to time and financial barriers. Next slide.

48

1 With a collection of over 2,600 oral histories from across the
2 United States and its territories, NOAA Voices documents the
3 experiences, values, and cultural perspectives of individuals and
4 communities affected by environmental change, severe weather, and
5 local ecological shifts. The archive includes testimonies from
6 scientists, fishers, disaster survivors, and coastal residents.
7 These qualitative narratives complement quantitative data by
8 offering rich contextualized perspectives on environmental change,
9 human adaptation, and policy impacts.

10
11 A key aspect of the archives mission is ensuring the inclusion of
12 all voices in the NOAA historical context. Through partnerships
13 with universities, museums, and community organizations, NOAA
14 Voices expands its collection to document diverse populations,
15 particularly from individuals experiencing environmental or
16 economic vulnerabilities. The database is an interactive tool that
17 allows individuals to query by theme or other types of variables,
18 such as geographic area or types of fisheries.

19
20 So, if you were to go into that database and say, "provide me all
21 of the oral histories from the U.S. Caribbean," it would bring you
22 up all of those. If you wanted to use a variable such as, "impact
23 of hurricanes," you could use that as your variable, and it would
24 bring up all of all of the oral histories that discuss impacts of
25 hurricanes, and that would not just be the U.S. Caribbean, but
26 throughout all 2,600. So, you have this as a tool that you can use
27 based upon the variable that you'd like to study, and it will do
28 that search for you and bring you links to those oral histories,
29 which you'll then be able to either read or listen to.

30
31 There are other oral histories that have been done in the past
32 that are not in Voices database. We know now that Puerto Rico has
33 a strong oral histories program there, and we would like to maybe,
34 perhaps, collaborate with them to perhaps have some of those oral
35 histories included in the Voices database if not already included.
36 It would perhaps be a good idea for these databases to join
37 together for the more that we have, the better data that we have
38 to use and looking at things like longitudinal analysis of change
39 or the impact on things like disasters. Next slide.

40
41 So, let's put oral histories in the context of fishery management.
42 As NOAA social scientists, we are required to provide information
43 on a number of different topics. Some things are more general, and
44 other things are quite specific. We have a list of National
45 Standards that relates to how we manage the fisheries under the
46 Magnuson-Stevens Act. What we see here is a list of the most
47 relevant to social science data and analysis of socioeconomic
48 impacts. In my experience, the standards that really stand out for

1 us as NOAA social scientists are National Standards 1, 8, and 10,
2 but all are important.

3
4 In addition to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, we have the Regulatory
5 Flexibility Act and the National Environmental Protection Act,
6 which also requires that we provide analysis of impacts on small
7 businesses and more generally the human environment. These
8 analyses can focus on micro or macro level impacts, from an impact
9 on a type of fishery such as commercial trap fishermen in Saint
10 Thomas, to an impact on a fishery as a whole. For example, the
11 for-hire recreational fishery from Blue Marlin in the U.S.
12 Caribbean.

13
14 Oral histories can help us to understand the context of an impact
15 on a fishery as well as the historical and contemporary
16 sociocultural and socioeconomic relationship between that fishery
17 and the coastal communities. It can also help in ascertaining the
18 magnitude of regulatory impact or the behavioral changes
19 associated with perturbations that disrupt food security and
20 economic stability.

21
22 And now I'm going to turn it over to Suzana to talk about,
23 specifically, about some of the findings from our ongoing project.

24
25 **SUZANA BLAKE:** Thank you, Brent. And for those of you who don't
26 know me, I am anthropologist working with the University of Miami.
27 A lot of my work is in collaboration with social science research
28 group at the Science Center in Miami. For me, this is a new project
29 in the sense that this is the first time I have been involved with
30 a U.S. Caribbean data collection process. It's a very exciting
31 project, and I've enjoyed working on this so far.

32
33 So, I am going to talk a little bit about what we've done so far
34 and some of the preliminary findings. And I'm going to stress these
35 are preliminary because the data analysis is not complete at this
36 point. So, for those of you who don't know, this oral history
37 initiative was started last year in 2024. We were aiming to
38 understand a little bit better what are the socioeconomic aspects
39 of fishing in the U.S. Caribbean region.

40
41 As part of this effort, we've collected, at this point, 40
42 interviews. This includes nine interviews in Saint Thomas and 31
43 on the West Coast of Puerto Rico as well as in Vieques and Culebra.
44 We have plans underway for additional interviews in Saint Croix
45 and the East Coast of Puerto Rico. However, they're not finalized,
46 I would say.

47
48 So, the primary purpose of this data collection, as I said, was to

1 document and interpret the lived experiences of fishermen and
2 fisherwomen in this region as it relates to ecological and cultural
3 as well as socioeconomic changes in fisheries. We asked about
4 perceived changes in species abundance, the habitat quality, as
5 well as the areas of cultural and economic importance in the
6 region. We spoke with a wide range of knowledge holders from
7 commercial and recreational fishermen, subsistence fishermen, and
8 for-hire operators. We also spoke with government employees and
9 others that are involved in the marine and terrestrial fisheries
10 resources.

11
12 So, several consistent themes emerged in these oral histories at
13 this point. Fisherfolk in general talked about shifts in fishing
14 practices and technology used. They described how gear,
15 techniques, and target species have evolved in response to changes
16 in species availability, particularly the need to go further
17 offshore to fish as the traditional fishing grounds have moved in
18 response to warming wars. This is the most sided cause across
19 islands. But a key theme that emerged across all these interviews
20 is the personal accounts of how natural disasters, like hurricanes,
21 have impacted their lives, but also the fishing infrastructure and
22 the ecosystems.

23
24 So, one recurring issue was the loss of fishing associations
25 infrastructures, especially in the mainland, Puerto Rico. And
26 several cases, this loss has made it difficult to renew the
27 permits, the building permits for these fishing associations. This
28 has led to a loss in markets that has been crucial, or a crucial
29 pressure, I should say. This is compounded by coastal development.
30 The collapse of local markets in some cases has led some fishermen
31 exiting the profession.

32
33 So, all of this is connected with environmental pressures including
34 environmental pressures, including environmental coastal erosion.
35 I have some pictures here. In the corner right it shows how close
36 the bar is to the actual buildings. In terms of environmental
37 pressure, I have a picture here showing snails that one SCUBA diver
38 has commented that they cover the Southern Western Coast of Puerto
39 Rico in-shore waters, and he talks about how these are typical in
40 South Africa. Now, this is not something that we've further looked
41 into. These are just interesting facts that come up in these
42 interviews.

43
44 Other things that fishermen-- one other important aspect about
45 natural disasters is how these fishing associations or the fishing
46 community in general plays such a crucial role in the resilience
47 of the community in general. They talk about how, during
48 hurricanes, and especially with increasing pressures from loss of

1 power and electricity, fishing associations or just fishermen in
2 general can provide refrigeration for critical medicine needed in
3 the community. And this comes on top of the fact that sometimes
4 they provide food security in times of distress. So, I just wanted
5 to mention that because it's a very interesting connection and
6 finding, I would say.

7
8 Oral historians also talked about the economic challenges of
9 fishing. They are concerned about the viability and sustainability
10 of the fishing. They voice frustration with certain closures or
11 limits that are not aligned with the actual reproductive cycles or
12 species behavior they are familiar with. Especially, on the islands
13 of Vieques and Culebra, people have showed us traditional practices
14 of fishing. You can see here in the picture, and actually in the
15 previous slide on the top corner, I couldn't remember this morning,
16 but this is a device designed locally in Culebra to fish for
17 octopus. And here you see other elements of artisanal fishing that
18 we were proudly presented with, I would say.

19
20 But there's concern that due to pressures, a lot of these
21 traditions are lost. The new generation will opt, because of the
22 difficulty of fishing, they will opt for more advanced fishing
23 practices or advanced technologies, or they would opt for targeting
24 certain species using scuba diving. And that in turn leads to
25 concern about the sustainability of fishing in general. Other
26 things that they talk about, their ambivalence about the
27 regulations and things like that, on one hand, they appreciate
28 protection of the fishing environment. On the other hand, they
29 highlight certain frictions and the lack of cooperation as a key
30 issue.

31
32 Then several interviews have addressed the role of women or the
33 increasing role of women, especially in the aftermath of disasters,
34 but in general, as innovators and as key points of transmitting
35 traditional knowledge in communities. And, like I briefly
36 mentioned, the impact of tourism and coastal development is
37 impacting access to fishing grounds and is impacting the quality
38 of the water in the coastal areas in these regions.

39
40 So, one of the clearest messages we received was about changes in
41 species abundance and habitat health. Across the region, fishermen
42 have noticed these declines in groupers, snappers, and conch. And
43 again, they connect these declines with brief degradation,
44 sedimentation, and runoff. They also talked, in parts, about
45 shifting spawning periods and locations. Sometimes this
46 information could potentially complement some of the scientific
47 monitoring that is needed for this region.

48

1 And to summarize, some of the common challenges across the regions
2 we've interviewed so far, the key was decline in fish population
3 due to overfishing, habitat degradation and increased coastal
4 development, the market instability, including they talk about
5 fluctuation in prices and competition from non-local buyers. The
6 decline in traditional fishing knowledge and practices, and I want
7 to mention here very briefly, interesting accounts about,
8 especially on the West Coast Of Puerto Rico, about how it is
9 increasingly difficult to use local knowledge to fish, because the
10 weather patterns are not as predictable as they used to be, also
11 because they notice a disappearance or random appearance, I guess,
12 of certain species of birds and baitfish that they used to rely on
13 to fish in the past. So, it's not only that there's a loss in
14 traditional fishing practices because of more efficient
15 technologies, because older fishermen are exiting the industry,
16 but there's also this increased difficulty in using their knowledge
17 because of a change in weather and climate patterns.

18
19 In terms of location specific challenges that were noted, I would
20 say that on the West Coast of Puerto Rico, the impact of storms on
21 fishing infrastructure was the key issue that I would highlight.
22 In Saint Thomas, it seems that there's a heavy emphasis on climate
23 change impacts and habitat loss from pollution and runoff. And in
24 Vieques and Culebra, the strongest narratives are around the
25 military legacy and their impacts on the marine environment. So,
26 they talk about areas that are used to beam with life that now are
27 depleted, areas that have still issues related to unexploded
28 ordnances that pose a risk to fishermen and things like that.

29
30 Also, in Vieques, it was interesting to hear a lot of accounts on
31 how it seems that there's a wave of development that further
32 affects the nearshore water quality. So that was very present in
33 the mind of the fishermen I interviewed, the fisherfolk, because
34 they were women as well.

35
36 Anyway, so when I was preparing this presentation and shared in
37 our local office, there were a few questions about, well, how can
38 we use this information in stock assessment? And I would say we
39 didn't collect this information specifically targeting a certain
40 stock assessment. That is a possibility. There were some mentions
41 today and yesterday about that. But this kind of information, the
42 way it is now and the way we collect it now, could still inform
43 more multispecies and ecosystem type of approaches to
44 understanding the marine environment with an emphasis on how
45 fishing communities experience transitions and changes and just in
46 general, the quality of fishing.

47
48 And one note here that is not fully explored yet because I still

1 need to do data analysis, but there seems to be a disconnect.
2 Sometimes, yes, they talk about decrease in fish abundance, but
3 they also talk about the fact that the fish is there, but we cannot
4 fish for it. And that makes me think about other barriers that
5 fishing community and fisherfolk have that need to be explored and
6 understood in order allow this industry to continue to thrive or
7 thrive, to say so.

8
9 And now, I will leave it at that. I'm happy to explore
10 possibilities of thinking about how this information could inform
11 some of the current efforts, including understanding historical
12 baseline for stock decline, or the spatial distribution of habitat
13 use, or effort trends and gear shifts and things like that.

14
15 I will pass it back to Brent who going to talk about how oral
16 histories in general build relationships. Thank you.

17
18 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Thank you, Suzana. So, as we talk about building
19 rapport and building relationships with local communities and how
20 oral histories as a methodology assist us in that, I'd like to
21 think about sort of the past in fisheries management where
22 fishermen, and I heard this many times, especially back in the
23 middle 2000s, that the fisheries research often felt very one-
24 sided for local fishermen.

25
26 They felt that there was very little feedback until a new
27 regulation was proposed or implemented. They felt oftentimes
28 scientists said, "Come. I'm coming to measure your fish. I'm coming
29 to document your catch. I'm coming to ask you about your costs."
30 But, well, there's this phrase in North Carolina, and I think it
31 adheres to pretty much a lot of local fishing communities, is that
32 people just become clam lipped, which means that they become tight
33 with the words that they share, with the knowledge that they share.
34 And that is because of the perception that every time the
35 government comes, or scientists come with the opportunity to
36 conduct research that when local folks open their mouths to discuss
37 things or to share information, they felt that the follow-up was
38 new regulations and being excluded or restricted from fishing
39 practices.

40
41 And so, I think that some of this with oral histories and with
42 continued collaborative work and building people into the process
43 early can assist this, in terms of the policy process, building it
44 in early, in the early stages, makes for a better acceptance of
45 regulatory change and the way that it's implemented. Next slide.

46
47 So, we interviewed Red Bailey as one of the people. And we'll use
48 this as sort of an idea of this collaboration. You know, Red didn't

1 have to speak with us. It wasn't his responsibility to go out
2 searching for someone to hear him. But when his time came, he was
3 extraordinarily happy that someone cared enough to listen. Red
4 isn't some ordinary fisherman. He has fished in the Caribbean
5 waters for more than fifty years and in some of the biggest
6 tournaments. He runs arguably one of the most successful charter
7 businesses on Saint Thomas, and his reputation is solid among
8 fishermen as it is among researchers and policymakers.

9
10 He is, I believe, still part of the local FAC and has participated
11 in the Caribbean Council over the years. Yet in all of his years,
12 no one asked him his story. By conducting an oral history with
13 him, not only did we gain knowledge of his fifty plus years of
14 experience, but we solidified a relationship for future management
15 needs.

16
17 We were also able to incorporate this knowledge into the policy
18 process, be it understanding the impacts or providing context for
19 current behaviors and changes as they're related to adapting to
20 social and environmental perturbations. And when I talk about these
21 perturbations, some of the most recent ones, the most drastic ones
22 are, of course, socially, the COVID pandemic and, environmentally,
23 the hurricanes, especially María and Irma.

24
25 When I asked Nicole how Red felt the interview went, she really
26 hit home, and it wasn't what Red had said, it was what his wife
27 had said. She said "When I spoke to her, I asked her how the
28 interview went, and she said he was so happy. Happier than he has
29 been in a long time." He said that he has been sitting here for
30 years waiting for someone to ask him about his story and what he
31 knows. He said it made him feel so good that someone cared. Someone
32 who has a reason to listen to him and can use what he said to help
33 the people and the fishermen of Saint Thomas.

34
35 That's the main reason why oral histories are so important. They
36 can connect us on so many different levels. Next slide.

37
38 So, let's look at, a little bit of the future research and, you
39 know, Suzanne already sorts of mentioned a little bit about stock
40 assessment. Now, we're not at that point, yet, where these oral
41 histories and the social data is built in in the preliminary
42 assessments, but we kind of believe that the longitudinal
43 perspective, the information regarding perturbations on fishing
44 and fish stocks, and ground truths in the quantitative data, those
45 kinds of things can be incredibly useful as people discuss things
46 like time series. They look for anomalies in the fish catch
47 statistics and contextualize some of the things that are happening
48 with regards to seasonality, changes in fishing behavior, and

1 marketing practices. I think these things are important when we
2 talk about stock assessments.

3
4 How does this inform us about ecosystem-based management? Well, it
5 really incorporates, oftentimes, you know, I don't think that there
6 was one person, in Saint Thomas, that I interviewed in Saint
7 Thomas, that didn't have at least four generations of knowledge
8 behind their discussion. And so, what we're incorporating here is
9 not only their own experiences and their own perspectives, but
10 we're incorporating the knowledge of those four generations that
11 come before. I think that that's important when we talk about
12 ecosystems, because we're talking about environmental changes that
13 are happening sometimes rapidly and some things that have occurred
14 over time. And people have adapted their behaviors or fishing
15 practices to incorporate or to adjust to those changes.

16
17 So, what impact does this have on the amendment development? Well,
18 initially, it will provide updated information on the cumulative
19 impacts. You know, if we look at a single species management as we
20 still do right now, we can contextualize that single species
21 management in with other things like the other species that are
22 targeted, seasonal rounds, annual rounds, and then other types of
23 regulatory actions that impact the fisheries. In addition, it
24 provides updated information on the description of the fishery,
25 which are sections that go and are developed in the amendment.

26
27 So, what do the current administrative changes, meaning, changes
28 in government, what does this do for NOAA social science in
29 Caribbean fisheries management? Well, right now, we're not really
30 sure what the future holds. We're going to sit and wait, but I can
31 promise you one thing, that our commitment to providing the best
32 service that we can for the people of the U.S. Caribbean is strong.
33 And I think there's great support from everyone in NOAA to make
34 sure that we collaborate and work together. And I find, working,
35 with the folks that are sitting in that room a real pleasure and
36 benefit for the process.

37
38 Like I said, we're going to continue, hopefully, the oral histories
39 in Puerto Rico and in Saint Croix. The intent was for all of those
40 to be done, and so we're going to continue to strive to accomplish
41 that goal. In addition, the near future, next month, I'm working
42 with a couple of folks in the room there on a sargassum workshop.
43 Our obligation is that this is looking at sargassum from all
44 different levels, from legal, political, jurisdictional, health,
45 economic impact, fisheries related, and what we're looking at is
46 the human dimensions of sargassum. So, if any of you there and
47 would like to be involved in that, please get in contact with me.

48

1 We're going to be having a virtual workshop May 19th through the
2 21st. Currently, right now, we have Nelson and Jannette working
3 with us, and Wilson, and they've been incredibly useful in helping
4 us to understand the local perspective as the way sargassum has
5 impacted coastal communities, and, you know, local industries,
6 tourist industry.

7
8 So, I don't want to take up too much more of your time. I'll leave
9 time for questions if there are any. But to say that the work
10 continues, and we will promise to continue to strive to do our
11 very best, under the conditions that we're faced with, to make
12 sure that we collaborate and work with the people of the U.S.
13 Caribbean. Thank you.

14 15 **Questions/Comments**

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Brent. Vance?

18
19 **VANCE VICENTE:** Hey, Brent and Suzana. Thanks a lot for such a
20 great presentation. I only have one question. I'm looking back in
21 history, the older I get, and I recall that the U.S. Fish Hawk,
22 which was the first research vessel of the U.S. Commission, they
23 gathered marine information including fisheries between 1880 and
24 1922. I happen to have one their encyclopedic report called the
25 U.S. Fish Hawk Expedition of 1898 in which they provide the species
26 that were being fish in Puerto Rico with the most excellent color
27 plates that have ever been produced of reef fish.

28
29 In addition to that, I went back a little bit further back. In
30 1864, there was, Placide Duchassaing de Fontbressin and
31 Michelotti, which they made the first collection of Vieques and
32 Saint Thomas. And they also have fisheries information. I wonder
33 whether you know about that, or did you include it, or is it
34 outside the scope of your work? But again, for your presentation.

35
36 **BRENT STOFFLE:** No. Thank you for that and thank you for the update
37 on that information. That is certainly something that would be
38 incredibly interesting to look at. It wasn't a part of our, I would
39 say, our focus of the oral histories, because that's already
40 historically documented. But I would gather that four generations
41 of fishing probably go back to some of those time frames. And so
42 that's the kind of thing that we can kind of tap on where we're
43 getting the story about four generations of fishing and things
44 that used to be targeted or continually targeted or have faded out
45 the techniques and the strategies. That's the kind of thing where
46 we can take these different forms of data and collaborate them and
47 bring some use to understanding past and present methodologies for
48 fishing.

1
2 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you. Thank you very much.
3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Any more questions for Brent?
5
6 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Mr. Chair, you have a hand raised from
7 Kevin McCarthy.
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?
10
11 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. Suzana and Brent, really nice job. So,
12 one of the things that comes to mind when you talk about having,
13 you know, multiple generations of oral history and a thing that's
14 come up as a problematic in some of the recent work that we've
15 done is, when do fisheries start? Right? So, when is species x?
16 when does that become a targeted species? Or when does that, you
17 know, or even incidentally, but especially targeting. You know?
18
19 So, one of the things we hear about is, you know, if you go back
20 far enough, you know, lobsters weren't caught for human
21 consumption. They were used as animal feed, for example, or they
22 were used as bait or something like that. So, when do things start
23 and how did it ramp up?
24
25 So, if you're doing the kinds of stock assessments that we have
26 been doing, or even if we come up with some alternative, it's
27 really nice to know the history of exploitation. Right? So, if
28 somebody can say, "You know what? My great grandfather didn't fish
29 for these things, but my grandfather did." You know? Or it all
30 started after World War II or some other change where-- You know,
31 we talk about a thing called catchability, meaning, how does some
32 factor other than your own skill and the abundance of fish in the
33 water, how does that impact your ability to catch fish? So, one
34 thing might be, you know, engines and boats became cheaper after
35 World War II with all the surplus stuff. Things like that are
36 really nice to have when we're looking at sort of the timeline of
37 a fishery.
38
39 But, anyway, thanks for the presentation. Really good stuff.
40
41 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Thanks, Kevin. I think that's a great point. In
42 fact, I kind of laughed when you talked about lobster. I can
43 remember the very first time I flew to Saint Croix, I was sitting
44 next to a lovely lady, you know, one of the ways you always get to
45 know people is you talk about food. Right? We were sitting there
46 talking, and I was asking her about what's good to eat on the
47 island and this and that, because it was my first visit. And we
48 got to talking about the lobster there, and she said, "I can

1 remember when I was a girl and my grandfather fished that you
2 didn't sell lobster. You just gave it away. Like, the kids got it
3 because it wasn't something, it wasn't a marketable thing.”
4

5 You know, fish was important, but, you know, lobster was like,
6 “Ah, here. Take it.” You know? And she told me about the stories
7 of sucking the legs and eating the antennas as, like, the most fun
8 thing for our kid to do.
9

10 So, you're right. You can put it into a time series where you can
11 actually trace that back, “Well, how old was her grandparents when
12 this was happening? How young was she?” and you can get access to
13 some of that kind of data. And I'm sure there's quite a few people
14 sitting in that room right now that remember sucking lobster legs
15 as a kid.
16

17 **SUZANA BLAKE:** Yeah. I just wanted to thank, Kevin. This these are
18 the kind of things that are very important as we continue to
19 understand and explore and analyze this data. I will say from the
20 top of my head, there definitely are accounts of historic
21 timelines. Like Brent mentioned, there's several discussions on
22 when a certain species became important and how that is linked,
23 particularly, with the shift from fishing and selling locally to
24 accessing a broader audience, I would say.
25

26 I will definitely look for that information in the data and all of
27 that. That's why I emphasize continuous discussion with fishery
28 biologists is key as we want to explore this data to the best of
29 our ability. That's all.
30

31 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Yeah. I'm just building on that. I would agree a
32 100% with what Suzana saying. When you have those kinds of
33 questions, and that's for anybody in the room, when we come down
34 to do that kind of thing, if there are certain issues that you
35 want some longitudinal exposure to, that's the kind of stuff where
36 we talk about the scientific collaboration, not just the
37 collaboration with the locals.
38

39 If we work across disciplines, this is a great way for us to assist
40 in answering maybe some of the questions that you might have. And
41 so, you know, it's great to not only work internally with each
42 other, but externally with the local folks.
43

44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a hand raised.
45

46 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Kevin McCarthy.
47

48 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Thank you. Yeah. So, Suzana, just to follow-up

1 and Brent, also. I think that's great. You're absolutely speaking
2 my language about collaboration, especially among people who are,
3 you know, sort of together in the Science Center.

4
5 So why don't we, in the not-too-distant future, have a chat, get
6 some of the assessment biologists on my team in that conversation?
7 Well, the whole group, really, I don't need to be exclusive to the
8 folks who do assessments. But we'll get everybody together and
9 talk about the kinds of information that would be really
10 beneficial.

11
12 There's going to be a couple of really top items, and so maybe a
13 handful of questions added to what you normally are asking people
14 might really make a big difference. So, that'd be great. Thanks.

15
16 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Yeah. Kevin, we'd be more than happy to do that.
17 It's great to have that multidisciplinary approach.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Brent? I think I have
20 Wils-- Oh, Sennai?

21
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** Hey. Morning, Brent. Good to see you again and
23 thank you so much for all the work in this effort. I think
24 collecting this oral history information from the fishers is hugely
25 important and can really aid in both scientific management of the
26 species, but also a broader cultural understanding of the
27 importance of fisheries to the U.S. Caribbean. So, I applaud you
28 on your efforts.

29
30 I'd also like to ask, have you looked at maybe expanding the
31 coordination with some of the groups in the U.S.V.I. and Puerto
32 Rico that do sociological research to provide training
33 opportunities, say, for students or other researchers that may be
34 doing this kind of work but have not worked in the fisheries,
35 right? So, like at U.S.V.I. there's the Eastern Caribbean Center.
36 They've done sociological work to try and work with farmers, but
37 have never really integrated well with the fisheries community.

38
39 I think providing tools and opportunities and collaborating with
40 those groups so we can have this ongoing in the territory, would
41 be really great. You know? Not that, like, the work that you're
42 doing isn't really important, but, like, I worry that it's going
43 to be, like, you know, one time every five years as opposed to
44 building a group of people that can be doing this continuously,
45 because a lot of the fishers with this knowledge, honestly, they're
46 not going to be around that much longer, you know?

47
48 And who knows if their children are going to be listening to their

1 stories as intently as, like, you know, you do when you come down
2 and speak with them.

3
4 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Sennai, that's a-- you hit it out of the park
5 there. One of the things that we were doing, it was also a part of
6 our actionable solutions to improve our service, was to engage the
7 local liaisons in the process, so that they could learn and perhaps
8 then in the future be doing the interviews themselves. It wouldn't
9 have to be us once every five years, but it could be a continued
10 effort. And so, Wilson and Jannette had the opportunity to work
11 with Suzana and experience them. Not that they don't already have
12 experience doing it, but I also work with Nicole.

13
14 I would have great confidence, with a little bit more practice, I
15 think all would be able to engage in it with great productivity
16 and efficiency. I think that that's a fantastic idea. I also super
17 encourage the notion of U.S.V.I. and, getting the students
18 involved. This is something that happens here quite a bit.

19
20 I think that, I've often wanted to create, whether I be an adjunct
21 or whatever, to teach a social methods course there at the U.S.V.I.
22 virtually or assist somebody teaching that, so that we can actually
23 train, even the biologists who are working there, into how do you
24 talk to fishermen, how do you talk to people, how do you access
25 other kinds of data. I would be very much excited about the
26 proposition for free to teach a course on social methods, including
27 the use of oral histories.

28
29 I think you're exactly right. And that was part of our old movement
30 that we can't mention the name, from a couple years ago, this last
31 year, but is to get more and more folks involved at the ground
32 level. And I continue to think that that actionable solution is a
33 very positive step forward for both NOAA and for research in the
34 in the U.S. Caribbean.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I got Wilson, and then we have got to take a
37 break.

38
39 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Wilson
40 Santiago for the record. I just want to thank Suzana and Brent for
41 these oral interviews.

42
43 I just wanted to add in my experience helping them. I had never
44 heard other history of a fisher from two, three generations back.
45 I did it in Vieques and Culebra. And hearing them all their story
46 of fight and the positives that they have right now, regarding all
47 the things that have happened to all the generations back, it was
48 very grateful.

1
2 The other thing is that these two people, Brent and Suzana, they
3 come very prepared. They're professionals in what they do. And one
4 of the best things that happens here in Puerto Rico is that Suzana
5 talks very good Spanish. You know? And she connects very good with
6 the fishers. So, thank you, and I hope this continues to all the
7 other parts of the island, and that will be all. Thank you.
8
9 **SUZANA BLAKE:** Thanks, Wilson. Just a note on that. I would not
10 have been able to do any of my work without Wilson and Janette.
11 That's just the truth. And that just emphasizes the fact that we
12 need them, and people like them to do this work and continue this
13 work. But, yeah, thanks, Wilson. It was a pleasure, and I hope I
14 can go back.
15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Brent. Thank you, Suzana. We're
17 taking a quick break in about fifteen minutes. We have to be back
18 on at exactly 10:45.
19
20 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Hey, Carlos?
21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.
23
24 **BRENT STOFFLE:** How come you can cook conch for other people and
25 not for me? [laughter]
26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I'm not going there. We'll see you soon.
28
29 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)
30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. We're going to get started again. So,
32 next on the agenda is Outreach an education panel with Jannette
33 Ramos, Chair.
34
35 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Alida, do you hear us?
36
37 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** Yes, I'm here.
38
39 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Muy bien. Okay. We are ready.
40
41 **ALIDA ORTIZ SOTOMAYOR:** It's me first or Jannette first?
42
43 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** No. You first, Alida. And also, the people
44 are around, they are not--
45
46 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Ya comenzamos. We've started. Gracias.
47

1
2 It was a space for exchanging ideas and several concrete proposals
3 were shared to help reach the gap between researchers and the
4 people directly experiencing climate impacts in our coastal and
5 rural communities. It was a great effort. There was a lot of people
6 around, also people that are not in science, but are regular people
7 who wants to know and have more knowledge in this event. Next one,
8 Cristina.

9
10 I've continued participating in the MREP Planning Unit Team
11 meetings, and I'm excited to share that we are currently organizing
12 a small expo that will take place during the June 2025 MREP
13 session. The focus of this expo will be underutilized fish species,
14 and I'll be co-presenting alongside chef Lorraine Arroyo. Why Chef
15 Lorraine Arroyo? Because she was one of the chefs that took part
16 of the continuing education course that we offered thanks to
17 Caribbean Management Council, Puerto Rico Sea Grant program and
18 also the UPR in Mayagüez.

19
20 In that course, we offered chefs the opportunity to cook several
21 kinds species, underutilized species. We had vaquita, which is a
22 kind of tuna, and several others. We only spent, on those species,
23 for 18 chefs, \$126. They were-- you don't expect it to be only
24 that money. They thought that it was, like, \$600 for all the fish
25 that we used there. And they used the whole fish. Nothing was going
26 to the waste because they learned to use every part of the fish.

27
28 It's going to be a great opportunity for MREP to connect fishery
29 science with the culinary world and promote local sustainable
30 options. Next one, Cristina.

31
32 What's next for the Outreach Education Advisory Panel? Next one.

33
34 Well, one of the projects we are especially proud of is a calendar
35 we are going to create to celebrate the lives and legacy of fishing
36 families across the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The goal
37 is to highlight the resilience, the deep-rooted traditions, and
38 the vital role they continue to play in our coastal communities
39 and food system. It's a tribute to the people who generation after
40 generation have built a way of life around the sea. Also, have the
41 privilege of working since October 2024 on the IRA project led by
42 Dr. Alida Ortiz and Dr. Martha Prada.

43
44 And last but not least, I just want to take a moment, like Wilson
45 did, to thank Brent and Suzana for giving us the chance to work
46 with them. It was such a great experience, not only because I got
47 to work alongside two amazing social scientists, but also because
48 it gave me a new way to connect with our fishing community. I've

1 been working with the fishing community for, like, fifteen years,
2 but it was a new experience, and it was great. As we continue
3 honoring and supporting--

4
5 In the calendar we are highlighting, four families from Saint
6 Croix. We already have them. Also, four families from Saint Thomas.
7 And in Saint Croix, Gerson is helping me. In Saint Thomas, I have
8 Nicole Greaux, which I already spoke to, and she's helping. And
9 also, four families from around Puerto Rico. I want to highlight
10 different zones from the island, not only from the West or-- No,
11 from all the coasts of Puerto Rico. And now, Cristina, the other
12 one. Thank you.

13
14 Questions?

15 16 **Questions/Comments**

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have Vanessa.

19
20 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. I just want to
21 make comment to thank Alida and Jannette and all the outreach group
22 because I know the hard work that you have been doing with our
23 commercial fisheries, especially in the West Side where I am. We
24 know that it's not easy to work with us, but we really enjoy being
25 able to collaborate with all the things that you are doing. The
26 activities, and all your support, especially when we run away or
27 call at last minute that we need materials and all that, and the
28 importance that all our new generations or fishermen get the
29 compromise to continue collaborating with the Council and all the
30 areas. Thanks.

31
32 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thanks. And Vanessa, I could say the same
33 for you. Well, that's all?

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER** Two questions. Who's in the picture?

38
39 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Oh, that's Jaime Creitoff. He's a fisherman
40 from Boqueron, Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico.

41
42 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** And the second question is, do we have
43 any plans of letting the recreational fishers know that the
44 regulations that we have in place, like the seasonal closures, the
45 seasonally closed areas, etcetera, actually apply to them also?

46
47 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yes. We had a meeting in Rincón about two
48 or three months ago, and we began that work. I'm also talking to

1 Yamitza and Grisel and with Wilson, and I hope to follow that
2 project.
3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And also, if I may Mr. Chairman, Helena Antoun
5 is also working in that area.
6
7 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yes. I spoke to her as well.
8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But they will do their own thing and cover the
10 workshops, and they will be coordinated with them.
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a chat and then Wilson.
13
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Refik Orhun. "Thank you for the
15 presentation. Do you have a list of this secondary species that
16 people consume?"
17
18 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** I'm sorry.
19
20 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** The question is, "Do you have a list
21 of this secondary species that people consume?"
22
23 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yes. I have the list.
24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But now that you know that they have the
26 list, how will the public be able to read that list?
27
28 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** I don't have it in here.
29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. No. No. What is the mechanism you are giving?
31 So, you may use the I the web page.
32
33 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Oh! You can use the page. You can write to
34 me, and I will send it if someone needs it. I can send it to
35 Cristina, she can--
36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Cristina and you can later talk it over
38 and see if you can put it in the web page.
39
40 The other thing that Diana is saying is that this is one of those
41 things that we would like to have a bulletin that we can send to
42 the people.
43
44 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** That was the second thing I was going to
45 ask, if maybe Cristina can--
46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Both of you will work on the bulletin. And
48 remember, many other fishers tell me that "The digital bulletin is

1 okay, but I would like to have a paper so I can stick in the wall
2 of the association.”
3
4 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Let me tell you. The Sea Grant press is
5 working at last.
6
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The Sea Grant is going to disappear next year,
8 so don't talk about Sea Grant.
9
10
11 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** But we have the press, right now. We can
12 use it.
13
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I know. But the thing is that those two
15 request by the fishers, the OEAP can be responsive to them. So, we
16 will have the bulletin, and we will have a place in the web page
17 where we can include that information.
18
19 So, I think Cedric also mentioned to me, several years ago, but he
20 still has the same idea, that there are many species that he uses
21 in his restaurant that are underutilized. He also wanted to see if
22 there was a possibility to include, you know, recipes, things that
23 he uses, like we have done before under different projects, and he
24 suggested to put it in the web page too. So just the record, that's
25 one of the recommendations that he made.
26
27 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** I have the recipes that the chefs did in
28 continuing education course, and we can use them.
29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Okay. And thank you, Jannette, for filling
31 the big shoes after Alida.
32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?
34
35 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to add
36 to the answer for Graciela.
37
38 Yes. Helena and me, we are working with the recreational area. In
39 my report that I'll do later I'll be talking about this. But we
40 are reforming what the educational program is for recreational
41 fishers. So, yes, we are attending that sector. In my case, as a
42 liaison, I always give them educational materials.
43
44 They have participated in my workshops, the descending device
45 workshops. They always have questions. And via the WhatsApp
46 broadcast list as well, they always ask me question. And very,
47 very interesting is that recreational fishers from Puerto Rico and
48 the states that are living right now in Puerto Rico, we are

1 attending that area.

2
3 So, for Jannette and Refik, the list of the underutilized species.
4 If you want, you can talk with Daniel Matos, or we can work
5 together, and I can make you a list, so we can make you a list of
6 the of the reported second, or third category of species. Thank
7 you, Mr. Chair.

8
9 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Thank you, Wilson. I appreciate your
10 support. I also have to tell that chef Lorraine, her father is a
11 fisherman, and her grandmother has a book of recipes that she--
12 How do you-- Yes. Thank you. That's why I select her for the MREP
13 expo.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Diana?

16
17 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** I was telling Miguel that there's also the
18 species that are included in recipe book that we made, and that
19 recipe book is already up in the web page and ISSUU.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more questions for Jannette? Glad to
22 hear when Graciela brought up the point about recreational fishery.
23 Because, you know, I spent a lot of time out there talking to
24 people and the recreational sector believes that those rules are
25 only for the commercial sector. So, that's a good point. Thanks.

26
27 Anything else for Jannette? Okay. We have Cristina with Social
28 Network.

29
30 **CFMC SOCIAL NETWORKS - CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ**

31
32 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Good morning and thank
33 you for letting me present something about what we have been doing
34 with social media and the web page. My name is Cristina Olán. I am
35 the social media network coordinator for the CFMC.

36
37 I will give you some updates and some highlights, but feel free at
38 the end to ask any questions regarding the social media, webpage,
39 or another thing that we have been doing in coordination with our
40 liaisons and people that are collaborating with the Council as
41 well.

42
43 As always, I present the numbers just to let you know how many
44 followers we have in each of our platforms. In Facebook we have
45 over 7,000, in Instagram, over 2,000. We have X, LinkedIn, Threads,
46 and YouTube also. Now, for example, we are live on YouTube too.

47
48 We have a new platform in BlueSky. We just opened it this year, so

1 feel free also to follow us in BlueSky. And also, we have a new
2 web page, and I want, now, to stop sharing my presentation and
3 share for a moment our new web page.

4
5 So, what we did was, like, working along with WebSoft, we created,
6 like, a new format, cleaner and easier to follow and find
7 information. We have, of course, information about the Council and
8 the panels, the calendar for the meetings, how to contact us, the
9 meeting regulations, also the Fishery Management Plans, as you can
10 see, it is divided by Puerto Rico, Saint Croix, Saint Thomas/Saint
11 John. In the near future, are going have the section for Puerto
12 Rico in Spanish too. And for each section, for example, we have a
13 summary of the purpose and need of each plan and also the
14 information on the actions and amendments that are under
15 development or those that are already implemented.

16
17 Here I want to thank a lot the people of NOAA Fisheries, especially
18 Sarah and María who guided me a lot in this section. Also, to
19 Graciela, Liajay and Kiara who gave me a lot of input on ideas on
20 how to put this information in the web page.

21
22 Also, there were a lot, a lot of links in the old web page. What
23 we decided was just to have the links of the main agencies so
24 people can find the NOAA links, the other Fishery Management
25 Councils, other agencies that are related to our topics, and also
26 local agencies, links to weather information, and also, of course,
27 Big Fish that we have been collaborating with this regional
28 initiative and FishBase because people like to know the names of
29 the fish in the region.

30
31 In the case of the reports, for example, we move the reports to
32 ISSUU. So, if you go to stacks in ISSUU, you will find the reports
33 that were in the webpage.

34
35 We continue to have the CFMC ArcGIS Online and we reduced the
36 amount of information on enforcement contacts just to the main
37 one, the NOAA OLE, el cuerpo de vigilantes del DRNA de Puerto Rico
38 and the DPNR. And of course, we have all the information about our
39 social media platforms, including the LinkTree.

40
41 In the LinkTree, you can easily find all the links to the social
42 media, a section for the Salvapeje or descending device in English.
43 All the resources that are related to descending device, Big Fish
44 Initiative, resources that could be very helpful to fishers like
45 MerosPR, for example, to report groupers. And also, for every
46 meeting, we keep this so people can find easily the resources for
47 the meeting, like just right now.

48

1 I'm going to continue my presentation now.
2
3 As always, we include in our social media any seasonal closures,
4 local and federal meetings and workshops, outreach and educational
5 activities, marine species, content that we share from other
6 agencies and collaborators, collaborative content, also followers'
7 requests-- sometimes people write to us on the DM or the email, or
8 just a WhatsApp, for example, and we do content in response to
9 what people request --funding opportunities from different federal
10 agencies, our bulletins, and also the Big Fish Initiative.
11
12 We continue receiving request of information, through the inbox
13 and the DM on Facebook and Instagram. As we mentioned, have ISSUU
14 which is a platform that allows us to provide documents, books,
15 and different information that people can easily read, share,
16 download there. It has multiple uses and purposes, and as I always
17 mentioned it is good but not perfect because we have a lot of
18 people that still need printed information, printed documents.
19
20 Now I'm sharing some of the images of the CFMC monthly bulletin.
21 I want to share those two, the January and February issues. The
22 one from February, I want to give a lot thanks to Michelle Schärer.
23 We focused on the topic of groupers. The one that was published in
24 January is about the descending device on Salvapeje. I want to
25 thank the whole team who helped me put together all this
26 information, María, Sarah, Jannette, Wilson, Nicole, Miguel,
27 Diana.
28
29 As always, published CFMC Updates and Noticias del CFMC English
30 and Spanish. So, thank you very much for all the support in this
31 process. This one, the January issue, we also printed it, and it
32 has been used in the workshops that Wilson is coordinating, the
33 Salvapeje and also in MerosPR too. So, again, we have been doing
34 the PEPCO and the Salvapeje workshop, we have noticed the need for
35 printed information, printed documents for our audiences.
36
37 Those are some others that I kept because I wasn't able to present
38 them in the other meetings, so I kept some of the slides. I'm
39 showing some of the bulletins, the newsletters that were published
40 last year. And I want to share those two because we have been
41 strongly collaborating also with MREP. Salvapeje. Those are some
42 examples of the announcements that we publish in our social media
43 of our workshops. PEPCO. PEPER, which is for recreational fishers.
44
45 Also, we always share request for comments from NOAA Fisheries. As
46 I mentioned, have LinkTree. Also, have been using a lot of
47 WhatsApp. Wilson has a broadcast list through which he sends the
48 information from the Council that I share with him. Weekly, I

1 prepare information in English and Spanish, and he sends the
2 information through WhatsApp. Also, Gerson made me an
3 administrator in his chat, and I'm sharing the information through
4 the Saint Croix Fisherman chat in WhatsApp. Nicole is sending
5 information as well.

6
7 Email. We have increased the amount of contacts that we have in
8 email. Kiara Matías, she has been working on the master list of
9 contacts in the Council. And every time that we have a workshop,
10 for example, PEPCO or Salvapeje, what we are doing now is that we
11 are not only doing it on paper, but we do it electronically. So,
12 every time that we have a workshop, we have this information, and
13 we send it to Kiara. Now, we are adding more contacts to our
14 emails, so every time that we have an announcement we have more
15 people that can receive the information through their emails.

16
17 Big Fish initiative. We continue sharing content that Big Fish is
18 producing. This is the HUB from the initiative. I also want to
19 mention that I have been collaborating with MREP in the U.S.V.I.,
20 now. This is new to me. I'm very thankful for being part of the
21 MREP planning team in the U.S.V.I., Puerto Rico steering committee,
22 and also in the PUT. That is the Presentation Unit Team.

23
24 Also, in PEPCO with Wilson, in Salvapeje with Wilson and Nelson,
25 MerosPR, always in festivals and workshop. And with Puerto Rico's
26 Sea Grant we formalized a collaboration. We were sharing content
27 in a very spontaneous way, now, we have clear that anytime that we
28 have things that is common with our topics, we can share and do
29 collaborative content.

30
31 We are in social media. Again, this is a QR code to our LinkTree.
32 Thank you for giving me the time to present. I didn't include a
33 lot of pictures or many other things, but please feel free to ask
34 me any questions if you want to. Gracias.

35
36 Y si hay alguien en español en el zoom, también, por favor, pueden
37 hacer la pregunta en español y la respondo en español.

38

39 **Questions/Comments**

40

41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, question for Cristina? Miguel?

42

43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Not a question, just for the record. The
44 Salvapeje or the one for the descending devices. Although we don't
45 have the regulation in place and maybe-- well, we don't have the
46 regulation in place. We agree to continue the outreach and
47 education for this one. There are many fishers who are already
48 interested in using it on a voluntary basis. Jannette and Cristina

1 have been working together with fishers both in the U.S. Virgin
2 Islands and Puerto Rico. Liaison officers, also, we have some of
3 the descending device's equipment that was sent to us, well,
4 actually it was provided to us by Russel Dunn through an addition
5 to our grant. The interest is there. Without regulations or with
6 regulations, it seems that the fishers are more interested in
7 protecting the fish, throwing them back in a way that they will be
8 able to survive. The chances of survival are higher.

9
10 Just for the record, that's something that is positive to mention.
11 So, thank you a lot, Cristina, for all your work.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

14
15 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. This is María López, NOAA Fisheries
16 SERO. I want to say that one of the things that came out from the
17 December 2024 meeting was for staff to work with the OEAP to
18 summarize new actions and amendments, contribute plain language
19 summary for flyers, meet with the liaisons to ensure that
20 descending device questions were addressed or that we could discuss
21 to ensure that the information that they have was good information,
22 you know, coming from the amendments, etcetera, what we were doing,
23 so that information can be provided to the fishers that they were
24 already assisting.

25
26 I want to thank the liaisons because we were able to meet and it
27 was a really, really super productive discussion. It also helped
28 me a lot to understand which fishers, in terms of sectors, have
29 some more questions about the descending devices and how can we
30 better assist the different sectors. So, thank you to Nicole and
31 thank you to Wilson.

32
33 And for the other things, we work with the panel, and we work with
34 Cristina to go through the actions that we were doing and revising,
35 reviewing and preparing materials, assisting Cristina prepare the
36 materials because she had everything already pretty much done. So,
37 it has been a pleasure. Thank you for giving NOAA Fisheries the
38 opportunity to work with you and for your availability. I know
39 that I we can call you anytime that we have any questions, and you
40 know that you can call us at any time as well.

41
42 So excellent work. We are super, super happy with the Council page.
43 I think it looks amazing, and I think you guys are going to be
44 very happy that it's very accessible. It's very easy to use.
45 There's really good information, so thank you for that.

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anything else for Cristina?

48

1 **VANCE VICENTE:** Thank you, Cristina, again for being everywhere.
2 Don't know if it's to take too much time, but there's, I think
3 it's the second or third underwater photograph that you use, which
4 shows up the first and only hardcore listed as endanger. It's just
5 so the fishers would take a look at it. Is it too hard to go back?
6 It's an underwater picture. Back.

7
8 Yeah. Well, yeah, you have to go. I'm sorry for taking time.

9
10 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** This picture is from Edwin Hernández.

11
12 **VANCE VICENTE:** No. But that's not the one. No. It's before that.

13
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** This is the first one.

15
16 **VANCE VICENTE:** ¿No aparece? Don't worry. I'll show the fishers in
17 a picture. Don't worry.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Right. Moving on to the Liaison officer's
20 report, Nicole Greaux.

21
22 **CFMC LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS**
23 **ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN USVI - NICOLE GREAUX**

24
25 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good morning. I am Nicole Greaux, the Fisheries
26 Liaison for Saint Thomas and Saint John. I do not have a
27 presentation. Unfortunately, I made an egregious error in not
28 listening to my Chief of Fisheries and downloading my presentation
29 to Teams and I had a mishap with my computer. So, because of that,
30 I don't have my presentation.

31
32 So, over the past few months, we have been working on the
33 educational outreach for descending devices, focusing on that
34 mostly. I have had a chance to do two educational outreach projects
35 at the Afternoon on the Green in March and then a Dolphin and Wahoo
36 Fishing Tournament, last month. These allowed me the opportunity
37 to speak with not only recreational fishers, but also some
38 commercial charter fishers as well. And instead of calling it,
39 Salvapeje or save the fish, we are calling it Assist the Fish.

40
41 A lot of the anglers and the fishermen did let me know that by
42 utilizing the descending devices, we are not necessarily saving
43 the fish from making it back down to the bottom, after it has
44 barotrauma, but we are just kind helping it get along the way a
45 little bit quicker than it normally would, which was a really good
46 way to look at how I was promoting the usage of the descending
47 devices. That definitely helped me adjust the context when I'm
48 speaking with Fishers about utilizing the descending devices.

1
2 We received a video from Cristina, that I have done a voiceover in
3 English simply because I realized that a lot of the fishermen that
4 I was showing the video to were having difficulties even after I
5 turned the volume down with listening in Spanish, but then looking
6 at the subtitles in English. For some reason, it was difficult for
7 them to, look at the video and listen to Marcos in Spanish, but
8 then being able to see the words in English. So, even after I asked
9 them to take the volume off while they're watching the video, that
10 still seemed to pose a problem.

11
12 At our fishing tournament, had a guest fisherman that was there
13 from Puerto Rico, Antonio, I think his name is. He was featured in
14 the video. Cristina?

15
16 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Anthony Elizo.

17
18 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Yeah. So, Anthony Elizo was in attendance at the
19 one fishing tournament that we had, and he helped me to explain
20 the descending devices to some of the fishers that were there
21 participating in the fishing tournament. I kind of had a chance to
22 do a mini workshop then and there, and I'm really happy that he
23 was able to attend.

24
25 So, another thing that we've been doing, as the outreach and
26 education is also letting fishers, the new line fishers know that
27 they do have to comply with the federal regulations and telling
28 them and getting them interested in reading about the Island-Based
29 Fishery Management Plan. Several of the new fishers were not aware
30 of the Island-Based Fishery Management Plan. So, in May, the 19th
31 I believe, we are going to be holding a workshop not only on the
32 descending devices, but also letting fishers become more familiar
33 with the IBFMPs. That is going to be publicized within the next
34 week, so that we can have a pretty good attendance of not only our
35 new line fishers, but hopefully some of our commercial fishers
36 will be in attendance as well to answer questions on a peer basis.

37
38 As I said earlier, I don't have a presentation, but I did have
39 some pretty amazing photos of the people that attended. We
40 unfortunately are losing one of our largest fishing tournaments in
41 the Saint Thomas/Saint John District this year, the Northside
42 Sports Fishing Tournament, which takes place in July and is an
43 amazing opportunity for us to speak to fishers from all different
44 sectors, is not being held this year. So, I'm losing one of my
45 outreach things to get information available across the board to
46 fishers of all different categories, and I'm pretty sad about that.

47
48 Hopefully, we will have a chance to have the Northside Sports

1 Fishing Tournament next year, or maybe one of our other
2 associations, like the Committee for the Betterment of Carnage or
3 the Saint Thomas Fishers Association, will be able to pull off and
4 hold a fishing tournament of that magnitude.

5
6 I do want to say thank you very much to Cristina and also to
7 Jannette for keeping me included in what the outreach and education
8 program and panel is doing. Wilson has been an invaluable resource
9 whenever I'm having issues or trouble with how to get the message
10 across. So, I do want to say thank you very much to my Puerto Rico
11 counterpart and thank you to the Council for allowing me the
12 opportunity to bring forth the federal regulations to our fishers
13 in Saint Thomas and Saint John.

14
15 That's all. Thank you.

16 17 **Questions/Comments**

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nicole. Questions? Kreglo.

20
21 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Yeah. Okay. Nicole, you don't need all the
22 audio/visual aids and all that. You always give a great
23 presentation no matter what.

24
25 I Have a question about the May 19th workshop. Where's that being
26 held?

27
28 **NICOLE GREAUX:** That's going to be at the Gamefish Club.

29
30 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Okay.

31
32 **NICOLE GREAUX:** And then depending on what we get for an audience
33 there-- Oh.

34
35 That is going to be held at the Gamefish Club. And then depending
36 on what we do there, we're going to look for moving it closer to
37 some place in town.

38
39 I do have a chance to do a workshop or get space at the U.V.I. in
40 the business classes down there. So, that's another area, but
41 that's going to take place later on, maybe, in July. Yep.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further-- Vance?

44
45 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Nicole, thank you for your presentation.
46 Despite having no slides, it was excellent. Thanks for your work.

47
48 One question, what were the factors that contributed to the

1 cancellation of the fishing tournament?

2
3 **NICOLE GREAUX:** So, we're thinking that it's probably due to
4 monetary constraints and then also some in house personal issues
5 with the sports tournament. Yeah, thank you.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Nicole. Now, I have Wilson
8 Santiago, Puerto Rico.

9
10 **PUERTO RICO - WILSON SANTIAGO**

11
12 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico Fisheries
13 Liaison. I just want to start by saying hi to Alida. Alida, it's
14 good to see you and hear you again. I don't know if you're still
15 connected, but hi.

16
17 As a liaison, my participation and orientation that we have been
18 giving to the fishers. So, weekly, we are working directly with
19 the fishes and fishing communities, both sectors. So, every day,
20 I am attending calls from fishers giving questions and answer, and
21 I'm, like I said in one of my comments earlier, I have been
22 receiving a lot of calls from people from the states that are
23 living in Puerto Rico now. So, there are very few in the agency,
24 like DNER, that cannot speak Spanish, or they don't know how to
25 speak English. So, they passed my contact to them, and we are
26 working with them, with that community. So, with recreational and
27 commercial fishers.

28
29 We continue collaborating with Cristina Olán and the CFMC, with
30 information about the Puerto Rico State Waters for the CFMC webpage
31 and the Fish App or whatever is needed regarding the state
32 regulations or questions that I can answer. If I don't know it, I
33 just find the person that can assist with that concern.

34
35 We have been in virtual meeting regarding water security. We had
36 a meeting with Jannette, Vanessa, and Cristina, I don't remember
37 who else. That was because of a problem that happens in the Puerto
38 Real area. Right, Vanessa? So, we meet virtually, talk about
39 security in the water for divers. So, I think last night, Cristina,
40 you posted a--

41
42 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** On Monday.

43
44 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** On Monday. Yeah.

45
46 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** On Monday we started repeating again
47 the information that we already have regarding water safety.

48

1 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. So, we posted that on social
2 medias and in the broad WhatsApp broadcast list. For those of you
3 who don't know, I have a WhatsApp broadcast list. It's a list that
4 where you receive messages and they are directly from me. It is
5 not a chat. They don't see any phone number for any person. It
6 keeps it confidential. All the information that—Cristina, every
7 week, she's she calls me every Monday, and we talk about what we're
8 going to do for that week. So, thank you, Cristina.

9
10 I have been visiting Fishing Villages around the island with
11 Jannette Ramos, the OEAP Chair. Monthly or every two weeks we are,
12 like, visiting fishers from all around the island. So, we visit
13 them, ask them about any of their concerns. I have learned, in my
14 experience, with communicating with the fishers, you don't have to
15 ask them anything. With a conversation, you can know a lot of their
16 concerns and everything. So, Jannette and I do that very good.

17
18 So, during Brent's presentation he spoke about the Sargassum Human
19 Dimension virtual workshop with NOAA personnel. With Brent Stoffle
20 I've been connecting, like, every Monday, with Nelson and Jannette
21 too. We are working in a virtual workshop which is going to be
22 held in, I don't know if it's in May or-- May, right? So, we've
23 been telling them about the concerns and everything that the
24 fishing communities have about the Sargassum. So, we're working in
25 that. Next slide, Cristina.

26
27 So, outreach and education participation. I have been working on
28 the descending devices workshop. I'm going to talk, with the next
29 slide, a bit more about the descending devices workshops.
30 Educational workshop for commercial fishers, that the PEPCO. We
31 held one in Luquillo this year, and we have another coordinated
32 during the end of May, in Cataño. That's on the North.

33
34 We have been delivering Council's educational materials to fishers
35 around the island. We have the Council's educational and
36 informative table at various events. There are three events listed
37 there, but this Friday, I'm going to another one and I have, like,
38 three or four more listed until July. So, in the educational tables
39 we are always giving information from the Council regarding the
40 state, ecosystem-based management, the MPAs, and everything
41 regarding federal regulations.

42
43 So, we are collaborating with the MREP workshop as well, in the
44 Puerto Rico steering committee, and the planning team. This year
45 MREP workshop is going to be held in the Northwest, in Aguadilla,
46 from the 11th to June 14th. So, we are in the planning team choosing
47 all the participants. Thirty, thirty-two, maybe thirty-five
48 participants, from both sectors, are going to participate this

1 year.

2
3 Like I said in my first slide, our weekly post on the WhatsApp
4 broadcast list. Again, thanks Cristina for everything. So, I'm
5 always sharing information when DNER [inaudible] from the coral
6 reef area. All the information that anyone has that they need to
7 take to the fishing communities, I always tell them to send it to
8 me so I can send it. That list has grown since the descending
9 device workshop. Right now, I do not have the exact number, but it
10 maybe has 700 fishers, something like--

11
12 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** You have over 700 fishers.

13
14 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. A number like that. Yeah.

15
16 I have like four different broadcast lists. You can only have,
17 like, 250 people in one, so we continue adding more. Next page.

18
19 So, for the descending device workshop, yes, the Council, like
20 Miguel said, the Council provides the liaisons with the descending
21 devices system. So, this year we started in Mayagüez on the West
22 Side, then on the South, with two in Villa Pesquera with commercial
23 fishers. So, future locations that are already coordinated May 2nd,
24 May 13th, and May 5th in Guayama, in both, Club Náutico for the from
25 recreational fishers and Villa Pesquera in Pozuelo for commercial
26 fishers. And on the fifth it will be at the Villa Pesquera in
27 Naguabo. Those other locations are still pending for coordination,
28 but it will happen. They are very interested. The fisher is very
29 interested. They're calling me. When they see the promo of the
30 other workshops, they just call me. I'm making the list of who
31 soliciting me to bring the workshop to their area.

32
33 So, we and María, we have very good feedback from both sectors,
34 recreational and commercial. I want to thank you for the meeting
35 that we had and the presentation too.

36
37 So, regarding the descending device workshop, Cristina Olán, as
38 the Council staff, she helped me a lot, and I want to give special
39 attention to Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair, because you're going to see
40 in the photos that Cristina is going to upload now that Nelson
41 Crespo did the presentation for the descending devices and how
42 they can make it. I don't know if you are going to talk about this,
43 Nelson, but-- okay. They make, if you've seen the photos, in the
44 photo that's in the middle and left side, there are couple of
45 descending devices that Nelson with only one or two bucks made in
46 his house. He even made a descending device with a hanger. So,
47 fishers are very happy when they hear him say, you know, that with
48 anything they have in the house, it can be done. So, that was from

1 Mayagüez, from Ponce. Look at the smile. Very happy fisher
2 receiving the descending device, the Salvapeje. That was the group
3 from Mayagüez. Those are commercial and recreational, that was the
4 group of Ponce. The total of participant in both workshops, was
5 like, maybe 60 or 70. Right?

6
7 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** 60-something.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** 60-something. Yeah. Yeah.

10
11 So, we are continuing giving those workshops, as I said, and also
12 the educational program for commercial fishers. And like I said,
13 'tamo activos. Yeah.

14
15 So, like I said in my comments to Graciela, we are reforming the
16 educational program for recreational fishers. So, probably, this
17 next month, we're going to be-- Helena Antoun held a meeting with
18 other partners from DNER on other recreational personal interests
19 so we can all work together. You know? The wheel is already
20 invented, so why not make it all work like a manager community or
21 educational communities. So, next slide.

22
23 This is the end of my presentation. My contact is over there. So,
24 thank you.

25

26 **Questions/Comments**

27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Wilson. Crespo?

29

30 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have to say thank you,
31 Wilson, and this Council for the invitation to participate in those
32 workshops. It's a rewarding experience that encouraged me to use
33 the creativity to build the descending devices at a low cost. And
34 the beauty of this is that when we interact with the fishers, we
35 share more ideas on how to build it. And, you know, we pass a good
36 time. We are learning from each other. The thing is that everyone
37 is interested in using it in the field and that is good, you know,
38 for the fisher and for the resource. Thank you, Wilson, for the
39 invitation.

40

41 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Thank you, Nelson. To add something to
42 that, yes, we have heard from the different sectors, commercial,
43 recreational, divers-- the divers don't have to use it, but
44 sometimes we are multispecies, multiyear fisheries. So, the
45 divers, the cala, the hand line, hook and line, the traps fishers
46 too. They have been very interested in the device. So, thank you,
47 Nelson.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Julian?

2
3 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Hey. Julian Magras, for the record. Okay. So, from
4 speaking with Nelson and Wilson over the last couple days, I heard
5 about their presentations and the great reception that they got
6 from everyone that attended the workshops. I also heard that Nelson
7 was able to teach the fishers how they could make their own
8 descending devices from stuff that they have around their house
9 that can cost them as little as \$2 and he has a presentation on
10 that.

11
12 So, what I'm requesting for the V.I., if possible, at some point,
13 if the both of you can come over and do that same presentation to
14 the fishers in collaboration with Nicole Greaux to do that
15 presentation to all the fishers, both recreational, commercial,
16 and the new guys, everyone. So, see what wheels you guys can spin
17 and if that would be possible to come over and do that for our
18 guys. Thank you.

19
20 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** I'll second that.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Wilson. We don't
23 have Saint Croix.

24
25 We don't have anything for Saint Croix, right, Sennai? Okay.

26
27 So, next, we have Julio Morell and Loraine Martell for CariCOOS
28 with a Sargassum Season Update.

29
30 **SARGASSUM SEASON UPDATE - JULIO MORELL/LORAINÉ MARTELL,**
31 **CARICOOS, INC.**

32
33 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** Hello. Okay. Let me share my screen.

34
35 Okay. Thank you for inviting us to be here in this meeting. I'm
36 glad to see familiar faces in here. My name is Loraine Martel. I
37 am a research associate in CariCOOS, and I am going to be
38 presenting on our efforts on monitoring and forecasting sargassum
39 inundation events and what to expect for the following month.

40
41 So, our sargassum monitoring program includes a series of data
42 intensive analysis designed to leverage existing technologies
43 towards improvements in sargassum inundation forecasting and the
44 characterization of associated sargassum impacts. We have three
45 objectives, which include a weekly monitoring of sargassum biomass
46 influx in term of the magnitude and the spatial temporal
47 variability, in terms of the La Parguera Marine Reserve Basin, and
48 at the key scales within La Parguera. Our second objective is to

1 look at the biogeochemical impacts of these sargassum events. And
2 with the data that we collect along with other available tools we
3 have, we have developed and validated Sargassum coastal inundation
4 forecasting products to support coastal managers and marine
5 activities.

6
7 So, here, I am presenting a map of Puerto Rico, where on the left
8 side is the map of La Parguera Marine Reserve, which is located in
9 the Southwest region of Puerto Rico. The blue pins represent the
10 sargassum traps that we have. We have 12 traps within the basin.
11 And for six of those stations, we also collect biogeochemical data.
12 So, we collect discrete seawater samples for pH, total salinity,
13 dissolve inorganic carbon, and dissolve oxygen, as well as salinity
14 and temperature measurement.

15
16 So, right now I am showing you our time series of the estimated
17 sargassum with biomass per meter of coast as an average of those
18 12 traps that are within the basin. Right now, are starting our
19 fifth year of this time and this data shows that we have
20 seasonality and variability throughout the years, where in 2024 we
21 saw the lowest sargassum biomass. So, this year, we have documented
22 the arrival of sargassum in February, with a significant influx
23 observed just two weeks ago, which is that last spike on the plot.
24 So, we expect to see more sargassum arrivals according to the
25 sargassum watch system.

26
27 So, this data that we collect on biomass and biogeochemical
28 parameters are used for the development of the forecast model and
29 the biogeochemical impact model. And it's an ongoing effort to
30 collect this data to continue validating those models. And so, on
31 the right corner, there's a picture of the sargassum traps that we
32 have here in La Parguera.

33
34 So, the evolution of the sargassum forecasting products. We started
35 with version one, which was or is a tracking tool. It's a visual
36 model for particle tracking using AmSeas, and this is a qualitative
37 approach for tracking sargassum patches. However, this tool has
38 its limitations because it does not reach shore, and it doesn't
39 provide information on the amount of biomass to be expected at
40 landfall.

41
42 Version two is driven by surface current of AmSeas forecast as
43 well and uses the maximum chlorophyll index to better track the
44 sargassum patches by representing the distribution of sargassum
45 mat and its density. I want you to really see the movies that I
46 have on the presentation. So, the different colors represent the
47 sargassum patch density. Right? And this is version two.

1
2 So, for this version, we have validated the model. On the left
3 side at the bottom, it's a map of La Parguera with the sargassum
4 traps. And so, since this forecast project uses AmSeas, and the
5 limitation is that it doesn't reach shore, we use the outer traps
6 of La Parguera. So, the outer reef traps to validate this model.
7
8 And so, on the top of the map, we see the plot for that validation
9 where the red bars are the modeled sargassum, and the stars are
10 the recorded biomass in La Parguera. And so, it gave us a
11 reasonable validation for this model. So, this forecast product is
12 available at CariCOOS.org. This is a regional sargassum coastal
13 inundation forecast in terms of biomass in kilograms per meter of
14 shoreline per week, and it is based on the AmSeas model. And this
15 tool support costal managers and marine related activities.
16
17 Version three, which is currently operational, it uses FVCOM
18 Currents Model from CariCOOS and provides a three- and half-day
19 forecast. So, this one is also initialized with MCI. It's not
20 restricted by the resolution like the one before because it
21 represents both the coastline and the bathymetry. And so, in these
22 movies, you can see how the particles get into the coast, unlike
23 the other one that I showed you. So, it can forecast the landfall
24 at a specific coastal site. And it is a tool for rapid response to
25 extreme beaching events. This, like I mentioned, is currently
26 operational. It operates daily, and it runs after the FVCOM
27 Hydrodynamic model. And we expect to have this product available
28 on our webpage by next month.
29
30 Version four, we are working on it. Currently, Dr. Haibo is
31 collaborating for the development of version four. It's also based
32 on FVCOM, and it will allow the inclusion of very high-resolution
33 domains for La Parguera and Saint Croix. In La Parguera, we will
34 use this forecast model for the development of the biogeochemical
35 impact forecast because it has improvements in the near shore
36 currents and the particle capacity to be accumulated in the
37 emergent kits and the coast. And for Saint Croix, it will help
38 with the management of the water and power authorities, the water
39 intake desalination plan. Sargassum traps were installed near the
40 WAPA station for validation of this model in Saint Croix.
41
42 And so, this version will help to predict the landfall of sargassum
43 on sensitive marine ecosystem and near shore critical
44 infrastructure. This should be operational in the upcoming weeks,
45 and we expect to have it available by the May.

1
2 So, as part of our monitoring efforts on the biogeochemical impacts
3 of sargassum inundation events, the quantified sargassum biomass
4 is converted into carbon influx within the basin. So, endogenous
5 sources of particulate organic carbon for La Parguera includes
6 seagrasses and mangrove litterfall. When compared to sargassum,
7 these estimates suggest that sargassum contributes to about a 20%
8 increase in carbon within La Parguera.

9
10 When we did that for a nearshore Mangrove Bay, we saw that this
11 carbon influx increases by over 100%. In this near shore bay,
12 Mangrove Bay, the dissolved oxygen-- So here, I am presenting, at
13 this station, Monsio José, which is a nearshore mangrove station
14 that we have. It works as a big natural trap for sargassum. So, I
15 am presenting the time series for that station for the sargassum
16 biomass and the dissolved oxygen.

17
18 So, we see that the dissolved oxygen levels are influenced by the
19 influx of sargassum, showing a consistent decline during the
20 sargassum season each year. So, around 20% of the observations, we
21 saw that the dissolved oxygen was below two milligrams per liter.
22 So, this is affecting the mangrove biota there. So, here I am
23 showing you pH in green and aragonite saturation state in pink.
24 And so, we see that this station is also experiencing
25 acidification. In 2021, we see a major drop on pH of about one pH
26 unit. We also see that about 30% of the observations, the aragonite
27 saturation state was below two, which means dissolution.

28
29 We have conducted a biological study. It was conducted by Dr.
30 Otero, from the Department of Marine Science from the UPR in
31 Mayagüez and these results are from sol plankton and indicate that
32 there is a decrease in holoplankton and meroplankton biomass linked
33 to sargassum events and low oxygen levels at Monsio José. So, I am
34 showing you the two stations. MJ1 is the one that I showed the
35 oxygen and pH and aragonite levels. Varadero is another station
36 that we have, but in both stations, there is a decline of plankton
37 biomass.

38
39 As part of the biogeochemical model efforts, we are gathering high
40 temporal resolution data from HOBO's data loggers for their
41 assessment of hypoxia events at three stations. These stations are
42 from the outer keys, middle key, and the near shore station that
43 we have. We are exploring physical drivers that modeled dissolve
44 oxygen, and we have found that for these two stations, which are
45 Media Luna is the outer key, Enrique is the mid-shelf key, two
46 drivers that modeled the dissolved oxygen variability there are
47 wind speed and tides.

1
2 However, tides and wind speed do not fully modulate a dissolved
3 oxygen at Monsio José where the bottom sediments are highly
4 organic, unlike the other stations which have coral rubble and low
5 sargassum entrapment. So, we need to account for carbon inputs
6 from the mangrove at this station and from the sargassum that
7 arrives there. So, the remineralization rate may be the most
8 important driver of hypoxia there.

9
10 On the right graph here-- so we collect four sediments weekly as
11 well to and measure the carbon on the sediments. And so, we see,
12 for example, the sargassum season between 2021 and 2022. We see
13 that about eight months, we continue to have sargassum at the
14 bottom decomposing. Maybe that's-- well, that's an important
15 parameter for our biogeochemical forecasting model. So, we are
16 working on improving that model, and we expect to have it by the
17 end of summer. This model can be applied to other locations that
18 are being impacted by sargassum inundation.

19
20 And that's all I have.

21 22 **Questions/Comments**

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Loraine. Any questions for Loraine
25 on Sargassum? Vance.

26
27 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. Thanks again for your presentation. Very
28 hard work that CariCOOS people have been doing. I hope that you
29 don't get a budget cut or not a significant one, but it's going to
30 hurt.

31
32 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** We hope not.

33
34 **VANCE VICENTE:** It's going to hurt. But anyhow. Back to your
35 presentations. One thing that-- can you hear me okay?

36
37 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** Yeah.

38
39 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yeah. This is Vance Vicente. Something that would
40 be very useful in the graphs that you presented, especially with
41 the water quality parameters, it will be nice to have a bar that
42 shows which are the water quality standards for SB waters. For
43 example, you know, dissolved oxygen shall not exceed, shall not
44 contain less than five milligrams. It would be nice to see how the
45 oxygen concentration varies. If it varies significantly, you know,
46 below the water quality standard for dissolved oxygen, the same
47 thing with the pH. If it goes outside the range between 7.3 and
48 8.5 and turbidity that it doesn't exceed the 10 NTUs, nephelometric

1 units. It will be nice for management purposes to see how much
2 natural violations are occurring out there with regards to water
3 quality standards. That's just my comment, and thanks again for
4 your presentation.

5

6 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** Thank you for the suggestion.

7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. I have Ricardo and then Graciela.

9

10 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Graciela. You can go first. Sure. Okay.

11

12 Loraine, thanks for that presentation. I have only one question.
13 I will provide it in Spanish and in English. In Spanish is, pudiste
14 observar mortalidad o emigración sobre todo de las especies más
15 sésiles en los lugares de muestreo. Did you manage to observe
16 sessile animals or organism migrating from or dying, with a lot of
17 mortality, from those places that you managed to sample.

18

19 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** Okay. Espero acordarme lo que digo en
20 español para decirlo en inglés. Honestamente, yo estoy empezando
21 este año a hacer estos muestreos. Así que, ahora, verdad, para mí,
22 es que voy a comenzar a hacer estas observaciones. Pero sí, mis
23 compañeros me han compartido que, en efecto, la Estación de Monsio
24 José, que es la estación costera, cuando llegan estos arribazones
25 de sargazo, pues sí se ven las raíces de rizófora, que no hay,
26 ¿verdad? No hay organismos, no hay peces, los peces no hay, y, sí,
27 han visto peces muertos y cassiopeas también. Y cuando acaba el
28 season, por ejemplo, cuando empecé a hacer estos muestreos, y había
29 peces en Monsio José, ellos se ponían contentos, como, "Mira,
30 llegaron los peces de nuevo." Así que, si, en esa estación en
31 particular si se ve ese efecto en la llegada de sargazo.

32

33 Okay. Now in English. So, I recently started doing these field
34 observations, so I don't have personal observations, but my
35 coworkers, they have shared that in the past, during the sargassum
36 arrivals, they have seen plain rhizophore roots and that there are
37 no fish at this nearshore station. They have seen dead fish and
38 upside-down jellyfish floating.

39

40 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Muchas gracias.

41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Graciela?

43

44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** That was my question, but I have another
45 one. Are you guys looking at the movement of the dissolved oxygen
46 lens away from the area where you have the stations? Because that
47 would definitely impact certain fish species, and you can have
48 fish mortalities associated with that dissolved oxygen, lowly

1 dissolved oxygen as it moves away from the reef.

2
3 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** What do mean by, like, if we take the DO
4 measurements near the traps?

5
6 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Right. Do you have stations that go away
7 from the coast and from the reef to see how far that dissolved
8 oxygen lens goes?

9
10 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** Yeah. So, we have traps and stations within
11 La Parguera. So, we have that gradient of the outer keys, mid keys,
12 and the nearshore stations or coastal stations. So, we can see,
13 like, the variability on the sargassum. Right?

14
15 So, for example, two weeks ago, we got sargassum at the outer
16 traps, but not on the inshore traps. So, we see that variability
17 of sargassum as well as the biogeochemical impact and variability,
18 partial temporal variability for the chemical parameters. Does
19 that answer your question?

20
21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Si. Actually, it answers it more than I
22 expected because you're following it inshore also. So, thank you.

23
24 **LORAINÉ MARTELL-BONET:** Okay.

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. We have to break for lunch.
27 Lunch is here, and we must be back by 01:30 because we have the
28 assistant RA coming to make a speech online from DC. So, promptly
29 at 01:30.

30
31 Thank you. I do have mortality on sargassum video if you want to
32 see it here.

33
34 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on April 23, 2025.)

35
36 - - -

37
38 APRIL 23, 2025

39
40 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

41
42 - - -

43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Alright. Good afternoon, everybody. We're
44 back from lunch, and we have the assistant RA, Eugenio Piñeiro,
45 will give some words to the Council. Good afternoon, Mr. Piñeiro.
46 Welcome, the floor is yours.

47

1
2 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Hey. Julian Magras, for the record. Genio,
3 congratulations, you know. I've known you for a very, very long
4 time.

5
6 The man that saved my life in Ponce with a spider bite. I'll never
7 forget that, but as you said earlier, you know, it's so good to
8 see one of our own that came from the bottom, and you reached to
9 where you're at today. I congratulate you in where you're sitting.
10 I know you're going to be a very useful resource that can help the
11 Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the fishers in getting
12 things done that need to get done, getting it done in the right
13 way. So, I look forward to working with you and your team, and
14 congratulations.

15
16 **EUGENIO PIÑEIRO SOLER:** Thank you, Julian. Julian, you are not
17 only a friend, but you're also a brother. I really appreciate those
18 kind words, and you can be sure that I'm going to do everything I
19 can to help you guys in this new task that I that I'm with. Please
20 extend my regards to the fisheries communities, most commercial
21 and recreational anglers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Saint Thomas,
22 Saint Croix, and to my fellow friends in in Puerto Rico. Thank
23 you.

24
25 Thank you, Julian, for your kind words. I did really appreciate
26 your words. Thank you.

27
28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel.

29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Genio, espero que no se te haya olvidado el
31 español. So, we are very proud that you are sitting there. Remember
32 that you have friends here; I know how difficult it is because you
33 are in between the top and the bottom of everything that we do in
34 fisheries. But rest assured that whenever you need to call us,
35 whenever you need to consult with us, just drop us a note.

36
37 Me uno a las palabras de los compañeros, especialmente de Nelson
38 que te conoce desde que eras chiquito. So, we are really proud.
39 You have a friend in the Caribbean. Don't forget about that.

40
41 Thank you, a lot, Genio.

42
43 **EUGENIO PIÑEIRO SOLER:** Thank you, Miguel. Thank you. And I have
44 many friends and many brothers there. So, yeah, I appreciate your
45 kind words. Thank you. Muchas gracias.

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa.

48

1 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Genio, I just have to say
2 that I'm really happy that you are there right now. And I know
3 that our friend Elliot is very proud of you. I am the little one
4 in the stable, but I've known you for a long time. I know that
5 we're going to have a nice representation over there.

6
7 In the name of all of our commercial fishermen and all the years
8 that you give to us we really appreciate you and congratulations
9 on your nomination.

10
11 **EUGENIO PIÑEIRO SOLER:** Thank you, Vanessa. Please use this
12 opportunity to relay to all the fishers in the West Side of the
13 island, that you have been involved with for all your life, that
14 I'm here for them, that nothing has changed. I'm still the same.
15 Thank you, Vanessa.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anyone else for-- Vance?

18
19 **VANCE VICENTE:** Genio, saludos. Habla Vance Vicente. Un abrazo y
20 gracias por haber echo tantas cosas buenas por Puerto Rico; por tu
21 país. Y haces falta. Bueno me alegra el verte. Bye.

22
23 **EUGENIO PIÑEIRO SOLER:** Thank you, Vance. Thank you, Vance. Thank
24 you for your words and looking forward to work with you for many
25 years ahead and to help in any way I can assist the Caribbean
26 Council and all the Councils that are here. But in particular the
27 Caribbean Council where I know you guys work very hard. Thank you,
28 Vance.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Anyone else? Okay. Genio,
31 congratulations. Looking forward to working with you.

32
33 **EUGENIO PIÑEIRO SOLER:** Thank you, Carlitos. Good luck. Good luck
34 in your meeting, guys. Take care now.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next, we have enforcement reports. Puerto
37 Rico DNER.

38
39 Wait. Wait. Sorry about that. District Advisory Panel. So, we got
40 Julian for the DAP.

41
42 **DISTRICT ADVISORY PANEL REPORTS**
43 **ST. THOMAS, U.S.V.I. - JULIAN MAGRAS, CHAIR**

44
45 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. DAP Chair, Saint
46 Thomas/Saint John. I don't have a report because there was really
47 not a whole lot going on over the last year, but I was able to
48 attend the MREP workshop in the Southeast in January of this year.

1 I was invited. I also am member of the National Steering Committee
2 meeting for MREP. So, I am able to attend any of the workshops,
3 and I went to the Southeast workshop to experience how it is done
4 there. And I must say it was a great experience. A great experience
5 similar to what we had done in Saint Croix last year in May. You
6 know, you watch these fishers and other agencies come in to learn
7 the process of what's actually taking place in the fisheries. And
8 the team that was put together to present to these fishers was
9 amazing.

10
11 And, you know, I want to highlight a couple individuals who really
12 spent a lot of time working that whole week with the fishers. Two
13 of them are Andy Strelcheck and Clay Porch. They did a lot of
14 presentations. On the last day, you know, they spent over two hours
15 sitting down in the front of the room in a chair. They had a panel,
16 but the two of them took each one of those fishers' questions and
17 answered them thoroughly and made the fishers feel comfortable.

18
19 At the end, the fishers were asked, "well, would you be involved?"
20 At the beginning, they said "no." At the end, we had fishers who
21 had already signed up to advisory committees, already signed up to
22 attend meetings, asking for all the information and when the next
23 meeting in their specific area was, it was amazing.

24
25 That's why MREP is so important. I'm really hoping with the voice
26 of all the different fishers that are involved in MREP throughout
27 all of the U.S. that they can get the message across to the people
28 that need to know we need to keep this program alive. I think it's
29 the key to fisheries. I think it's the key to the managers working
30 with the fishers. It's the most amazing thing that I'm a part of,
31 and, you know,

32
33 I'm so happy to be a part of it and to see the time and energy
34 that people put out. You know, they don't exclude anybody's
35 questions or comments. They listen and they work with it. So,
36 that's my report for today. I just wanted to say thank you for all
37 the people who are involved and all of what they do to make it
38 happen.

39
40 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Thank you, Julian. Gerson.

41
42 **ST. CROIX, U.S.V.I. - GERSON MARTÍNEZ, CHAIR**

43
44 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. At this time,
45 I don't have any report, but I want to add that since all the
46 decision makers and our government person are here, I have a couple
47 issues that I want to bring up to the director, I mean,
48 Commissioner Oriel and our Dr. Sennai concerning issues with sharks

1 coming around our shorelines.

2
3 We have been seeing sharks up to six inches of water in the
4 shoreline, a hammerhead to be specific. And just last week, Easter
5 Monday, we had another encounter where a fisherman saved the life
6 of two tourists that came over in a sailboat, and they were
7 swimming to the sailboat. And the fisherman saw a tiger
8 surrounding, going in circles around them, and literally went and
9 took them out of the water. We asked our leaders here that signs
10 be put up, just warning the public that it's not safe for them to
11 be in the water unless they are probably knee deep.

12
13 I don't want to make the public be uncomfortable, but I rather
14 know that there's danger in the shoreline because my grandchild
15 can be in water and a shark can come up to the shoreline and go
16 with him, than being naive about something and losing a family
17 member. So, I asked that something be done towards that.

18
19 That will be all I have to say this afternoon. We didn't have any
20 meetings. I thank you all for having us here today, I thank all my
21 fellow companions for bringing-- especially Julian. I admire him.
22 He is a-- I think he can run for governor, and we will vote for
23 him because this guy always has so much input. I don't sit down
24 and wonder where this guy gets so much information, because,
25 sometimes, I see myself so little around him, but I admire him,
26 and he gives me the courage to continue coming to this meeting and
27 speaking on behalf of our fisherman. I thank you for this. Thanks

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Gerson. Nelson?

30
31 **PUERTO RICO - NELSON CRESPO, CHAIR**

32
33 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have any official
34 report, but on February 11th I had the opportunity to attend a
35 meeting with fishers and charter boat operators in Rincon. The
36 meeting was successful despite the fact that most of the fishermen
37 who attended the meeting were a commercial and only two charters
38 operator were there. I think the meeting should have been held
39 after 6PM because, in that moment, we're in the high peak season
40 of tourists in Rincon, and most of the charter operator are booked.

41
42 Among the most important points of the meeting, in my opinion, are
43 the following. There is a great confusion among the charter
44 community and the DNER about the requirements for a permit of
45 charter boat operation. It's unclear whether they need a permit or

1 a certification from the Department of Tourism to operate. At one
2 point, it was stated that they only need to comply with the DNER
3 requirements, but in some cases, DNR rangers try to give them a
4 fine if they don't comply with the tourist requirements.

5 It's evident that there is no clear communication within agencies
6 involving this matter, and this need to be addressed promptly.

7
8 There are a large number of charter boats operator without the
9 required permits, and even more, they are unaware of the
10 requirements and law. I think it is necessary to develop an intense
11 education campaign, perhaps to create a special section detail on
12 PEPCO or PEPER or create a special education program for the
13 charter boat operators and also the DNR rangers regarding this
14 matter.

15
16 Also, the commercial sector claims that illegal fishing sales by
17 charter boat operators are affecting their ability to sell their
18 catch. In my opinion, charter boat operators are conducting a
19 commercial activity even if they are taking clients for
20 recreational fishing and should be able to sell their catch and
21 submit a catch report for each trip as required by commercial
22 fishermen. Also, you know, this is a contradiction because most
23 commercial fishers buy the bait for the commercial fishing
24 charters, and I know a few commercial fishermen that buy their
25 catch to resell it. This is an activity that has always occurred,
26 and I don't think it's a real problem at the moment.

27
28 The issue was raised that it is necessary for the DNER enforcement
29 to be equal for all sectors. Unfortunately, they only focus on
30 commercial fishermen and almost never intervene with charter boat
31 operation. I think there is only a language barrier that maybe is
32 present because the official doesn't know how to speak, you know,
33 fluid English, and they prefer to let go of the charters because
34 most of them are American people that only speak English, and they
35 don't want to have that intervention. That's my opinion.

36
37 Another topic that is coming up is the high increase in deepwater
38 fishermen for Unit 2, since fishing was opened to all commercial
39 fishermen. One [inaudible] brought up the issue, this issue had
40 been raised at the Council meeting the first time this decision
41 was presented by the DNER. Fishermen feared that this fishery would
42 fall in danger at some moment. I know at this moment, this fishery
43 is really healthy, but we have to maintain an eye on that, because
44 the pressure that is getting right now, especially for Snapper
45 Unit 2-- and I am special as Snapper Unit 2 fisherman, I know what
46 I'm talking about --is huge. And that sometimes scares me.

1
2 So, I recommend this Council to maintain an eye on that and see
3 the numbers that are coming up when the new reports come out.
4 That's all I got. Thank you.
5

6 **Questions/Comments**

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nelson. Miguel?
9

10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just to take the opportunity now that the three
11 Chairs are here. I discussed it with Gerson, and I believe that
12 they mentioned it to Julian. We are going to have a virtual meeting
13 of all the three DAPs. It will be Chaired by Julian. Yeah, you
14 didn't know that, uh? They elected you unanimously. But in order
15 to make the meeting effective, it's a virtual meeting, I will be
16 joining efforts with the three Chairs so we can put together an
17 agenda and a schedule of events because there are certain things
18 that we discuss here.
19

20 Now that the permit will be postpone for further discussion until
21 further notice, we can then address issues related to the Executive
22 Orders once we have the guidance for the National Marine Fisheries
23 Services and other issues that are important that have been
24 mentioned here.
25

26 So, Mr. Chairman, the three Chairs and I will discuss this in the
27 near future. Once we have the agenda prepared, we will share it
28 with you and the other Council members, so we will know that this
29 is going to happen.
30

31 And then the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council sent us a
32 note for the record, and I want Diana to mention it. It's a minor
33 thing, but it's not at the same time.
34

35 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** Yeah. I received a call from Emily Muehlstein,
36 and we talked for a little while and she told me that the Gulf
37 Council already has a new name. It's the Gulf Council. She
38 encouraged everybody to enter the page because they changed their
39 logo and also, I mean, they have nice things for you guys to see.
40

41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Diana. It's funny, but it's not at
42 same time. This is a happy meeting between two laws and one
43 Executive Order. So, we welcome the new name and for the record,
44 that's what they wanted us to convey to you today.
45

46 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Okay, next on the agenda. I

1 want to say something about what Crespo mentioned on the deepwater
2 snapper in Puerto Rico because I go there quite often and I agree.
3 It is a huge fishery, and I believe it needs some serious attention
4 to manage it. I would recommend you listen to Nelson.

5
6 Enforcement reports. We have DNER Puerto Rico.

7
8 **ENFORCEMENT REPORTS**
9 **PUERTO RICO DNER**

10
11 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Good afternoon, Council and all the public
12 attending today. My name is Ricardo López. I will be presenting
13 the report of law enforcement from the Puerto Rico Department of
14 Natural and Environmental Resources, the DNER rangers.

15
16 As you can see right now in the presentation, there are movies of
17 two interventions, both of them in the Exclusive Economic Zone.
18 One of them specifically in Bajo De Sico. That report came from
19 DNER Ranger Edwin Rodríguez, who was the previous commissioner
20 from the DNR Corps. And the report was provided by Yamiré Pérez-
21 Román, who is a DNR Ranger in charge of working in maritime zones
22 and in the ocean. Next, please.

23
24 Okay. Yeah. As in previous reports, you can see in the bullets,
25 different bullets, what they have been doing in terms of activities
26 and interventions. You can see that there are different laws, but
27 the ones that are of more concern to us are those in the green
28 rectangle. For example, the law 278, Puerto Rico Fisheries Law.
29 They had five cases during this season. For Regulation 7949, which
30 is the Regulation on Fisheries they also have five cases. We can
31 compare this data with previous reports in the next slide, please.

32
33 As you can see there, we have different seasons, different years.
34 It's more or less the same. We can see that most of the
35 interventions are in the Puerto Rico Water Navigation and Safety
36 Law. And very few of them are in Puerto Rico Fisheries Law or
37 Fishery's Regulation.

38
39 Now we have, I believe, two new vessels that we can see on the
40 next slide please. Maybe the next one. But on this one, you can
41 see evidence of an intervention with a queen conch. It was done in
42 Puerto Real, Cabo Rojo. All those queen conchs went to the
43 Fisheries Research Lab to be researched by the biologists. On the
44 picture on the right, you can see bags full of queen conch, but
45 also you can see three engines. Those are three new engines for
46 one of the new boats that the DNR rangers have, which are used to

1 go to the EEZ. Next, please.

2
3 In this other slide, you can see also some activities and
4 interventions, many of them with commercial fishers. None of those
5 in the pictures, have any illegal activity involved, but they were
6 there, and they checked for safety and for fishes and any kind of
7 activity that the fisherman was doing in that zone. There you can
8 also see the new boat with those three new engines. I believe we
9 have two of those. And you can also see at the bottom of the
10 picture, a description of the price, of the cost of those boats
11 that they are using now. Next, please.

12
13 They not only intervene with fishermen and illegal activities, but
14 they also helped the different organisms in the ocean that may
15 need help. In this case, that manatee was tangled in a rope. It
16 was then released during the month of Valentines, and then he
17 engaged another boat, that happened during this season. That was
18 Tuque. Tuque was a very well-known manatee. He was released in
19 Ceiba when he was young. Now, we can see he is not that young
20 anymore. Let's to the next one.

21
22 Okay. There you can have the different emails and telephone numbers
23 of the colleagues that provided the information.

24
25 If you have any questions, I'm here.

26

27 **Questions/Comments**

28

29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Questions for Ricardo? Graciela?

30

31 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Ricardo, thank you for that. Did you get
32 the poundage of the queen conch and the exact location where it
33 was harvested? And what's the disposition of that conch once you-

34 -

35

36 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** I don't have that information at this moment,
37 but I can get it for you very soon, probably for today.

38

39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So those were juvenile conch, right?

40

41 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Well, one of the problems was that the person
42 didn't have a permit or license for that. That was the main
43 problem. Yeah.

44

45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But also, you know, if we have that
46 information from the illegal side of the fishing, it's also
47 undersized from what I saw in the picture. So, it would be, you
48 know, very good to have that information. Thank you.

1
2 **RICARDO LÓPEZ-ORTIZ:** Alright. Thanks to you.
3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Ricardo? Hearing none,
5 thank you, Ricardo. We have DPNR? Okay. We have the U.S. Coast
6 Guard.
7

8 **U.S. COAST GUARD**
9

10 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Good afternoon, everyone. This is, Lieutenant Kayla
11 Ishida from sector San Juan. So, I just took over as a living
12 marine resource, so happy to be a part of this team. And looking
13 forward to collaborating. So, I just want to highlight one of the
14 multi-agency operations that we conducted in February 28th of this
15 year.
16

17 So, this was the first fisheries focused operation that sector San
18 Juan has done in a couple of years, or at least since the last
19 three years that people have been here for. So, we're really
20 excited to get this initiative off the ground. We were able to
21 encompass Coast Guard, FURA, DNER, and NOAA OLE on the operation.
22 So, we're really excited to have a joint unified presence out on
23 the West Coast of Puerto Rico.
24

25 So, the focus was to ensure compliance and the closures of the
26 three closed areas on the West Side of Puerto Rico. From that, we
27 use a Coast Guard thirty-three-foot vessel, which you can see on
28 the top left of or bottom left picture of the slide. We also had
29 the DNER vessel. That was deployed with the NOAA OLE agent and
30 then a Fura boat as well with a Coast Guard boarding officer on
31 board. From the operation, we were able to board eight vessels,
32 and we found two significant violations.
33

34 The first was the fishing within a closed area, and there were 10
35 spiny lobsters on board. The second was a commercial fishing
36 vessel, which had 2 spiny lobsters on board one hogfish, which was
37 fished in the closed area. In addition to the surface assets, we
38 also had air assets. So, we had a coast guard helicopter and then
39 also a DNER, Cessna to provide overflights and provide targeting
40 so that we were able to op optimize the amount of time that we had
41 on scene with the assets.
42

43 So, again, just want to highlight that we want to do more of these
44 operations where it's not just Coast Guard out there. It's not
45 just DNER. It's not just FURA out there. We're able to do a unified
46 approach where we're showing presence, not just on the West Coast,
47 but hopefully moving across to Saint Thomas and the U.S. Virgin
48 Islands as well.

1
2 And then on the right, we have a boarding done by the Coast Guard
3 Cutter, Joseph Napier. So, that's our fast response cutters. That's
4 our 154-foot vessels. So, they were out doing their normal law
5 enforcement patrol when they encountered a fishing vessel. They
6 conducted a boarding on a 22-foot commercial vessel, which was
7 actively fishing in the closed area. They had 25 silk snappers on
8 board, and this case has also been assumed by NOAA.

9 So, I just want to highlight again that on the left, you have an
10 example of something that we're specifically targeting fisheries
11 operations, and on the right is a coincidental fisheries boarding
12 that we're doing. Again, we're not just doing fisheries. We're
13 doing law enforcement. We're doing alien interdiction operations
14 as well, but the idea is that we can be multifaceted so that when
15 we have an asset out, whether it's on the West Side of Puerto Rico
16 or in the Virgin Islands, that we're able pivot on both sides.

17
18 Moving forward, I'd like to propose that we do more operations for
19 enforcement for the Coast Guard. Granted that we do have limited
20 resources, but, again, I think if we get creative in working with
21 our partners with DNER, working with NOAA OLE, we can be more
22 effective in the region. And that's all I have from the Coast
23 pending any questions.

24

25 **Questions/Comments**

26

27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Questions for the Coast Guard?
28 Vanessa?

29

30 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Vanessa Ramírez for the
31 record. Thank you for the presentation. I just wanted to make
32 comment for the record. We had a situation this Saturday in our
33 bay in Puerto Real with an intervention with a fisherman, a
34 commercial fisherman that was escorted to the port, and it became
35 a big issue because at the beginning it was being handled by the
36 Coast Guard. And then FURA came as well.

37

38 At the beginning, they were alleging that they were throwing out
39 drugs. Then they found out that they were just cleaning the conch.
40 Once they were in the port, K-9 units also came and around 15
41 agents with a lot of excessive boats, the helicopter. Everyone was
42 up in that port, just to find out that they only had queen conch,
43 they had their license, everything was legal, but the Coast Guard
44 doesn't know that in Puerto Rico they land without the shell. So,
45 they were arguing that they were supposed to have the shells.

46

47 So that's a point of conflict and has been for a long time. So, I
48 hope the DNER can take notes on that and can put together the

1 information, the orientation so that when this kind of thing--
2 especially, because in the West Side, we have the areas that are
3 federal zones inside of state waters, --happens, everything is
4 clear and this situation doesn't happen again.

5
6 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Yes. Thank you. So, we're actually doing some more
7 training this upcoming week. And I think that's one thing that we
8 need improve upon, the understanding between the federal
9 regulations and then the local state regulations. We're getting
10 better at that, but I understand that was a big conflict. So, we'll
11 make sure that we clarify that with our boarding officers moving
12 forward.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Anything else for the Coast Guard?
15 I want to personally thank you for the collaboration on fisheries
16 out there with the Coast Guard and the local authorities. It's
17 really helpful. Thank you. Vance?

18
19 **VANCE VICENTE:** Real quickly. I use fishers to do my research.
20 Okay? And the fact that they have a scientist on board, you know,
21 they feel that they can be a little bit relaxed regarding life
22 vests and stuff like that. So, we were stopped by the Coast Guard.
23 I said, what the hell is happening? Well, they didn't have the
24 right number of life vest. I had bought new ones and didn't take
25 them. So, it's important that the fishers are aware that they have
26 to have all the licenses in place and life vests. Okay? You know,
27 it was embarrassing. Anyhow, that's it.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you, Coast Guard. I have NOAA
30 Fisheries OLE. Are they online?

31
32 **MATTHEW WALIA:** I am. Can you hear me?

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

35
36 **NOAA FISHERIES OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**

37
38 **MATTHEW WALIA:** I appreciate it, Mr. Chair. I'm Matt Walia with
39 NOAA OLE, the compliance liaison. I'm give our brief here. And I
40 also want to note, if questions come up, our agent in Puerto Rico,
41 Miguel Borges, is also online as well. So, both of us are available
42 if there's any comments or questions.

43
44 But if you go on the next slide, I want to just give you an overview
45 of pretty much since January of some of the activities we've had
46 in the region. I think this is great. This should look very
47 familiar. You just saw this in Coast Guard and a picture in Puerto
48 Rico's report as well.

1
2 You can go back. It shouldn't be doing that on the slides.
3 Hopefully, it'll stay there.
4
5 But, yeah, what I wanted to highlight--
6
7 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Excuse me. Could you send us the power
8 point, or you can share your screen?
9
10 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Yeah. Give me-- sorry. Give me one moment. I'll
11 quick pull it up here. I can share it if that's easier. If you
12 allow me to share my screen, I can pull it up.
13
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. You're a co-host now. Thank you
15 very much.
16
17 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Alright. Can you see that okay?
18
19 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We see your screen.
20
21 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Alright. Apologies. That was sent over, it should
22 have been good.
23
24 But, yeah, what I want to highlight here is, so this should look
25 familiar. Like I said, you just heard from Coast Guard, and this
26 is great. You know, there's a similar theme between all law
27 enforcement on this, and this is great cooperation of what our
28 priorities are. We want to patrol the closed areas, make sure folks
29 are keeping what's allowable, not getting in there and fishing
30 when they can't. So, this was a recent patrol back in February
31 that Miguel Borges worked a lot with, and he's got a great
32 relationship with Coast Guard helping them train over at sector as
33 well as working with the rangers as well getting out.
34
35 So, he was able to get out on patrol. He was on the DNER vessel
36 that you just saw. He was with the rangers. Coast Guard also had
37 their boat out there, as well, you heard, with the air assets, and
38 they made these cases with the hogfish, with the lobster.
39
40 He was on one that they made a case with those conchs you see in
41 the right picture as well and then got called over by Coast Guard
42 for assistance with the picture in the middle with the lobster and
43 hogfish in octopus. So, all that was in Abrir la Sierra, is where
44 those were actually found in, on the Western side. So, those are
45 open and pending right now. We're waiting to see where it is, but
46 that's all civil right now at this point.
47
48 As far as civil penalties, there is a question about what happens

1 to it, I think, on the state side, but on our side, these are open
2 right now working, and there's usually some result of a civil
3 penalty at the end. Next slide. Oh, sorry. I forgot. I'm sharing
4 my screen. Sorry. Alright.

5
6 So, on this one, you just saw too. This is from the cutter, and
7 this is just to reiterate our working relationship that we have
8 with our partners, and this is how we're successful no matter where
9 we are. This was with the Coast Guard Cutter. They referred this
10 catch of the snapper over to us. They ended up escorting this
11 vessel into port. The captain at the time thought he was on the
12 edge of the closure. This was an Abrir la Sierra as well. He was
13 not. We were able document very clearly where this boat was and
14 where the fishing activity took place. So that one's also currently
15 open and working on as well.

16
17 And over to your side here, we are in U.S.V.I. So, as many of you
18 are aware, we did lose our agent transferred over. Alex Guerrero
19 did leave a little while ago. We have not been able to backfill.
20 When can we? That is up in air just like a lot of other positions
21 right now, so I can't give any timeline of when and if we can get
22 another officer stationed in U.S.V.I. But we do try to get over as
23 resources allow to make a presence.

24
25 I will note that top one I have there, Alex still gets a lot of
26 calls from his local contacts. So, he is getting calls of, "Hey.
27 Can I bring in conch from B.V.I. over? Can I do this? Can I do
28 that?" He's still filling those calls and giving a lot of
29 compliance assistance to local fishers in the area, which is great.
30 A lot of the activity we see comes over on the ferries, and he's
31 getting that calls as well to make sure that people are bringing
32 in their personal consumption. If they need CITES permits, they
33 can get their CITES permits and work with fish and wildlife as
34 well on that.

35
36 And the other activity I want to note that Special Agent Borges
37 was able to go is we had a joint patrol near the border of B.V.I.
38 and U.S.V.I., and you see that was with Coast Guard and with CBP
39 that we worked with. We've had reports in the past of folks trying
40 to bring over the personal consumption of illegal conch, and even
41 sea turtle meat. So, that's why we were out there. And what we do
42 on these joint patrols is we're all out there working together. We
43 each have our agency's jurisdiction that we're responsible for.
44 So, we're able to multiply that force and go look for multiple
45 things at the same time and accomplish all our missions working
46 together with--

1
2 (Part of Mr. Walia's comments are inaudible on the audio
3 recording.)

4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think you got frozen.

6
7 **MATTHEW WALIA:** --enclosures for all the groupers. Grammanik Bank
8 is still closed, and then you have the mutton lanes for them to
9 spawn which is still closed through June. The main idea is just
10 knowing your boundaries. You know, some of those cases I first
11 showed you in the beginning, the captain thought he was good. They
12 didn't think they're in the closed area. During the interviews,
13 they said they knew there was a closed area nearby but did not
14 think we were in there.

15
16 Hopefully, you can hear me. I've just seen a message that I was
17 frozen, but please speak up if you can hear me or if I need to
18 reiterate anything.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. We got you.

21
22 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Okay. Last slide. Just, well, just want to
23 reiterate our hotline. Please, you know, reach out, contact us.
24 You have Miguel's number as well as on the Caribbean side. I saw
25 Cristina, you put that on there, so you have local contacts. You
26 have our main number. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you
27 need anything.

28
29 And like I said, Miguel's on here as well. If there's any questions
30 or if I froze, I missed anything, please let me know. But that's
31 what I have, Mr. Chair. Thanks for the time.

32
33 **Questions/Comments**

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Any questions for-- Julian?

36
37 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, I have a
38 question. Maybe you can help me out. Custom and Border Patrol
39 stopped a vessel in U.S.V.I. territorial waters a few weeks back,
40 a Puerto Rican vessel. And they were pulling fish traps illegally
41 by hand, but they didn't know what to do. And I'm wondering if you
42 guys work together or who can I get? I have the officer's name and
43 everything. Who has the video and all the information? I got the
44 boat number and everything and want to know how it can be dealt
45 with. Because number one, they didn't have a U.S.V.I. license.
46 Number two, they're pulling one of my commercial fisher's traps.
47 So, lucky the commercial fisher didn't pull up on them, but we

1 want to know how we can proceed to get this dealt with since they
2 actually have the videos and everything.

3
4 And then another issue, when we had that long period of calm
5 weather a couple weeks ago, we had several boats, from Puerto Rico
6 also, that were fishing inside the MCD. And one of our fishers
7 came from the West. One came from the north boundary lines, and
8 when they saw them, they ran away. But I just want to throw out
9 there. Like, the weather is so flat again today that we're
10 happening to see a lot more activity inside of the MCD.

11
12 So, if you want me to call you directly to speak about the issues
13 I can, but I just need some guidance.

14
15 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Thank you. Yeah. No. No. I appreciate that, Julian.

16
17 I would say to the second point you brought up, continue to report
18 that in. If you can get that out to the local folks, but you even
19 heard Coast Guard speak to it. Right? We can only respond to what
20 we can as our resources allow, and sometimes that's not always
21 real time. But if it's actionable intelligence, we can work on,
22 maybe there's a pattern. If we know something's there, we can plan
23 for something in the future. Or like you said, if the weather's
24 laying down, we can get something going ahead of time to address
25 that.

26
27 As far as your specifics with other agencies, unfortunately, that
28 does happen. Just, that's not some folks' wheelhouse that they're
29 aware of what those regulations are. That just comes down to us
30 having better open lines of communication and training. I'd say a
31 perfect example of that is a lot of work that we do at NOAA Office
32 Law Enforcement involves seafood imports at the ports. So, we're
33 looking to make sure folks are bringing in import and exports
34 properly to protect domestic seafood security.

35
36 But CBP folks may not know that. They're looking for contraband
37 and other stuff. They could, you know, they're not aware of
38 restrictions when it comes to seafood. We've developed those
39 working relationships at a lot of ports in our area that they now
40 know to call us. They're giving us a heads up. That would be a
41 similar scenario that you just brought up.

42
43 So please let's connect offline afterwards, and I can always get
44 with Miguel as well, and we can get that with you once you're free
45 after the meeting.

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Coast Guard.

48

1 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** Lieutenant Ishida, for the record. For the MCD area,
2 I think, like, what he was mentioning, if there's a pattern or
3 behavior that they're going out there and they're fishing within
4 the MCD, we have the Boat Forces Unit in Saint Thomas that we would
5 be able to deploy to the area and do some enforcement presence.
6 So, I think the more that we communicate and the more we establish
7 those trends, the more we can provide some targeted enforcement
8 operations in the area.

9
10 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, who would I call if I'm seeing that? Like,
11 today, I'm seeing it. Who would I call? I can go to the VHF and
12 call it in?

13
14 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** No. So, I'll give you a phone number for our sector
15 San Juan Command Center. So, that's, like, our operational node
16 for everything, all the missions that we do in Puerto Rico and
17 U.S.V.I. And they'll forward that over to the appropriate office,
18 either me or the law enforcement duty officer for that.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

21
22 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I would ask the same thing for the
23 Lang Bank area because we had two incidents of illegal fishing at
24 the Lang Bank Spawning Aggregation site in March. And we called it
25 in and everything else, we need more help in terms of actually--
26 because it's a very small area. And, you know, we're trying to
27 figure out how well the aggregation is doing and, you know, they're
28 fishing there. So, the one that's coming up, I think is the mutton
29 snapper. So, that's Southwest of Saint Croix. So, you know, we
30 would like to have a phone number to call it in and see if we can
31 start working here in Saint Croix. Thanks.

32
33 **MATTHEW WALIA:** And I would just say really quick, we have our 800
34 number I put up. Right? So that may not be real time in that
35 scenario, but report it in. If we get enough reports, we can show
36 there's a need for that resource. We can try to act in the future
37 on it. So please utilize that 800 number as well.

38
39 **KAYLA ISHIDA:** So, maybe I can work with Cristina to put that,
40 sector San Juan Command Center number on the website. That way
41 it's available for everyone to call in any reports of people
42 fishing in the federally closed waters. And just to note on the
43 Lang Bank, that one's a little bit more challenging for Coast Guard
44 presence just because our small boat assets are in Saint Thomas.
45 So, getting all the way down there is a strain based on weather
46 and then operating parameters. But if we have a faster spots cutter
47 in the area, we can definitely have them do some enforcement in
48 the area.

1
2 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, we had a little chat about getting
3 the dates and the specific moons for the different spawning area
4 sites. So, if we provide that information to the enforcement
5 agents, that would be better. Because it's not really the whole
6 month. You know? They're very specific on the moons that they that
7 they spawn. So, we'll continue working on this. Thanks.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Full moon is a keyword. Okay. Any more
10 question-- Graciela?

11
12 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, for Miguel Borges, because I did
13 have his old phone number, so he's provided us with his new phone
14 number, (727) 295-5925. Thank you, Miguel.

15
16 **MIGUEL BORGES:** Yes. Thank you, Graciela, and everybody there. Hi.
17 Miguel Borges, for the record. NOAA OLE

18
19 That phone number is mine. So, 24/7. That's the same number that
20 Cristina had on her slide and on the Caribbean Council page. So,
21 the 1-800 number that Matt put up and this 727, which is mine,
22 those are two good numbers to call to report anything.

23
24 In regard to Julian's comments, I think that for those cases, the
25 best assets that we have there are like Kayla said from the Coast
26 Guard, that Guard station in Saint Thomas would be the fastest
27 response.

28
29 I do have a lot of communication and good relationship with the
30 customs and border protection marine unit there in Saint Thomas.
31 I know they have, like, five new agents that might not be aware of
32 all the regulations, but I did go there just a few months ago and
33 did some training with them. So, hopefully, I can continue that
34 and write them with more information on when they do encounter
35 these fishery cases. They have the knowledge on what to do and who
36 to refer them to. So, that's all for me.

37
38 Thank you.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Any more questions for law
41 enforcement? No. Okay.

42
43 Moving on. We have Ecosystem Risk Assessment by Leigh Fletcher.
44 How do I pronounce your first name? Leigh. Okay.

45
46 **ECOSYSTEM RISK ASSESSMENT - LEIGH FLETCHER, BIOIMPACT INC.**

47
48 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** All right. We're going to do it this way.

1 My name is Leigh Fletcher, and I work with BioImpact. We provide
2 environmental consulting to public agencies and private companies
3 in the U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico. As Sennai indicated yesterday,
4 BioImpact was retained to work with the EBFM TAP on the risk
5 assessment framework a little over a year ago, and our work was
6 funded by a NOAA grant.

7
8 I want to step back and just kind of talk about a basic definition
9 of risk. Risk is a word we use in everyday conversation. We talk
10 about someone doing something risky or we say that there's a risk
11 that this or that bad thing might happen. We make decisions on how
12 to act, in part, by deciding if the likely outcome of our actions
13 is going to be what we want. For instance, if I was going to go on
14 a hike, I might choose not to go on that hike if I saw dark clouds
15 on the horizon because the clouds would signal rain.

16
17 Risk management is the process of assessing the risk, making a
18 decision on how to act based on how we understand the risk.

19
20 Oh, could you go to the next slide? I'm sorry, Cristina. Next
21 before that one. Yeah. They were good.

22
23 Okay. So, you know, we would decide how to act based on the risk
24 that we think how it would affect our ability to reach our goal,
25 and then we would take steps, if we could, to mitigate the risks
26 so we can just achieve our goal even if there is risk. So, going
27 back to my example, clouds are a signal of risk of bad weather. I
28 use that signal and I have a decision to make. Will I take a long
29 hike and just hope it doesn't rain? Will I cancel my hike because
30 I really don't want to get wet and get caught in storm? Or will I
31 take a step to mitigate my risk and either take a shorter hike
32 based on the weather report that says that the rain's going to
33 come later in the day, or will I delay my hike and take it tomorrow
34 because the weather report says the weather will be better
35 tomorrow?

36
37 In that example, my example is simple. It's one decision, one risk.
38 But risk management gets infinitely more complicated when there
39 are multiple risks and multiple goals you're trying to achieve.

40
41 In the National Marine Fisheries EBFM policy, risk is defined, as
42 is up on the screen, as the probability and potential impact of
43 events or actions that could negatively affect the health,
44 productivity, and resilience of marine ecosystems, their
45 associated fisheries, and the communities that rely on fishing for
46 their livelihoods and sustenance. That sentence summarizes
47 numerous risks, the events or actions, that affect diverse goals
48 of fisheries management.

1
2 For the Council, the risk we're talking about when we talk about
3 risk assessment is the risk that events, actions, or conditions
4 exist which would prevent the Council from successfully meeting
5 the 22 strategic objectives that are contained in your strategic
6 plan. In my graphic behind the blue box, which I made playing with
7 AI, I've previewed what some of the ecological risks are. Coral
8 reefs decline due to bleaching events, natural disasters,
9 sargassum inundation, changes in fish populations. We'll talk more
10 about what risks the framework considers a little bit later. Could
11 you go to the next slide?

12
13 So why a risk assessment framework? The risk assessment framework
14 has been designed to be part of the fishery ecosystem plan under
15 development by the EBFM TAP. Generally, the development of the
16 fishery ecosystem plan is following the FEP loop developed by
17 Lenfest. So, the risk assessment framework has been developed as
18 part of step two, and its purpose is to analyze risks to meeting
19 strategic objectives. It also integrates parts of step three, which
20 relate to identifying and selecting management strategies.

21
22 The risk assessment framework is a tool the Council can utilize to
23 assess how likely it is that recent changes in socioeconomic or
24 ecological conditions will have an impact on the outcome or
25 effectiveness of Council management decisions. The higher the risk
26 score, the more likely that ecosystem biological and or fisher
27 community response to management actions will deviate from
28 historical responses to similar policies or will otherwise be
29 influenced by changing conditions. Considering the level of risk
30 enables the Council to consider whether management action needs to
31 be adjusted to account for this uncertainty. Could you go to the
32 next slide?

33
34 So, this is a busy slide with a flow chart. Some people love them.
35 Some people hate them. So, how does it do it? Basically, the risk
36 assessment framework takes the work the Council has already done
37 in defining its strategic objectives, identifying ecosystem
38 threats, and organizes that information in a way so that existing
39 relevant sets can be used to evaluate whether the threats
40 identified are going to derail the Council's efforts at meeting
41 its strategic objectives. This flowchart describes kind of how
42 that was developed. And then my next slide's following this will
43 go into a little more detail about each step.

44
45 But if you start with the box on the far left at the top, to
46 develop the framework, we started with the strategic objectives
47 the Council had identified. And if you look now to the next box

1 below it, it says we looked at the stakeholder conceptual model to
2 see what threats were identified in that conceptual model and what
3 ecosystem drivers they affected. Those threats were also confirmed
4 in peer-reviewed literature. And just to remind everyone, the
5 conceptual model that I'm talking about is the model that Tarsila
6 Seara and J.J. Cruz-Motta and Stacy Williams worked on under the
7 Lenfest grant where you had 29 stakeholder groups come together to
8 identify ecosystem threats and drivers.

9

10 If you continue down the blue arrows, the third box describes the
11 next step, which is to classify those risks and identify what data
12 indicators were available to monitor the impact of those threats.
13 Risks were signed into four categories and for each identified
14 risk, a data driven indicator was selected to measure change in
15 risk over time. Because the ecosystem status report was also
16 developed in part based on the threats and drivers identified in
17 the conceptual model, the data for many of those indicators was
18 already being summarized in the ecosystem status report. For the
19 indicators that were not already tracked in the ecosystem status
20 report, we worked with Mandy and Chrissa to identify datasets that
21 could be added to the ecosystem status report. And as a result,
22 most of those datasets were incorporated in the January draft of
23 the ecosystem status reports.

24

25 By using the same datasets as are included in the ecosystem status
26 report, it means that the risk scores can be updated as datasets
27 are updated in the ESR. That means that the double-- that's why
28 there's a double ended arrow in silver right there, because it's
29 going to be an iterative process. The indicators are informed by
30 the datasets, and the datasets inform the indicators.

31

32 Going back to the blue arrows, the next box summarizes the next
33 step, which was to identify thresholds of change that would
34 indicate increasing, decreasing, or no change in the risk being
35 evaluated by the indicator. For each indicator, what is being
36 evaluated is whether over time the risk is likely to have a greater
37 or lesser impact on the outcome of management decisions. The ESR
38 calculates trend metrics summarizing change over time in the data
39 for each ESR indicator. For those indicators, we're able to use
40 the summary of change in data for the most recent five-year period
41 to establish those thresholds.

42

43 The next step was to develop a tool that would make all this
44 information usable. To do that, a one-page scorecard was designed.
45 It organizes indicators by categories and allows each risk to be
46 scored based on the thresholds. Each line of the scorecard relates
47 to a separate risk organized by category, and each line also
48 contains a quick statement of how to score it. There are lines to

1 calculate risk category scores and an aggregate risk score. The
2 scorecard gives you four risk scores by category and one overall
3 risk score. The overall risk score is based on the categorical
4 risk adjusted for risk associated with data gaps and datasets used
5 to score the indicators.

6
7 Next, in the development, we tested the scorecard by completing a
8 pilot scorecard based on the January draft of the ESR. So that was
9 our test, was to see if we filled it out, would seem like it gave
10 us reasonable results, and luckily, it did. So, now we are at the
11 last part of the flow chart, which shows alternative pathways for
12 utilizing these risk scores in management decision making. The
13 risk assessment framework provides a literature-based analysis of
14 the relationships between strategic objectives, risk categories,
15 and globally used fisheries management tools that could be used to
16 manage or mitigate identified risks. That information can be used
17 either on an ad hoc basis or in a structured decision-making
18 framework. The risk assessment framework outlines examples and
19 potential workflows for both potential uses for consideration by
20 counsel later. Okay. Next slide, please.

21
22 As I described in the flowchart, the risk assessment framework is
23 really a cumulative tool that is built on the prior work of the
24 Council, the SSC, and the EBFM TAP. To identify strategic
25 objectives, the information in the Island-Based Fishery Management
26 Plans and the 2022 to 2026 strategic plan was used. In the risk
27 assessment framework, the analysis is organized around the 22
28 strategic objectives in the strategic plan.

29
30 The primary source to identify threats, risks to achieving those
31 objectives, I used the 29-stakeholder group conceptual models, and
32 the consensus stakeholder model of the ecosystem developed as part
33 of the grant from Lenfest. And I want to say right now, I'm very
34 appreciative of time that Tarsila Seara and J.J. Cruz-Motta spent
35 in helping me understand how that model was created and what the
36 implications of that model were. Because I was able to then
37 incorporate the threats and drivers that the majority of
38 stakeholder groups identified as primary threats and drivers into
39 the risk framework. Using the stakeholder consensus model to
40 identify them, it incorporates the local expertise of all the
41 stakeholders who participated in the conceptual modeling process.

42
43 I then screened those threats and drivers against ecosystem threats
44 and drivers identified in literature. All of the threats in the
45 conceptual model were validated in the wider literature about
46 ecosystem risk, confirming that the stakeholders are very aware of
47 the threats and drivers to the ecosystem. The literature also

1 identified additional connections between the identified threats
2 and ecosystem drivers, which was helpful in defining risk
3 relationships for purposes of categorizing the risk.

4
5 As many of you are aware, the Council has been considering
6 different alternatives for risk assessment for quite a while. As
7 part of the development process, I reviewed the records related to
8 the prior framework that was considered by EBFM TAP and the SSC
9 and tried to avoid the concerns raised by that framework, which
10 primarily was that it was overly reliant on expert opinion to score
11 risk. Most, if not all, risk assessment frameworks developed for
12 data limited systems do rely on expert opinions. So, therefore, I
13 conducted a literature review that went beyond fisheries
14 management risk assessment and looked at other types of risk
15 assessment to see if there was a model that would work for the
16 Council.

17
18 I looked at business and financial risk management, environmental
19 contamination risk management using EPA models, and all of those
20 models used expert opinion in the absence of clear quantitative
21 data. In February, I was at the World Fisheries Congress, and I
22 listened to a presentation on the development of something called
23 the ecosystem threat index, which used a systems-based data driven
24 approach to evaluate risk. I thought the categories of risk used
25 in that index aligned well with the threats we had identified in
26 the conceptual model. The ETAI, however, was based on indicators
27 that use information from a trophic ecosystem model, which is
28 something we don't have here in the U.S. Caribbean.

29
30 So, the index itself wasn't a workable framework for us. However,
31 the structure of that framework informed the categories I used on
32 the scorecard and how the indicators were sorted into categories.
33 As I said earlier, the ESR has been in parallel development with
34 the fishery ecosystem plan, and the indicators being tracked in
35 the ESR were chosen based, in part, on information of the threats
36 and drivers in the conceptual model plus expert opinion. So, to
37 ground the risk assessment framework and data, when possible,
38 utilize the data sets that were tracked in the ESR so that there
39 would be alignment.

40
41 Because the ESR is planned to be updated on a going forward basis
42 with new data, the ESR also ensures that the risk scorecard can be
43 recalculated using datasets that become updated every time there's
44 an ESR update, giving the Council continual access to a data driven
45 risk score. Next slide.

1 As I said, the threats in the stakeholder consensus model, which
2 represented the threats of at least four different stakeholder
3 groups, became the working list of risks to consider for the
4 framework. On the left-hand side of this slide is the list of the
5 primary threats that are identified in the consensus conceptual
6 model. To begin identifying indicators, I grouped those threats
7 based on what they related to, and that's what you see on the other
8 side. I also looked at the ecosystem drivers and the identified
9 relationships between threats and drivers in the conceptual model.
10 I don't know if you remember, but in the conceptual model, there
11 are red and green arrows, and they point in different directions
12 depending on which way the energy is kind of flowing between those
13 drivers and threats.

14
15 In the conceptual model, these are considered important drivers
16 and/or receivers in the U.S. fishery ecosystem. Biological
17 function, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, coral reefs,
18 runoff, tourism, education and outreach, marine diseases,
19 disturbances, coastal development, local culture and religious
20 traditions, water quality, marine habitat, mangroves, and
21 seagrass. Using those factors, the indicators were identified and
22 sorted into four categories. During this process, it became
23 apparent that for some risks, additional work was going to be
24 needed to create the indicators that best represent the threat
25 driver relationship identified in the conceptual model. Okay. Next
26 slide, please.

27
28 So, this is a conceptual view of the scorecard. I'm not putting
29 the scorecard up on the screen. You saw a preview of it on Sennai's
30 slide yesterday, but I wanted to talk conceptually about the
31 categories of risk more than focus on the details of any particular
32 indicator for this presentation. There are four categories of risk
33 displayed in the scorecard, ecosystem level function, distortive
34 pressure sensitivity, socioeconomic sensitivity, and coral reef
35 habitat sensitivity.

36
37 The first category, ecosystem level function, measures risks
38 associated with change in biological function in the overall
39 ecosystem. The category distortive pressure sensitivity measures
40 risks associated with human induced changes to the marine ecosystem
41 ranging from direct human impacts like tourism to indirect impacts
42 associated with anthropocentrically induced climate change. The
43 third category, socioeconomic sensitivity, measures risks from
44 changes in human population and economy that affect the fisher
45 community. And the fourth category measures risk associated with
46 changes in the condition of coral reef habitat. Each category of
47 risk affects the ability of the Council to achieve its goals and
48 objectives for different reasons.

1
2 Changes in biological function and coral reef habitat impact goals
3 and objectives related to the management of fishery resources,
4 stock assessments, and sustainable fishing. Socioeconomic and
5 distorted pressure risks impact the goals and objectives related
6 to maintaining a viable fishing industry, promoting participation
7 and communication with stakeholders, and ensuring well-being of
8 the fisher community. The indicators used in each category are
9 described in chapter two of the framework document. Each indicator
10 description explains what data is being used, how to score the
11 indicator, and why the indicator was selected to measure the risk
12 for a particular threat or driver relationship.

13
14 19 indicators are usable based on existing available data. There
15 are four additional indicators described in the framework and
16 listed in the scorecard as future indicators. These indicators
17 would add dimension to the framework and then more comprehensively
18 capture the threats and drivers associated with the risk
19 categories. At present, however, either there's insufficient
20 information to calculate a score or more work needs to be completed
21 to develop the metric. The additional work required for each is
22 more fully described in chapter five of the framework.

23
24 So, looking at the slide, the category in green is ecosystem level
25 function indicators. These are indicators of macro level change
26 over time in the marine ecosystem. These indicators will offer
27 some insight into the overall function of the system at a
28 generalized level to provide context for the more fine-grained
29 insights provided by indicators in the other three categories.

30
31 The ecosystem level function risk score will increase the
32 likelihood that synergistic, additive, and antagonistic effects
33 between multiple threats and drivers are captured in the framework
34 because those types of effects would be reflected in measures of
35 change occurring across the ecosystem level even if they aren't
36 reflected by changes in discrete indicators measuring change
37 associated with a single threat driver interaction. Indicators in
38 this category have actually not been finalized. Choosing and
39 developing ecosystem level function indicators requires additional
40 work to select the metrics that are most appropriate.

41
42 During the development of the framework process we workshopped,
43 EBFM TAP workshopped potential indicators for this category, but
44 ultimately decided that input from SSC and others would be required
45 to choose the best indicators of ecosystem level function.
46 Indicators considered during the workshop were cumulative biomass
47 curves, several indices of ecosystem overfishing, length-based
48 indicators of overfishing, several different biodiversity indices,

1 and several biomass measures. These are also described in chapter
2 five along with a summary of kind of the pros and cons that were
3 raised during the discussion of each potential in indicator. Until
4 the ecosystem level function indicators are selected, a score
5 adjustment of 0.25 points in the aggregate risk score to account
6 for the risk that there are synergistic, additive or antagonist
7 effects among the other threats and drivers will be added to the
8 aggregate score.

9
10 The next category is distortive pressure sensitivity, and there
11 are 12 total indicators, and one future indicator included in this
12 category. Three indicators relate to changes in commercial
13 landings of conch, fin fish, and lobster. Another three indicators
14 relate to changes in tourism, measuring changes in visits by air,
15 hotel, and cruise to those territories. Two indicators relate to
16 water quality, enterococcus bacterial counts in the near shore
17 waters and turbidity measured by satellite. Other indicators
18 include recreational landings, sea surface temperature, sargassum
19 inundation, and changes in other ocean economy uses.

20
21 The future indicator relates to measuring changes in coastal
22 development over time using a landscape development density index.
23 The steps for developing that indicator are described in chapter
24 five of the framework. All of these distorted pressure sensitivity
25 indicators are designed to assess the risk that human induced
26 changes to the marine ecosystem and coastal environment are
27 disrupting its equilibrium or otherwise impairing marine ecosystem
28 function. And therefore, management actions related to marine
29 function might have unexpected results.

30
31 The goals and objectives of the Council relate not only to
32 ecological resiliency of the marine ecosystem, but also to the
33 socioeconomic resiliency of fishers in the wider community. The
34 socioeconomic sensitivity indicators are designed to assess the
35 risk that changes in the structure or economy of the human
36 community are impacting the well-being of the fisher community and
37 or the marine ecosystem, and therefore, the ability of the Council
38 to meet its strategic objectives and goals related to
39 socioeconomic, well-being.

40
41 Using the ESR and other available data, risk associated with
42 socioeconomic changes is measured using five indicators. Three of
43 the indicators are calculated using currently available data.
44 Those are population change, unemployment rate, and disaster
45 declaration rate. Two of the indicators cannot be calculated until
46 a sufficient time series of data is constructed and are specific
47 to indices of fishing community vulnerability. The ESR maps and
48 scores commercial fishing engagement and fishing reliance by

1 community for the period of 2016 to 2020. When additional maps are
2 developed for subsequent periods, comparing the maps, it will be
3 possible to track change over time, and that will be used to
4 measure whether risk is increasing, decreasing, or staying
5 consistent.

6
7 The fourth category is reef ecosystem sensitivity, or resiliency
8 indicators and are designed to reflect that the risk that changes
9 in the coral reef ecosystem will affect commercial fishery
10 resources in the U.S. Caribbean and, therefore, the ability of the
11 Council to meet his strategic objectives related specifically to
12 coral reef habitat and sustainable fisheries. There are four
13 indicators and one future indicator in this category.

14
15 The four indicators are average monthly degree heating weeks,
16 percent coral cover, fish density, and number of threatened and
17 endangered species in the reef ecosystem. The future indicator is
18 the number of invasive species in the U.S. Caribbean. So, I as I
19 said earlier, chapter two of the framework document describes in
20 detail each indicator and what why it was chosen and the basis for
21 scoring that indicator. We can go to the next slide, I think.

22
23 So, you know, basically, what I just covered is what's on the risk
24 assessment scorecard, and that is the tool that quantifies relative
25 risk that four different types of pressures, the systemic pressure,
26 distortive, extractive, or additions to the system, socioeconomic
27 stress, and habitat changes will influence the outcomes of
28 management activity. Based on the stakeholder consensus conceptual
29 model, it provides a snapshot of risk based on available data
30 tabulated in the ESR and in other public sources. The scores are
31 calculated for each island where data is available, recognizing
32 that the pressures experienced are unique in each jurisdiction.

33
34 From a management perspective, the lower the risk, the more
35 predictable outcomes for management activities are likely to be.
36 But translating a risk score into actual management decision making
37 requires some additional steps. Going back to my simple example
38 about hiking, choosing between three available alternatives,
39 canceling the hike, shortening the hike, or delaying the hike,
40 each uses a different tool or mechanism to respond to the risk of
41 bad weather. So, to use the information from the scorecard, the
42 Council needs to determine what management actions will respond to
43 the identified risks and which management techniques could
44 mitigate those risks.

45
46 In the risk assessment framework, the tools to assist the Council
47 in this step are in chapter three of the document. Chapter three
48 contains tables that analyze the relationships between the risk

1 categories and the Council's strategic objectives, identifying
2 which categories of risk are most likely influence the outcome of
3 management actions related to each objective. Another table
4 summarizes the relationship of a variety of fisheries management
5 tools identified in literature to risk categories on the scorecard,
6 and a heat map summarizes the strength of each identified tool as
7 a mechanism for advancing each of the Council's strategic
8 objectives.

9
10 Taken together, the Council can use this information to incorporate
11 risk assessment into decision making. There are multiple ways this
12 Council could incorporate this information. Chapter three outlines
13 two possible pathways, an ad hoc consideration of information and
14 also a structured decision-making process using some additional
15 decision tools that explicitly utilize risk scoring to evaluate
16 management options. Chapter three contains examples and
17 hypothetical case studies showing both processes.

18
19 This slide kind recaps the content of the framework document.
20 Chapter one contains the scorecard and the instructions for filling
21 it out. Chapter two describes each indicator on the scorecard, why
22 it was chosen, what the data source is, and the rationale behind
23 the scoring. Chapter three is all about incorporating risk scores
24 into decision making and explicitly connects decision making
25 processes to achieving strategic objectives. Chapter four gives
26 additional background information about the selection process for
27 risk indicator scoring, which is basically what told you about
28 today. Chapter five contains information on possible indicators to
29 include in the ecosystem level function category and information
30 on how to develop each of the future indicators that are listed on
31 the scorecard in each category.

32
33 Appendix A is a scorecard from the pilot risk assessment completed
34 using the January draft of the ESR. Appendix B is the background
35 information and scoring rationale for all the management tools
36 included in chapter three. And appendix C is kind of for the good
37 of the order, brief summaries of some innovative management
38 programs in other Caribbean jurisdictions that are designed to
39 respond to some of the same risks that were identified in the
40 conceptual model. Next slide, please.

41
42 So, what happens next? As Sennai said yesterday, this risk
43 assessment framework was developed, you know, under the auspices
44 of the EBFM TAP using a NOAA grant. It's part of the continued
45 work on developing the fishery ecosystem plan. The EBFM TAP will
46 be evaluating the risk assessment document, refining the framework
47 as needed to incorporate it into the fishery ecosystem plan. Other
48 future work is needed as described in chapter five. While the

1 scorecard functions as it is, selecting ecosystem function
2 indicators and making the future indicators operational will
3 strengthen its ability to assess risk over time.

4
5 I really, I want to close by saying thank you to everyone who
6 reviewed and commented on the presentations I did over the last
7 year on indicators and the use of risk management during the
8 development process. The risk assessment framework could not have
9 been developed without the input from the EBFM TAP and from Council
10 staff, including Liajay and Graciela, multiple phone calls and
11 messages and meetings to talk about it. Their input and expertise
12 definitely guided the design and refinement of the framework.

13
14 I also want to specifically thank Tauna Rankin, Tarsila Seara,
15 Sennai, Orian, J.J., Kevin McCarthy, Dr. Jason Link at NOAA, Mandy,
16 and Carissa who worked on the ESR, because all of them gave
17 generously to their time to help with the development, selection
18 and review of the indicators and understanding the conceptual
19 model, the ESR, and the strategic plan of the Council.

20
21 So, that is my brief summary of what is in the risk assessment
22 framework.

23 **Questions/Comments**

24
25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Leigh. We have someone on chat.

27
28 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Michelle Schärer. "Thank you, Leigh,
29 for putting all this information together. Question. Were seagrass
30 and mangrove habitats also considered in the coral reef ecosystem
31 sensitivity since these are critical to productive fisheries and
32 under direct risk from impacts related to anthropogenic coastal
33 disturbances?"

34
35 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** So, yes, mangroves and seagrass were
36 considered. They're not listed as a specific habitat category under
37 the coral reef, but the impacts of impacts to seagrass and
38 mangroves affect several of the other indicators in the dis-
39 abortive pressure and are part of the scoring.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

42
43 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Thank you for your presentation. Regarding
44 the incorporation of integrating mangrove habitats, seagrass
45 habitats, etcetera. You can just use coral reef and coral reef
46 associated habitats, and that's it. That would include it.

47
48 I have another-- I have a question, maybe. Every time I get exposed

1 to these ecosystem-based analysis and studies and risk assessment.
2 You know? I really appreciate and admire the way that all these
3 different components of the ecosystem-based approach have been put
4 together. You've done an excellent job, and our friend here,
5 Sennai, and J.J. and all the group that has put together. I may
6 ask you something that-- can you give me-- what kind of
7 hypothetical, at this stage, answer or recommendation in a sentence
8 or two sentences do you foresee in providing the Council, which
9 needs this information to make management decisions that right now
10 there's so many components involved, interactive, some additives,
11 some synergistic, and everything?

12
13 Have you thought about, you know, foreseeing something solid,
14 centrifuged, like looking at the precipitate that you will tell
15 the Council based on our analysis, even at this stage, you may
16 change your mind, that the Council says, "you know, this is going
17 to be useful" because right now it's very intellectual, very
18 conceptual, very abstract. No, really.

19
20 So, do you foresee any kind of recommendation you can give to the
21 Council and that they will assimilate?

22
23 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Yes. So, the risk framework document that
24 has five chapters is very, very utilizable. Like the first chapter
25 is literally a one-page scorecard that you could fill out using
26 the scorecard, right now, based on the data that's in the draft
27 ESR and calculate a score. So, today, could--

28
29 In fact, I did it in the pilot risk assessment. It's done for using
30 the January draft. Here's the score. So, there's a threshold risk
31 score that I calculated for each island based on that. They are
32 all right at the threshold of increasing risk on the aggregate.
33 Okay? And in some of the categories, they're at the very high end
34 of consistent risk.

35
36 What pushes them over into increasing risk is the data gaps. And
37 so, because we account for the potential risk associated with not
38 knowing some things, so for instance, in the Puerto Rico in the
39 Puerto Rico analysis, there is some bacterial water quality data
40 that's just missing. So, you can't calculate that particular
41 indicator for Puerto Rico. So, the way the risk assessment
42 framework works, it adjusts the score up 0.25 to account for the
43 fact that we don't know if bacterial water quality risk is
44 increasing. Now we can make some assumptions, but we don't know.

45
46 My direction was to build something that could be used entirely on
47 data that's available to us now. Right? So that's how you calculate
48 the scores. So, then once you have those scores, that's when you

1 get to chapter three, it's like, okay, well, what does a slightly
2 increasing risk mean? Well, that's what chapter three is about.
3
4 Chapter three is about how you take that score and you associate
5 the risks with which risks are most likely to affect which
6 strategic objectives. You have 22 of them. So, some risk, like the
7 strategic objective, I can't remember the number, but the one
8 that's about coral reef habitat, clearly, the category of risk
9 related to coral reef habitat, all of that risk category, any
10 increasing risk in that category is going to make it harder to
11 achieve your objectives about strategic. Right?

12
13 **VANCE VICENTE:** Well, maybe just correct you on something.
14 Regarding bacteriological studies, especially pathogenic bacteria,
15 coliforms. There are monitoring stations in Puerto Rico.

16
17 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Correct. So, let me clarify my statement.

18
19 **VANCE VICENTE:** So, there is that data.

20
21 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Okay. No. Let me clarify my statement.
22 There is that data. It's in StoreNet. For the years 2016 to 2018,
23 Puerto Rico did not upload the data.

24
25 Now, I understand there are other sources for that data. But,
26 again, what we're trying to do is define a definable, useful data
27 set that is reliable and can be returned to over and over again to
28 get the information. And that current data set right now is missing
29 two years of data. So, there's no way to calculate the risk score
30 using that data set.

31
32 The importance of this is not-- there is no way we are ever going
33 to know. In the global picture of things, there's too much
34 information. At some point, you pick, and you say, this is a
35 reliable enough indicator. That's what's in chapter two, a
36 discussion for each indicator and each data source. Why did think
37 it's enough? And why did I choose that particular one?

38
39 And it's always a balance between what data is available and what
40 data best fits the risk and trying to put those two things
41 together. So, that that's how it works. But I agree with you. There
42 is lots of data on bacteriological. It's just--

43
44 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. But even that, you can use, there are
45 designated water quality standards for Puerto Rico and the U.S.
46 Virgin Islands, which are very similar, especially for coliform.

47
48 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Yes.

1
2 **VANCE VICENTE:** For example, you cannot exceed x number of bacteria
3 per unit scale because it would prevent the usage of those waters
4 by divers, swimmers.
5
6 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Correct. And those are the standards that
7 are used in the indicator. That's what I'm saying to you.
8
9 **VANCE VICENTE:** Okay. Good.
10
11 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** You see what I'm saying?
12
13 **VANCE VICENTE:** Okay.
14
15 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** So, yes. You're using other standards
16 that are reliable standards that are quantified in data that's
17 available to calculate a risk score. It's kind of a-- and that's
18 not to say that there's not another set of data, but these are the
19 data sources that we picked as being the most reliable for the
20 purpose that we need in this particular risk assessment. Does that
21 make sense?
22
23 **VANCE VICENTE:** Yes. Okay. One more thing. I mean, there is,
24 almost, a weekly monitoring on the North Coast, especially by the
25 San Juan Bay Estuary Program run by the EPA and they keep a record.
26
27 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Yes.
28
29 **VANCE VICENTE:** And they advise people not to dive, not to come
30 into direct contact. For recreation and all that
31
32 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** That's right.
33
34 **VANCE VICENTE:** So, there may be, you know, enough information,
35 but maybe what it needs to be doing is to evaluate to see what
36 weight you are going to give to that. And that I understand.
37
38 I won't take more of your time. It is an excellent work. I feel--
39
40 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** No. But you raise a good point and let me
41 say this. This thing is designed to be adaptive. If you, at some
42 point, find a better data source that, as the Council looks at it,
43 says, "hey, this is more reliable. This has got more information.
44 We'd like to switch our data source." Then if that new data source
45 gets incorporated in the ESR, it'll be very easy to use. Even if
46 it's not in the ESR, then you could choose to use it and calculate
47 a trend over a five-year window using that new data source and be
48 able to achieve the same goal.

1
2 So, the idea is that this risk assessment would be adaptive over
3 time to allow you to use best available data as it becomes
4 available. Because we all know watching the sargassum presentation
5 today, sargassum data collection is changing. You know, in three
6 or four years, there may be a better dataset.

7
8 You know, so the idea was this was built, so it's kind of plug and
9 play in that way so that you can continue to make it as useful as
10 possible as you make decisions.

11
12 **VANCE VICENTE:** No. I admire your work and appreciate it. It's
13 been very educational. I still have to do more reading and trying
14 to get all this model together, all the components, and see how
15 they can be analyzed in such a way that it's going to be useful
16 for the Council to make fishery management decision.

17
18 Okay? So, I'll stop here.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

21
22 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, thank you, Leigh. This is the
23 beginning of what you're going to be seeing regarding the risk
24 assessment. It has to go to the EBFM TAP, and then it has to go to
25 the SSC for their input. I wanted to make sure that some of the
26 conceptual models were included from the DAPs that were part of
27 these 29 stakeholders. So, we passed along the information to that
28 group of Lenfest that was working on the conceptual models.

29
30 And the ESR still has to be presented to the EBFM TAP and to the
31 SSC and to the Council. So, these are all small pieces of the
32 puzzle to complete the fishery ecosystem plan. And this is
33 something that you'll see, it's workable. It's a good tool.

34
35 One of the things that it identifies is the data gaps. Where are
36 we missing information that it's critical for the ecosystem
37 function? That's going to be extremely helpful, most likely for
38 other agencies because we don't have control over those, but it
39 points to where the information is lacking. I think we have one
40 question, if it's possible, if not.

41
42 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Thanks very much. That was very interesting. I
43 just I have actually two questions. The first one is, in your
44 discussion of the socioeconomic risk and impacts, it seems to me
45 like from a methodological standpoint that that's essentially what
46 a social impact assessment is, something that's done under NEPA,
47 under the EA. Is that the type of method you would use to
48 incorporate into this larger EBFM framework?

1
2 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** It could be. Right now, we're using NOAA's
3 social vulnerability index. NOAA has created the tool that is on
4 NOAA's website, as using the two sub-indicators in that can be
5 calculated based on available data. But you're absolutely right
6 that there are other ways and other sources of data. It's really
7 a question of finding the available data sets that are, again,
8 repeatable and easily accessible.

9
10 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Right. That's great. And then let me ask a second
11 question really quick. You mentioned sargassum, and I'm working on
12 this workshop that's coming up next month. And the one thing I'm
13 learning about sargassum is that sargassum has positives and
14 negatives associated with it.

15
16 If you are dealing with sargassum in, let's say, an inundation of
17 sargassum for a number of years, but for the for-hire and
18 recreational fisheries, it has positives for the pelagics and its
19 negatives for the set gear. How do you build that in where the
20 same variable has competing responses from two segments of the
21 fishery?

22
23 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** It's built into the scoring, so that
24 scoring, you know, it's scored, you know, either as increasing,
25 decreasing, or consistent risk. But in the framework, it actually
26 discusses all the factors that went into defining whether an
27 increase in sargassum is an increasing risk or an increase in
28 sargassum is a decreasing risk. So, because in some cases, an
29 increase in an indicator is actually representative of decreasing
30 risk and vice versa.

31
32 In the case of sargassum the kind of the weight of the information
33 that was available about the impacts, pushed it toward increasing
34 sargassum being more of a negative than a positive because it has
35 nearshore effects and it has impacts on fisher's equipment and it
36 has impacts on shoreline and other kind of living for the fishing
37 community because they live close to the shore, many of them, and
38 have to deal with the smell and all of those kind of things. So,
39 all of that tilted it toward being increasing sargassum being an
40 increasing risk.

41
42 But you're absolutely right. The other uses for it, the fact that
43 it's considered essential fish habitat when it's offshore, all of
44 those factors were also considered in how you kind of calculate
45 that score and in my rationale. And that's why going through this
46 review process through EBFM and through SSC, you know, some of
47 that scoring may ultimately get changed. You know, basically, the
48 scoring that is in this represents the scoring that came out of

1 the workshops we did over the last year, but that isn't the final
2 say on, you know, the expert opinion of this group as to what
3 things get scored which way.

4
5 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Okay. Because, yeah-- so, basically, what you're
6 saying is you sort of aggregate those numbers, and then you get
7 your score, even though in one section of the industry, it may be
8 positive, the overall score in itself identifies based upon its
9 EBFM scoring as potentially a negative impact?

10
11 **LEIGH KELLETT FLETCHER:** Correct.

12
13 **BRENT STOFFLE:** Okay. I see.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Thank you, Leigh. We're take a quick
16 ten-minute break and finish up the afternoon.

17
18 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We're going to start again. Okay. So, next on
21 the agenda is the advisory body membership. Alright. So, we'll do
22 Sea Grant.

23
24 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** René?

25
26 **RENÉ ESTEVES AMADOR:** Amazing. ¿Empiezo?

27
28 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Si.

29
30 **SEA GRANT PROGRAM UPDATE - RUPERTO CHAPARRO, DIRECTOR/RENÉ F.**
31 **ESTEVES, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PUERTO RICO SEA GRANT**

32
33 **RENÉ ESTEVES AMADOR:** Good afternoon, everybody. My name is René
34 Estevez. I'm the Marine Outreach Program Director, Research
35 Coordinator, and as Associate Director for Puerto Rico Sea Grant.
36 And today, I'm going to give you a quick update on what we are up
37 to in this new four-year cycle, which started in 2024. Next slide.

38
39 So, what do we do? There's a quick review for those two that do
40 not know Sea Grant. So, we are NOAA funded product based in
41 University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez, dedicated to changing
42 behavior through scientific based knowledge so that users of the
43 marine and coastal environment make better decisions and promote
44 a sustainable economy. We do this through three major components
45 with which is marine outreach, research education, and those are
46 tied together by a communication team that puts together the
47 publications that each of the three components require to do their
48 work. Next slide.

1
2 How do we work? The key to our success is that we engage directly
3 with the community, and we serve as that bridge between the
4 communities of users and the academia. This bridge is ideally a
5 two-way street in which once we engage with the community, we
6 understand what the needs are, we bring those back to the academia,
7 and we fund research, applied research that helps to solve some of
8 those issues. Then the research conclusions and findings we
9 translate into everyday language so that everybody is able to
10 understand and use this information in the way they relate to our
11 coastal and marine resources. Next slide.

12
13 Where do we work? We work in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin
14 Islands through a sub-award to the University of Virgin Islands.
15 And it's been pretty challenging the last couple cycles for very
16 known reasons, mainly regarding Puerto Rico's government financial
17 status, and more recently, you know, cuts in government and federal
18 funding. Next slide.

19
20 So how do we propose to deal with this scenario? We've come up
21 with the idea of using long standing trusted partners, and funding
22 undergraduate and graduate students to work on projects under their
23 tutelage, that align with our mission and with our strategic plan.
24 Next slide.

25
26 So, now I'm going to go over a list of current projects of extension
27 program, then I'm going to mention some recently concluded research
28 and some currently funded research that that's going on right now.

29
30 So, under the tutelage of Robert Mayer, we have a number of grad
31 students helping out in developing restoration of sand dunes and
32 mangrove systems in the North Coast of Puerto Rico to mitigate
33 coastal erosion and inundation in underserved communities in the
34 North Coast. Next slide.

35
36 Under the tutelage of Dr. Miguel Canals, which is the leader of
37 the board of the Tres Palmas Marine Reserve, we found a couple of
38 graduate students that would help with the creation of the update
39 of the management plan for the Tres Palmas Marine Reserve, which
40 is an example of how communities can take leadership of the
41 management of the resources and a co-management agreement with the
42 state agency.

43
44 So, one of the environmental economists at the University of Puerto
45 Rico Dr. Ivonne Díaz is guiding students on the creation of the
46 Local Environmental Justice Atlas, which will be supported by,
47 ideally, by a map, an interactive map where you can then click on
48 locations where these conflicts have led to judicial action and so

1 that everybody has a reference of what's going on around the island
2 regarding the issue of environmental justice. Next slide.

3
4 We plan to do a second take on a project that was originally done
5 in 1997 to document the impact of surfing tourism on the Rincon
6 municipality, hopefully, to serve as a as a model for other areas
7 around our region. Next slide.

8
9 After very tough, many sweat and tears, we've been able to install
10 Fish Aggregating Devices on the West Coast of Puerto Rico, and
11 we'll be documenting the impact it has on the local recreational
12 fishing efforts and economic activity. Next slide.

13
14 As a continuation of a project that is very dear to us, because
15 it's one of those examples where our work actually saves lives. We
16 trained 15 fishermen in Cabo Rojo, 16 fishermen in Vieques, in
17 safe diving techniques as to minimize the decompression sickness
18 cases that reached the decompression chamber, hyperbaric chamber
19 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The next step in this project is to train
20 two local fishermen into being instructors themselves so that the
21 communities have this resource for the future. In our outreach
22 model, there is no better way of transferring this information and
23 knowledge than for somebody from inside the community to do that.
24 Next slide.

25
26 As you've probably heard, a number of times, led by Jannette Ramos,
27 who's there with you guys. She's done great work on educating not
28 only consumers, but also local chefs into the preparation and the
29 selection of under-appreciated fish species in our waters for a
30 very vital gastronomic experience. What we hope to do is to release
31 some of the pressures on the typical species that are always sought
32 after by the consumers and that most of them have seasonal closures
33 and to offer alternatives during these times for both local
34 fishermen and local businesses. Next slide.

35
36 Under the tutelage of Miguel del Pozo, there's a couple of students
37 that are going around the island redefining or recapturing what
38 local names are given, known common names are given to local
39 species, what techniques are used to capture them, and what groups
40 are focused on targeting and what species they focus on targeting.
41 Ideally, this will be beneficial to local management. Next slide.

42
43 Led by Lillian Ramírez, we focus on the capacity building of first
44 responders. Those can be community leaders; they can be government
45 workers, agencies, through formal training in collaboration with
46 the University of Hawaii NDPTC program and how to prepare and
47 respond to extreme climate events. Next slide.

48

1 As a consequence of Hurricane María and several other storms, the
2 oldest private owned business in the region, which is the Cabo
3 Rojo Salt Flats, lost a bridge in their coladeras and the
4 restoration project, in collaboration with Fish and Wildlife
5 Protector de Cuenca, we're leading the outreach effort in keeping
6 the community informed and involved in what's being done at the
7 Salt Flats to restore the capacity to hold the water and,
8 eventually, let the sun do its work and keep producing salt, which,
9 guess what, it brings a lot of wildlife, specifically birds,
10 migratory birds to the area. Next slide.

11
12 So, again, led by Lillian Ramírez, we'll make an assessment of
13 what needs and gaps are there for us to develop new tools and
14 workshops for communities first responders, like emergency manager
15 personnel, for upcoming extreme events. Next slide.

16
17 And then, led by the Graduate School of Public Planning, we've
18 funded a number of graduate students to work directly with
19 communities and the issues of collective participatory approaches
20 and just equitable governance. This is related to issues that are
21 associated to short term rentals, displacement of communities, and
22 the way public planning can address these issues. Next slide.

23
24 So, for the last three decades, the group that has kept the
25 statistics on drowning in Puerto Rico, awful to say that we rank
26 among the highest, if not the highest jurisdiction in terms of per
27 capita drownings per year. So, led by Ruperto Chaparro, who some
28 of you may know, there'd be a number of approaches and efforts to
29 convince local government to establish a formal force of open water
30 lifeguard services to be placed on public beaches. This study is
31 directed documented public opinion with regards to paying an
32 additional 1% tax per night per room night to fund these efforts.
33 Next slide.

34
35 So, our partners at the Virgin Islands, University of Virgin
36 Islands, they're called Virgin Island Marine Advisory Services or
37 VIMAS. They do some great work led by Howard Forbes Jr., in Saint
38 Thomas. Some of the ongoing work includes the Ocean Explorer summer
39 programs, you know, the work just for educators and training
40 teachers, coastal cleanups, you know, just advisory services,
41 general advisory services, and the STEM education research
42 practice, summer teacher training workshop. Next slide.

43
44 Some recently concluded research projects include sargassum
45 observation and development decision making tools; development of
46 rapid, portable automatic fecal bacterial biosensors; response,
47 feedback and adaptive management of tropical coastal wetlands to
48 rising sea level and intensify hurricanes; rapid on-site detection

1 of fecal indicating bacterial for coastal water quality
2 monitoring; rapid environmental assessment using the microg-AMBI
3 and foram-AMBI as high impact/low cost bioindicators tools in
4 tropical estuarine/lagoon environments; response of tarpon to
5 catch-and-release angling in Puerto Rico; and then the impacts of
6 the alien seagrass, halophila stipulacea; and tracking a nursery
7 site for tiger sharks in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

8
9 These projects have recently been concluded, and their
10 publications are available for those who are interested in learning
11 more about them. We are particularly proud of the rapid on-site
12 detection of fecal indicating bacteria for coastal water quality
13 monitoring project led by Dr. Pedro Resto of University of
14 Mayagüez. Basically, what he was able to do was to follow the
15 established EPA protocol for detecting fecal bacteria by fitting
16 into a buoy and using machine learning to decrease the time from
17 twelve hours to four hours in which you can detect whether the
18 levels of fecal bacteria are over established limits. Next slide.

19
20 So currently funded projects include Protectores de Cuencas Inc.,
21 Watershed-to-Reef Connectivity in the West Coast of Puerto Rico,
22 Río Guanajibo. The Ocean Foundation will be using sargassum,
23 carbonization of sargassum to better soil quality. Dr. Manuel
24 Valdéz-Pizzini, will be doing a tour around the island to assess
25 the Villas Pesqueras, the fishing villages, and document the
26 current issues affecting them.

27
28 Dr. Stacey Williams will be cultivating all the seaweed to support
29 her ongoing restoration work of sea urchins and crabs. Dr. Legare,
30 Bryan, will continue that work in the tiger shark nursery area in
31 the U.S. Virgin Islands. Next slide.

32
33 So, new and ongoing initiatives. We recently had a chat with local
34 fishing charter businesses in the West Coast of Puerto Rico where
35 official Miguel Borges joined us. The group from DNER joined us
36 there too. Coast Guard was present, as well. Basically, educating
37 about what can and what can't you do as a fishing charter business
38 with regards to catching fish and selling fish, both, based on
39 federal and local regulations. We're really keen on educating and
40 keeping informed the community about queen conch changes to
41 regulations based on their recent listing. We believe strongly in
42 implementing and directing resources to strengthening commercial
43 fishermen organizations and expanding this co-management
44 experiment in Tres Palmas, you know, and Rincon to see how it fits
45 in other areas of Puerto Rico. Next slide.

46
47 Here, I show some of our publications. We have our educational
48 guides produced by our educational component, which is actually

1 pretty amazing. They've been translated. They're available
2 physically and virtually. What we do is that we offer training for
3 teachers and then offer the resources for them to use these
4 educational materials in their classroom. We have our 'Marejada'
5 magazine, and we have our 'Fuete y Verguilla' magazine directly to
6 fishers, to commercial fishers.

7
8 And with this, I conclude my presentation. I know it is almost
9 04:00. You've been listening to people today and yesterday. I want
10 to thank the Council for always being there for us throughout the
11 beginning and recent history of Sea Grant. I've been able to
12 witness what very positive and strong collaboration and
13 partnerships can be developed based on our island culture, and I'm
14 very proud of being part of it.

15
16 Thank you so much. If anybody has any questions, I'll be happy to
17 answer them.

18 19 **Questions/Comments**

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Miguel, and then Graciela.

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, René for an excellent presentation.
24 I really have a question that is kind of interesting. I actually
25 received a note that came back from OMB calling for the termination
26 of the Sea Grant program at the national level. Everything that we
27 have seen here that is germane to what we do, that is important to
28 this area not only to the U.S. Caribbean, but the entire United
29 States, will disappear. We're talking about 2026, starting October
30 1st.

31
32 Is there anything that the Council can do, aside from more support,
33 to endorse the continuation of the Sea Grant program? Is this
34 something that you already have information about?

35
36 **RENÉ ESTEVES AMADOR:** Yes. This is not the first time that we've
37 been zeroed out by the appreciation budget. The strategy moving
38 forward is to share a letter for our partners to sign, and then
39 we'll include that signed letter to another letter directed at our
40 resident commissioner in Washington so that when he has the
41 opportunity, he can express how important Puerto Rico Sea Grant
42 program is to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

43
44 You can, individually, write and communicate how important Sea
45 Grant is for your community and for your program directly to the
46 resident commissioner or to your elected official in the Virgin
47 Islands who sits at Washington DC. And then, it's just a matter of
48 having enough voices join that call so that elected officials feel

1 the pressure and understand that how important and how effective
2 is the investment in Sea Grant programs?

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Thank you for that answer. In case of the
5 Council. The Council as such cannot intervene, but we have a lot
6 of people around the table that they can do so in their private
7 capacity. Because, of all the Councils, the Caribbean Council has
8 been working with the Sea Grant program since the get go. Since
9 the first project that Alida put together. And when Manali became
10 the director, we worked hand in hand for the betterment of the
11 education, science, and fishery management of this area. So, I
12 cannot say enough about the importance of keeping the Sea Grant
13 program around here.

14
15 But, anyway, Mr. Chairman--

16
17 **RENÉ ESTEVES AMADOR:** I agree with you. I, humbly, accept and
18 appreciate that we are standing on your shoulders. Thanks to all
19 the great work you've done for the past forty some years, we now
20 have the capacity to reach that many more people. I've been with
21 Sea Grant for the last eight years. It's amazing how gratifying it
22 is for me to engage with my communities since I just bring
23 information. No scientific based knowledge, and that trust was
24 already there because of the work you did before us. Thank you,

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kate?

27
28 **KATHERINE M. ZAMBONI:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Kate Zamboni, Office
29 of General Counsel. I just want to say for the record, and I think
30 Miguel alluded to this, that the Council would be prevented from
31 using appropriated funds for the purposes of lobbying any decision
32 makers, but what people do in their personal capacity is beyond
33 the scope of my legal advice.

34
35 **RENÉ ESTEVES AMADOR:** Understood.

36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela, you still wanted?

38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, René. I had a question
40 regarding the queen conch project that you have ongoing. Can you
41 expand a little bit on that one?

42
43 **RENÉ ESTEVES AMADOR:** It's basically we're using our 'Fuete y
44 Verguilla' magazine to keep the commercial fishermen community
45 aware of how they can participate in the decision-making process.
46 You know? Since, for example, when the queen conch was listed,
47 only biological arguments were accepted. But in the next stage, we
48 understand that it's Magnuson-Stevens. So, you know, social,

1 economic, historical, cultural arguments are allowed. Basically,
2 that's the central idea of our engagement with this specific topic.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. Any more questions for Sea
5 Grant? Hearing none, we have Andy with some priorities.

6
7 **OTHER BUSINESS**

8
9 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Are you ready? Right. Thanks, Carlos. Before
10 we wrapped up the meeting, just wanted to circle back to what María
11 presented early yesterday in terms of priorities. Miguel, you
12 talked about August likely going be a virtual meeting, maybe a
13 hybrid meeting.

14
15 We had talked through having the pelagic accountability measures
16 and the spiny lobster accountability measures discussed by the
17 Council. My team's also preparing to bring back the sustainable
18 yield levels for those three species. I think it'll be beneficial
19 to start having a conversation, or at least discuss the process
20 for species in need of conservation and management as we look to
21 update some of the catch limits. So, I just wanted to get
22 confirmation that those were the key priorities for discussion in
23 August. And then after that, I a brief discussion as well about
24 the Grammanik Bank alleyway that we talked about earlier.

25
26 So, the Council's agreeable to those priorities for August? Is the
27 Council agreeable to those priorities for August? I just want to
28 confirm.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. Yes.

31
32 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Okay. So, then with the alleyway discussion,
33 we really didn't kind wrap up and reach a conclusion yesterday. I
34 was hearing obviously kind interest in more research. I've talked
35 a little bit with Sennai on the side about maybe some opportunities
36 so we could work with the fishermen to understand, you know, the
37 fishing activity better in that area. So, at this time, I would
38 not recommend that be at least a priority for the Council until
39 more data or information is collected, but wanted obviously see if
40 others agreed with that or if you felt like it was something you
41 wanted to continue to move forward with consideration.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Did anybody have anything to say on that? Yeah.
44 We agree.

45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Now that Andy has spoken to the Regional
47 Administrator, that means that these will be the top priorities
48 for the August meeting. There will be a today meeting. Doesn't

1 mean that that will be the only thing that we are going to discuss.
2 But with this guidance, then the staff will work toward the
3 preparation of the agenda and document, etcetera, that we need for
4 that meeting.

5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. Andy?

7

8 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thank you for that, Miguel. I guess the
9 other thing that I would suggest and happy to work with you and
10 your team on the agenda, but if we are going to do a virtual
11 meeting, obviously, you know how tiring those can be to be online
12 all day for two days straight, and that we may want to consider
13 pulling back at least on some of the information, presentations,
14 things that maybe are not requiring an immediate decision before
15 us, and provide at least some additional breaks in between kind of
16 doing business. So just a suggestion at this point.

17

18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. So, as a matter of fact, that's the other
19 thing I was going to mention. The CCC in October will also be a
20 virtual meeting, and we discuss exactly the same thing. So, we are
21 going to have two afternoons rather than two full days for the
22 meeting, and we are going to concentrate on the top topics. I
23 believe that that's along the lines of what you're thinking now.
24 So, yeah, we'll do that.

25

26 The reason why we have the virtual meeting in August, and the
27 decision made by the Council was because of the hurricane season.
28 NOAA is still predicting the hurricanes without the sharpie, and
29 they're saying that this year, we're going to have stronger
30 hurricanes and more frequent. But the other thing is the budget,
31 but if between here and August, I have a better understanding of
32 the situation. I personally prefer, minimum, hybrid meetings,
33 because what we discuss sometime on the coffee break, or during
34 lunch is, sometimes, more important for the future of the Council,
35 the discussions that we have there, especially with the action
36 agencies. So, we'll do our best to see if we can get the money to
37 have at least the same type of meeting that we had today. If not,
38 then it will be a virtual meeting, and we will accommodate the
39 time, make sure that it will be the most effective, less tiresome
40 for the people participating on the meeting.

41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Alright. Okay. Next on the agenda is
43 Advisory Body Membership. Julian?

44

45

**ADVISORY BODIES MEMBERSHIPS
DAP SAINT THOMAS/SAINT JOHN**

46

47

48 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. So, of my 12

1 members, I have three members on my committee that will no longer
2 be sitting. That's Daryl Bryan Sr., Collin Butler, and Christy
3 Berry.

4
5 So, I spoke with some of my other fishers to get replacements, and
6 I was able to come up with three replacement names. And as it
7 pertains to Daryl Bryan, his son junior, Daryl Bryan Jr., has
8 agreed join the District Advisory Panel if approved. He was at the
9 MREP training last year in May here in Saint Croix, and he took it
10 very well. He actually runs the business that his dad created, and
11 he's one of our young fishers. I think it's a great opportunity
12 for us to give him the chance to sit on his first committee. So,
13 that's one.

14
15 One of my other replacement names is Louis A. Blanchard, Tony.
16 He's an ex-Council member. And, when he came off of the Council
17 few years back, at that time, he was offered to go on to the
18 committee because that's one of the rules is they can go straight
19 on to the committee. And at that time, he said he wanted a break.
20 But now he has agreed that he's ready to be involved. He's still
21 involved; we communicate every day. Now, he's ready to come back
22 on board and be part of the whole scenario. So that's my second
23 replacement.

24
25 My third replacement is Corey Pugh, and he is the owner of Neptune
26 Fishing. He's also the owner Ocean Safari's. He's also a member of
27 the steering MREP committee for Saint Thomas/Saint John. And I
28 think that with his ties to the whole charter industry, knowing
29 all the guys on Saint Thomas and all the fishers in Saint John
30 also, that he would be able to represent. And being that he is
31 also the treasurer for the Game Fish Club. So, he has the whole
32 broad picture of the entire fleet that does pelagics, and charter
33 industry. So, I think he would be a great replacement. He'll be
34 replacing Collin Butler who sat in that position as the
35 representative for the industry before. So, I hear by ask if those
36 three members can be the three replacements for the three people
37 that are coming off of my existing board.

38
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Julian, if I may. What is the last name of Corey?

40
41 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Corey Pugh.

42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And he will be-- No. Todavía no. He will be
44 replacing Collin.

45
46 So, Mr. Chairman, as before, we need a motion to appoint these
47 three members. Taking note that the other members that he
48 mentioned, we will send in the letter of thank you.

1
2 Mira, atiendan esta vaina y después hablan de lo otro. Que mucho
3 chavan, contra. [laughter]
4
5 So, Daryl Bryan Sr. and Mr. Butler and Ms. Berry we will send them
6 a letter thanking them for the participation of the advisory
7 bodies. And then we need a motion to then appoint Mr. Daryl Bryan
8 Jr., Louis Blanchard, and Corey Pugh to the DAP Saint Thomas/Saint
9 John. Go ahead.
10
11 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yes. Sennai Habtes, for the record. I move that we
12 accept the appointments as recommended by DAP Chair, Julian Magras,
13 and that would be, Tony Blanchard, Daryl Bryan Jr., and Corey Pugh
14 to be the new members on the Saint Thomas/Saint John DAP.
15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second.
17
18 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, second.
19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion? Hearing none, we'll take it to
21 a vote. All in favor say "aye."
22
23 **GROUP:** Aye.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none. Motion
26 carries. Wait, Sabater?
27
28 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Roberto?
29
30 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.
31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson.
33
34 **DAP SAINT CROIX**
35
36 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martinez, for the record. I have two
37 nominees. I have Daniel Santiago Colón. He is a commercial
38 fisherman in the diving industry. Graciela has his contact
39 information and his email. I recommend him to replace Michelle
40 Pugh.
41
42 Carlos, can you tell me who is the other person we are replacing?
43 I don't have that information. I'm couldn't open that email.
44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Replacing Michelle Pugh--
46
47 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** With Daniel Santiago. Yeah.
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Daniel.
2
3 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** For the diving industry.
4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I think he's replacing Bobby Thomas.
6
7 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Bobby?
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Okay.
10
11 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** So, it's Bobby and Michelle Pugh getting
12 replaced. Okay.
13
14 I also have Nicholas Charles. His occupation is line fishing for
15 pelagic and also diving for lobsters. Diana has his contact
16 information and his emails. So, Nicholas Charles and Daniel
17 Santiago Colón.
18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Gerson, then those two people that you
20 mentioned will no longer be members of the DAP, and then you're
21 suggesting appointing the--
22
23 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** I'm suggesting appointing Daniel Santiago and
24 Nicholas Charles in replacement of Michelle Pugh and Robert Thomas.
25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Pero explícale.
27
28 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** No. We have three openings. Michelle Pugh is
29 still in here, and we had three openings. You gave me two names.
30 I filled out those names on those two spaces. Now we have one more
31 open seat, and if Michelle Pugh is no longer going to be part of
32 the group, of the DAP, then you have two seats.
33
34 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** My question, and I want Mr. Chair to confirm, is
35 she going out? Or--
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. Michelle sold her business; she's no
38 longer going to be part of the Fisheries Advisory Committee or the
39 DAP. However, whoever took over her charter diving business, we
40 have not met him. She's going to bring him to one of our meetings
41 to see if he's willing to come into the FAC. And if he does, we'll
42 ask him about the DAP.
43
44 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** As of now, I don't have a third person.
45
46 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** So, Carlos, just to make it clear, now we have
47 the open seat for Michelle Pugh, and the open seat that we had
48 before. Those two.

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿No tienes más ninguno?
3
4 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** No. The only other open seats we have is for
5 the ex-officio member, which is not really to be filled out. So,
6 we are clear that we only have two spaces open for the DAP of Saint
7 Croix.
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Those will be Santiago Colón, Danny Boy,
10 and the other guy that Gerson just mentioned. So, I need a motion.
11
12 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. To present the motion to accept Daniel
13 Santiago and Nicholas Charles for the position of the DAP of Saint
14 Croix.
15
16 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, for the record. Second.
17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor say
19 "aye."
20
21 **GROUP:** Aye.
22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
24 carries. Crespo?
25
26 **DAP PUERTO RICO**
27
28 **NELSON CRESPO:** At this time, we don't have any open position.
29
30 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** You have one open position for Puerto Rico.
31
32 **NELSON CRESPO:** I thought we filled it on the last meeting with
33 Miguel Ortiz.
34
35 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** I'll tell you in a moment because I believe we
36 already have him, and we have another position open.
37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No. What happened was the confusion because of
39 the ex-officio. I'll take that one, but you're correct, Nelson.
40
41 **DIANA T. MARTINO:** You're right, it's the ex-officio one.
42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, the thing that we have the ex-officio one.
44 You remember that the Pew Charitable Trust had a position at each
45 one of the DAPs, but they're no longer operating in the Caribbean.
46 I have been informed that they are not going operate in the
47 Caribbean for the future. So, we have an option, reduce the number
48 of the DAPs, we have one NGO, or leave that open and see if there

1 is an NGO that would like to participate.

2
3 We don't pay those representatives the same way that we don't pay
4 the local government representative, or the Coast Guard. So, at
5 this time, we just wanted to know whether the Council wanted to
6 keep that open for the future. You don't have to discuss it here,
7 or you just keep it vacant. The other option is to eliminate that
8 position altogether and only have one NGO as member of the DAPs.

9
10 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would love if it's possible
11 to have back the Coast Guard like an ex-officio member at the DAP
12 Panel or any other enforcement agency that would be willing to
13 attend our meetings.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. The Coast Guard is an ex-officio. You
16 cannot kick them out. The problem is-- yeah. We have to be careful
17 with that. The problem is that because of the budgetary constraint,
18 they have not been able to send anybody. But the last time that we
19 had a conversation with the representative from the Coast Guard,
20 he said that if you have an issue with enforcement that is present,
21 yeah, we will send somebody. Make sure that the Coast Guard
22 position is understood that we get the information from the fisher
23 so we can take action. And that's why we have that there.

24
25 So far, we have not identified an issue like that, but the Coast
26 Guard told me that if we identified an agenda, yes, they will be
27 willing to participate in person or virtual to the meeting.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** When it comes to the NGO, I would like to keep
30 that at least open. I think that they're an important stakeholder,
31 so I suggest we keep it open for now until-- to see if somebody's
32 interested, not eliminated.

33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, with that, we conclude that part, Mr.
35 Chairman. The other adversity bodies are okay. We have them. All
36 the terms will expire next year or the year after. So, we are okay
37 with the SSC, the TAP, and the Outreach and Education Panel. And
38 that's it.

39
40 **OTHER BUSINESS - CONT.**

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, other business. I have couple of
43 things. In the December meeting, Sennai was discussing about the
44 EEJ plan development, and there was supposed to be a meeting of
45 the minds with Graciela, Sennai, I believe, Science Center and
46 Miguel, and I don't know if that ever happened.

47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Jesús. Trump already eliminated the whole thing;

1 we're didn't even get to talk about it. [laughter]
2
3 I'm serious about it. I was intervened by NOAA, by some friendly
4 auditor, and they told me that, "it's a big no no." That all the
5 plans and everything has been scratched.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Andy?
8
9 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Based on the change in administrations,
10 this was a priority under the Biden administration. We've been
11 advised to rescind all of our equity environmental justice plans.
12 So, that's why it's no longer a topic of discussion or priority
13 for the Council, unfortunately.
14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. Jannette?
16
17 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Yes. Cristina, will you please? It's
18 briefly. I want to talk about 'Is That Fish Edible' continuing
19 education for chefs that took place on June of the last year? After
20 the course, one chef, his name is Joe W. Padilla Castro, won the
21 war paella day cup 2024 at the Valencia Marina in Spain with his
22 paella, 'El Susurro Del Pez León Caribeño.'
23
24 His dish was inspired by the knowledge he gained during the days
25 that we had the course. That's the chef. Those are part of the
26 dishes that they were created. And, also, we have a workshop on
27 creating jewelry with lionfish spines with Gloria Albino. She's an
28 artisan from Cabo Rojo. Cristina, next slide, please.
29
30 It took place in Blanca Colbert Public Library in Cabo Rojo in
31 July. These are part of the person that were there. And these are
32 the creations and the accomplishments. Thank you.
33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Jannette.
35
36 So, the last thing I had we're discussing, Gerson and I, about the
37 funding issues that the Council is having and some cost saving
38 measures, and we agreed, well, Saint Croix, I don't know about the
39 Saint Thomas District, we agreed that we won't mind if we hold our
40 meetings in Puerto Rico instead of all three islands in different
41 stages. Although, we would like to give everybody a chance. But
42 until funding is stabilized, it's cheaper to just move three or
43 four people to Puerto Rico than to move the staff and all that
44 equipment that costs a lot of money to ship to Saint Croix and
45 Saint Thomas. So, it was just a suggestion from, Gerson and myself.
46 It is up to the Council.
47
48 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Oh, I'd definitely agree with that. If we could

1 save money and have it in Puerto Rico, let's save the money and--
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. We have to be careful about saving money
4 and the duties that you have with the industry and the people.
5
6 Actually, I have an email opposing that by an official from the
7 U.S. Virgin Islands government saying that we were thinking about
8 discriminating against the U.S. Virgin Island fishers and industry
9 by doing that. So, I'd rather save money by not sending people to
10 meetings that doesn't-- Well, meetings. Other meetings. Than
11 sacrificing the meetings in Saint Thomas, Saint Croix and here.
12
13 In the case of Saint Croix this hotel probably will be out of our
14 pocket in the future because it's quite expensive. Diana and I are
15 looking for other places to have the meeting, but there are only
16 two other places besides buying houses and cruises. We have the
17 Divina Arena Hotel that we used to have meetings there, and it's
18 a little bit cheaper. And the other one is the Carambola. But the
19 Carambola--
20
21 Yeah. Roy Crabtree had to go all the way to the Little Hill to
22 make a call to the Regional Office. He said, "Miguel, can you have
23 a meeting some of the place? I'm trying to go up the hill to make
24 a phone call." So, the point is that Diana and I will come back,
25 after we talk about it in the next year meeting, if we all survive
26 this, and we will keep the meetings in Saint Croix, Saint Thomas,
27 and Puerto Rico as much as possible.
28
29 There will be hybrid meetings, so not everybody needs to travel.
30 Right now, we have Roberto because of healthy issues. He had to
31 stay there, but he has been instrumental participating in a
32 meeting, voting, and everything, and is it's something to do.
33
34 But, anyway, that's my two things about it. Because oh, okay. We
35 have a budget crunch and everything. But what happen if we lose
36 the people after we have, in a couple of year, two hundred weeks
37 from now, we have more money and we need to go back and talk to
38 people. It's difficult.
39
40 The Council system was created with the principle of having the
41 people that were going to be impacted by regulations involved in
42 the beginning in the discussion that will impact their livelihood.
43 That's something that should be keeping in mind.
44
45 But, anyway, Carlos and I will make sure, with Angie, that we get
46 the best bank for the buck, you know, with the monies that we have
47 and the things that we have. But at least now we have some
48 alternative with the suggestion that Carlos and I will work.

1
2 Now that I'm still talking, I want to say something else with a
3 photograph. Ponle el número para que Jannette no se confunda con
4 los slides. [laughter]

5
6 Anyway, what I was going to say that we want to-- oh, there we
7 are. We want to thank our Chairman, and his better half, his wife,
8 for what they did yesterday evening. Carlos is not a chef. He's
9 not a cook. He calls himself a chook. He's in between.

10
11 So, they invited us, and they prepared all the food. The only thing
12 they said was not included was the beverages, the sodas, and all
13 that. Vanessa took care of the bar. We have an excellent time.

14
15 Actually, I had the chance to talk to Kate and other people. It's
16 very different when you sit here as an official person than sitting
17 there and talking to other people as friends. You learn a lot from
18 each other. You respect the people more when you get this type of
19 activity.

20
21 So, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much on behalf of everybody that
22 participated, and give my big, big thank you to Nora for everything
23 that you did yesterday.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thanks. I will. All I ask, if we hold a meeting
26 in Buccaneer again, change these chairs. My god. They're killing
27 my spine.

28
29 So, anything else?

30
31 **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND NEXT MEETINGS**

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Public comment. Alright. Anybody online for
34 public comment? No.

35
36 Next meeting will be held in August 12th and August 13th. '13, '14?
37 Yes.

38
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The meeting approved at the December meeting is
40 August 12th and 13th. And it will be, at this time, it will be
41 virtual, but as we just discussed, if we are able to get the money,
42 it will be a hybrid meeting similar to the one that we have these
43 two days.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Everybody have safe travels, and this
46 meeting is adjourned.

47
48 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 23, 2025.)